

IN SEASON OUT OF SEASON

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*If any of you feel that proclaiming the gospel is not so important,
know this: our individual worth is already divinely established as “great.”
It does not fluctuate like the stock market!*



The Lord is not pleased if we do anything half heartedly.

I share the same encouragement Paul shared when he wrote to Timothy of the danger ahead, the breaching of faith and problems of the “perilous times.”¹ In context here, Paul was anxious, because his audiences were starting to “wax worse and worse.” Paul not only urged the Saints to “[know] the holy scriptures” and to exercise “faith ... in Christ Jesus,”² but also to “preach the word; be instant in season [and in] out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”³

Many disciples today can wisely develop protective, spiritual manners, because they seek to live “after the manner of happiness.”⁴ These manners are reflected in their modest dress, language, humor, music and conduct, thereby sending the signal of determined discipleship.⁵

Yet some of us still seem to hang back a little when it comes to sharing the gospel. Such individuals, however, fail to share the gospel in an “instant in season [and in] out of the season.” To hold back the gospel is like Joseph Smith translating the Book of Mormon into English and burying the transcript again on the Cumorah’s Hill, or terminating the worldwide General Conference broadcast. I think many Church members—including you and me—feel that yielding oneself to bear a testimony brings misunderstanding, persecution and even rejection from their peers, thereby they become “ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.”⁶

Yet we need to break free of our old selves—the provincial, constraining and complaining selves. How can we truly acknowledge the Fatherhood of God and refuse to proclaim His truths, especially in the view of the fact, the Lord chastens those whom He loves?⁷

Consider this: what if Enoch had demurred when called by the Lord? He would have gone on being a good person, serving the Lord part-time in a city which was a slum compared to the glorious city of Enoch; nor would Enoch be part of that scene of glorious greeting yet to come.⁸

Suppose Peter had not left his net “straightway?”⁹ He might have become the president of the local Galilean fisherman’s association. But he would not have been on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, Moses and Elias and heard the voice of God.¹⁰



If Peter did not leave his net “straightway,” then he would have neglected many blessings that followed his actions, such as being with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, being the Chief Apostle, and being taught by the Master Teacher for 3 years.

It is so easy to be halfhearted, but this only produces half the growth, half the blessings, and just half a life, really, with more bud than blossom.

Therefore, all of us need honest, individualized introspection. We need to evaluate how we are conducting ourselves to others to help them feel the love of the Savior. Otherwise we are strangers to him: "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and his far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?"¹¹ Ironically, if the Master is a stranger to us, then we will merely end up serving other gods, thereby violating the first and the second commandments.¹² Thus keeping the commandments and sharing the gospel helps us know him more. Knowing our Savior helps us to become more kind, generous, armed with pure love for others. This will allow us to keep the commandments and spread the gospel more effectively. Then the powerful spiritual cycle continues.

Shrinking of our courage occurs in so many ways. Some have difficulty to speak up to bear testimony when a particular opportunity enters their lives. This holding back occurs because sometimes we lack courage and faith, or, we mistakenly think that, somehow by letting our wills be "swallowed up in the will of the Father,"¹³ we lose our individuality. What we are worried about, really, is not giving up self, but selfish things, like our talents, our energies, our preeminence, and our pride. No wonder we are instructed by the Savior to lose ourselves.¹⁴ He is only asking us to lose the old-self in order to find the new self. It is not a question of one's losing identity, but of finding his true identity.

Ironically, so many of us lose ourselves anyway, in our consuming hobbies and preoccupation, but with far, far lesser things. Hence these words of the Lord give us a challenging charge: "If ye are prepared, ye shall not fear."¹⁵ Even so, as Peter urged, let us "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh [us] a reason of hope that is in [us]."¹⁶

Some other times, our holding back occurs because, like Jonah of old, we try to "[flee] ... from the presence of the Lord,"¹⁷ hoping that by fulfilling other important duties, we can get away from sharing the gospel. Such individuals are "honorable," but still "not valiant in the testimony of Jesus."¹⁸ They are the ones that are casually engaged, rather than "anxiously engaged."¹⁹ Being valiant in one's testimony of Jesus includes striving to become more like Him in heart, mind and attributes. Thus becoming this manner of men is the ultimate expression of the orthodoxy. This is never easy. But I have never seen any perspiration-free shortcuts to the celestial kingdom either; there is no escalator to take us there.

One can therefore relate Jeremiah, Gideon and Moses, who first trembled with their divine responsibilities, but were comforted and reassured that the Lord will be with them and that He will "put His words into [their] mouth[s]."²⁰

Some disciples seem to complain, because within their own sphere of influence, they do not have any friends that are not members of the church. Nevertheless, as varied as our allotted circumstances may be, we can still share the gospel! Most important is what we are and what we do within these varied allocation and in the particular "work to which [we] have been called."²¹

Therefore, we must be on alert; otherwise, one of us may sit in the Laundromat for 2 hours and miss the opportunity to share the gospel, while idly waiting for the clothes to dry. Likewise, one can sit on the airplane for more than 4 hours and do not spend a second sharing the gospel with person sitting on the next seat. And similarly, we may live in the same house for many years, and yet neglect to talk with the neighbors across the roads who are neighbors of another faith. Or, even neglect to become acquainted with our children's non-member friends while they walk in-and-out of our home everyday. And when we finally realize that there was an opportunity, it is often too late, "as water spilt on the ground; which cannot be gathered up again."²²

Some of us do not even recognize the opportunities, possibly because they are too caught up in the mundane affairs of life. In such circumstances, "the weightier matters" are often omitted out of their lives.²² No wonder Alma realized that men must "be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto [them]."²³ There are so many opportunities allotted in our daily lives!

