

Are You Sleeping through the Restoration?

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There is too much at stake for us as individuals, as families, and as Christ’s Church to give only a halfhearted effort to this sacred work.

Nearly 200 years ago, the American short story “Rip Van Winkle” became an instant classic. The main character, Rip, is an unambitious man who is very good at avoiding two things: work and his wife.

One day, while wandering in the mountains with his dog, he discovers a group of strangely dressed men drinking and playing games. After accepting some of their liquor, Rip becomes drowsy and closes his eyes for a moment. When he opens his eyes again, he is surprised to find that his dog is gone, his rifle has rusted, and he now has a long beard.

Rip makes his way back to his village only to discover that everything has changed. His wife has died, his friends are gone, and the portrait of King George III in the tavern has been replaced by a portrait of someone he does not recognize—by General George Washington.

Rip Van Winkle had been sleeping for 20 years! And in the process, he had missed one of the most exciting periods in the history of his country—he had slept through the American Revolution.

In May 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used this story as an illustration for his speech “Don’t Sleep Through the Revolution.”¹

Today, I would like to take the same theme and propose a question to all of us who hold God’s priesthood: are you sleeping through the Restoration?

We Are Living in the Time of the Restoration

Sometimes we think of the Restoration of the gospel as something that is complete, already behind us—Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, he received priesthood keys, the Church was organized. In reality, the Restoration is an ongoing process; we are living in it right now. It includes “all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal,” and the “many great and important things” that “He will yet reveal.”² Brethren, the exciting developments of today are part of that long-foretold period of preparation that will culminate in the glorious Second Coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is one of the most remarkable periods of the world’s history! Ancient prophets yearned to see our day.

When our time in mortality is complete, what experiences will we be able to share about our own contribution to this significant period of our lives and to the furthering of the Lord’s work? Will we be able to say that we rolled

up our sleeves and labored with all our heart, might, mind, and strength? Or will we have to admit that our role was mostly that of an observer?

I suppose there are a variety of reasons why it is easy to become a bit sleepy with regard to building the kingdom of God. Let me mention three major ones. As I do, I invite you to ponder if any might apply. If you see room for improvement, I ask you to consider what could be done to change for the better.

Selfishness

First, selfishness.

Those who are selfish seek their own interests and pleasure above all else. The central question for the selfish person is “What’s in it for me?”

Brethren, I am sure you can see that this attitude is clearly contrary to the spirit required to build God’s kingdom.

When we seek self-service over selfless-service, our priorities become centered on our own recognition and pleasure.

Past generations had their struggle with variations of egotism and narcissism, but I think today we are giving them serious competition. Is it any coincidence that the Oxford Dictionary recently proclaimed “selfie” as the word of the year?³

Naturally, we all have a desire for recognition, and there is nothing wrong with relaxing and enjoying ourselves. But when seeking the “gain and praise of the world”⁴ is a central part of our motivation, we will miss the redemptive and joyful experiences that come when we give generously of ourselves to the work of the Lord.

What is the remedy?

The answer, as always, lies in the words of Christ:

“Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”⁵

Those who wholeheartedly turn their lives over to our Savior and serve God and fellowman discover a richness and fulness to life that the selfish or egotistic will never experience. The unselfish give of themselves. These may be small gifts of charity that have a grand impact for good: a smile, a handshake, a hug, time spent in listening, a soft word of encouragement, or a gesture of caring. All these acts of kindness can change hearts and lives. When we take advantage of the unlimited opportunities to love and serve our fellowmen, including our spouse and family, our capacity to love God and to serve others will greatly increase.

Those who serve others will not sleep through the Restoration.

Addictions

Another thing that may cause us to sleepwalk through this significant season of the world is addiction.

Addictions often begin subtly. Addictions are thin threads of repeated action that weave themselves into thick bonds of habit. Negative habits have the potential to become consuming addictions.

These binding chains of addiction can have many forms, like pornography, alcohol, sex, drugs, tobacco, gambling, food, work, the Internet, or virtual reality. Satan, our common enemy, has many favorite tools he uses to rob us of our divine potential to accomplish our mission in the Lord's kingdom.

It saddens our Heavenly Father to see how willingly some of His noble sons extend their wrists to accept the chains of devastating addictions.

Brethren, we bear the eternal priesthood of Almighty God. We are truly sons of the Most High and are endowed with unspeakable potential. We are designed to soar freely through the heavens. We are not meant to be shackled to the earth, imprisoned in straitjackets of our own making.

What is the remedy?

