

Over the course of the last several months, I have heard the term 'unprecedented' used on multiple occasions. Due to the 'unprecedented' events of the recent past, we have seen many 'unprecedented' responses. From politics, to sports, to education and to our church. The fascinating thing for me to consider is the church's 'unprecedented' preparation. Just over two years ago, in June 2018, the church announced the Come Follow Me program and a shift to a more home-centered worship experience. Then a few months later, at the October General Conference, it was announced that we would move to a two-hour block of church. At the time, we obviously didn't know what was coming, but we were being prepared.

I think that the shift from home/visiting teaching, to ministering, should also have prepared us for this time. As we began to focus more on the people we serve and less on making a 'visit', we were preparing to connect with people even when we're not able to be in the same place. I think we now have the opportunity to take the next step in our ministering and help support our ministering families in their home-centered worship.

If you occasionally text your ministering families to see how they are doing, ask yourself, "Is that enough?" If you post messages to them on social media, ask yourself, "Is that enough?" If you call them, "Is that enough?" I would encourage us all to turn to the Savior and ask him to help us know, "What lack I yet?", in our ministering efforts.

I was raised in a very small town (a village really) in Southeast Idaho. Almost everyone was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We had only one ward and one school. My football coach was also my Bishop.

In that situation, there really wasn't a need for 'ministering' as is in place now. Everybody knew everybody. If someone needed something, within a short amount of time, half a dozen neighbors would be there to provide assistance. And by Sunday, the whole town would be aware and the need would be met.

We still had many faithful home and visiting teachers, including the wise senior companion I was assigned to. Juan Spillett was his name and every month, he would pick me up and take me to see a faithful widow, a less-active widower, and an older couple with no children remaining at home. Not the ideal set of families for a teenager to visit. These people had plenty of other contact with the church. They had friends and family that checked in on them and took care of their needs. What we provided was a spiritual boost in the form of a Gospel message.

We are in a time where there is less focus on the visit and more focus on being a friend, making sure needs are met, and providing a listening ear. I have a testimony of those principles and believe it is the right thing for us to do. However, I don't think that the intent of ministering was to stop helping others come closer to Christ by sharing a Gospel message.

Here are a few ways we can do that in a pandemic -

- Spend time in your personal scripture study time pondering and praying about your ministering families. Look for passages of scripture, excerpts from conference talks or other Gospel messages that you feel might lift their spirits. Send it to them.
- Join church sponsored social media pages and invite your ministering families to do the same.
- Invite members of your ministering families to give a 'talk' in your at-home worship service via video conference.

- Invite ministering families to participate in virtual Family Home Evening with you.

You may have noticed that all of these things are just an extension of things you are already doing. It doesn't need to be hard. Small and simple.

Making an effort to do these things or others like them, will help us get closer to the Spirit, which will in turn, improve our own Gospel study and in-home worship. This is critical during this time when we don't have the normal fellowship and the church routines that we are accustomed to. It is easy to become complacent and less dedicated to the teachings of the Gospel. I'm reminded of a talk given by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin in October 1992. He said -

"Some people are weak in their faith and testimonies but are not even aware of how precarious their situation is. Many of them likely would be offended at the suggestion. They raise their right hand to sustain Church leaders and then murmur and complain when a decision does not square with their way of thinking. They claim to be obedient to God's commandments but do not feel at all uncomfortable about purchasing food at the store on Sunday and then asking the Lord to bless it. Some say they would give their lives for the Lord, yet they refuse to serve in the nursery."

Brothers and Sisters, have our faith and testimonies become weakened over the past several months? Are we as committed to the Gospel as we were last year? Now is a good time to do a thorough self-assessment to determine where we can improve. We also have a wonderful opportunity to strengthen our faith and testimonies by figuratively serving in the nursery through reaching out to those around us in need.

There is a story that many of you have heard called the Parable of the Starfish. It goes like this -

One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked, he came upon a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one.

Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up from his task, the boy simply replied, "I'm saving these starfish, Sir".

The old man chuckled aloud, "Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?"

The boy picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, said, "I made a difference to that one!"

We never know the difference we might make in someone's life by simply sharing our testimony of a Gospel Principle, or sharing a spiritual experience we have had. We worry about saying the wrong thing, but if we are in tune with the Spirit, we can't help but say the right thing.

We need each other. Even in this time of increased family togetherness and bonding, we still need the fellowship of the Saints. In one of the early revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, less than a year after the church was reorganized, the Lord commanded "be one, and if ye are not one, ye are not mine." D&C 38:27. I believe that now, perhaps more than ever, we need to be united.

Let us remember that the Savior is the Master Teacher. Even though we are in 'unprecedented' times, the Savior knew this was coming. And even during His earthly ministry, he gave some wonderful examples for us to follow. While He did teach large groups, there are many instances of ministry and teaching one-on-one or in small groups. I believe that's what He would do if he were here now. May we

look to him as we strive to help one another more fully live according to His commandments. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.