The Lord knows our circumstances and the intents and the gifts He has given us. The Master of the vineyard is "fully ... able" to gauge perfectly how we can perform our duties in our appointed orbits.²⁴

Moreover, when things begin to come into focus “with an eye single,” then do we see “things as they really are!”²⁶ What a view awaits!

Therefore, disciples need to understand that the mundane things can magnify the pottage of Jacob into banquet, and even make 30 pieces of silver for Jesus look like a treasure trove. May we always be “anxiously engaged.”²⁷

Even the meekest sometimes require personal evaluation. For example, in the place called Meribah, Moses was fatigued by people clammering for water. Then the wise Moses “spake unadvisedly,” saying, “must we fetch you water?”²⁸ The Lord mentored remarkable Moses through a pronoun problem and further magnified him.²⁹

Ironically, inordinate attention even to good things can diminish our usefulness to God. For example, one can be too caught up in memorizing scriptures, while neglecting to share them with others. One can have exclusionary knowledge in the gospel, while forgetting to rely on the Holy Ghost when it comes to sharing them. Such individuals may emulate Moses, who learned things he “never had supposed.”³⁰

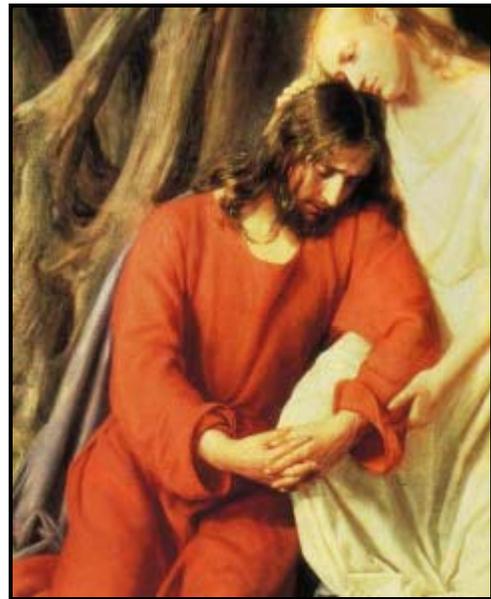
Yielding our hearts to God signifies the last stage in our spiritual enhancement. Only then we are beginning to be fully useful to God! How can we sincerely pray to be an instrument in His hands, if the instrument seeks to do the instructing? Only our humility can allow us to sing more honestly, “More holiness give me... more used would I be.”³¹ Besides, did we not all sing in primary “I feel my Savior’s love: He knows I will follow Him. Give all my life to Him!”³²

In pondering and pursuing to proclaiming the gospel, understandably, we tremble inwardly at what may be required. Furthermore, while we strive daily, we will fall short. Hence the avoidance of discouragement is so vital! So I end by offering a thought that I hope will help you see the need to taking courage and push the boundary of our experience into the twilight of the unknown. Jesus was a perfect exemplar. Suffering the agonizing universal atonement, He never faltered, stumbled, nor shrunk: instead, “He finished His preparations unto the children of men,”³³ so that He can now be prepared and know how to succor us. Jesus could have never performed the Atonement. But he loved us too deeply so he took courage and moved on to perform the things only he could do.

Even while suffering, He mentored His sublime submissiveness, pleading with the Father: “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”³⁴ All of us can emulate the Savior, and let our wills be “swallowed up in the will of the Father.”³⁵ As we take extra steps, even when it seems formidable, it will then introduce us to God’s stretching and “higher ways!”³⁶ How sharp-edged is that promise. The plain and precious doctrines of the restored truth in our time through Joseph Smith are pulsating with perspective and are so light intensive, like radioactive materials, that they must be handled with great care. Praise to the Man who



Meribah, where Moses mistakenly chastised his people for murmuring.



Like our Savior, in our own smaller scale, are we willing to go through our own path of extremity?

communed with Jehovah!”³⁷ We are Prophet Joseph’s spiritual-heirs, called long long ago—for the duties which wait us “here and now”!

The greatest happiness in God’s generous plan is finally reserved for those who are willing to stretch, and pay the cost of journeying to His regal realm. “Come, let us anew [this] journey pursue.”³⁸ In the name Jesus Christ, amen.

References

1. see 2 Tim. 3:1-5.
2. see 2 Tim. 3:13-15.
3. 2 Tim. 4:2.
4. 2 Ne. 5:27.
5. see Prov. 23:7.
6. 2 Tim. 1:8.
7. see Mosiah 23:21.
8. see Moses 7: 63.
9. see Mark 1:18.
10. see Matt. 17:4.
11. Mosiah 5:13.
12. see Exo. 20:3-4.
13. Mosiah 5:17.
14. see Luke 9:24.
15. D&C 38:30.
16. 1 Pet. 3:15.
17. see Jonah 1:3, 10.
18. D&C 76:75, 79.
19. D&C 58:27.
20. see Jer. 1:8-9; see also Exo. 4:12; Jud. 6:12, 23.
21. Alma 29:6.
22. 2 Samuel 14:14.
23. Matt. 23:23; see also 1 Cor. 2:16.
24. Alma 29:3.
25. Rom. 4:12.
26. Jacob 4:19.
27. D&C 58:27.
28. Ps. 106:33; Num. 20:10; emphasis added; see also Duet. 4:21.
29. see Num. 12:3.
30. Moses 1:10.
31. Hymn 1985. "More Holiness Give Me" no. 131.
32. (Children's Songs "I feel my Savior's love"; emphasis added)
33. D&C 19:19.
34. Matt. 26:39.
35. Mosiah 15:7.
36. Isa. 55:9.
37. Hymn 1985. "Praise to the Man." no.27.
38. Hymn 1985. "Come, let us anew." no.217.