The first thing we must understand is that addictions are so much easier to prevent than to cure. In the Savior's words, "Suffer none of these things to enter into your heart."⁶

Several years ago, President Thomas S. Monson and I were offered an opportunity to tour Air Force One—the magnificent aircraft that transports the president of the United States. There were painstaking security checks by the Secret Service, and I smiled a little as agents searched our dear prophet prior to boarding.

Then the pilot in command invited me to take the captain's seat. It was a remarkable experience to again sit at the helm of a wonderful flying machine like the kind I had flown for so many years. Memories of flights across oceans and continents filled my heart and mind. I envisioned exciting takeoffs and landings at airports all over the world.

Almost unconsciously, I placed my hands on the four throttles of the 747. Just then, a beloved and unmistakable voice came from behind—the voice of Thomas S. Monson.

"Dieter," he said, "don't even think about it."

I'm not admitting to anything, but it just may be that President Monson read my mind.

When we are tempted to do things we should not do, let us listen to the loving warning of trusted family and friends, our beloved prophet, and always the Savior.

The best defense against addiction is never to start.

But what of those who find themselves in the grip of addiction?

Please know, first of all, that there is hope. Seek help from loved ones, Church leaders, and trained counselors. The Church provides addiction recovery help through local Church leaders, the Internet,⁷ and in some areas, LDS Family Services.

Always remember, with the Savior's help, you can break free from addiction. It may be a long, difficult path, but the Lord will not give up on you. He loves you. Jesus Christ suffered the Atonement to help you change, to free you from the captivity of sin.

The most important thing is to keep trying—sometimes it takes several attempts before people find success. So don't give up. Don't lose faith. Keep your heart close to the Lord, and He will give you the power of deliverance. He will make you free.

My dear brethren, always keep far away from habits that could lead to addiction. Those who do so will be able to devote their heart, might, mind, and strength to the service of God.

They will not sleep through the Restoration.

Competing Priorities

A third obstacle that prevents us from fully engaging in this work is the many competing priorities we face. Some of us are so busy that we feel like a cart pulled by a dozen work animals—each straining in a different direction. A lot of energy is expended, but the cart doesn't go anywhere.

Often we devote our best efforts in pursuit of a hobby, a sport, vocational interests, and community or political issues. All these things may be good and honorable, but are they leaving us time and energy for what should be our highest priorities?

What is the remedy?

Once again, it comes from the words of the Savior:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

“This is the first and great commandment.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”⁸

Everything else in life should be secondary to these two great priorities.

Even in Church service, it is easy to spend a lot of time just going through the motions without the heart or the substance of discipleship.

Brethren, we as priesthood bearers have committed to be a people who love God and our neighbor and who are willing to demonstrate that love through word and deed. That is the essence of who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Those who live up to these principles will not sleep through the Restoration.

A Call to Awaken

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”⁹

My dear friends, know that you are sons of light.

Don't allow selfishness! Don't allow habits that could lead to addiction! Don't allow competing priorities to lull you into indifference or detachment from blessed discipleship and ennobling priesthood service!

There is too much at stake for us as individuals, as families, and as Christ's Church to give only a halfhearted

effort to this sacred work.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not an effort of once a week or once a day. It is an effort of once and for all.

The Lord's promise to His true priesthood holders is almost too grand to comprehend.

Those who are faithful unto the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods and magnify their callings "are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies." Therefore, all that our Father has will be given unto them.¹⁰

I testify that the cleansing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the transformative power of the Holy Ghost can heal and rescue mankind. It is our privilege, our sacred duty, and our joy to heed the Savior's call to follow Him with a willing mind and full purpose of heart. Let us "shake off the chains with which [we] are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust."¹¹

Let us be awake and not be weary of well-doing, for we "are laying the foundation of a great work,"¹² even preparing for the return of the Savior. Brethren, when we add the light of our example as a witness to the beauty and power of restored truth, we will not sleep through the Restoration. Of this I testify and leave you my blessing in the sacred name of our Master, even Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See Martin Luther King Jr., "Don't Sleep Through the Revolution" (1966 Ware Lecture, Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly, Hollywood, Florida, May 18, 1966).

2. Articles of Faith 1:9.

3. See blog.oxforddictionaries.com/press-releases/oxford-dictionaries-word-of-the-year-2013.

4. 2 Nephi 26:29.

5. Mark 8:34–35.

6. 3 Nephi 12:29.

7. See, for example, lds.org/topics/addiction.

8. Matthew 22:37–39.

9. Ephesians 5:14.

10. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:33, 38.

11. 2 Nephi 1:23.

12. See Doctrine and Covenants 64:33.

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