



HOW DO WE KEEP OUR FOCUS ON CHRIST AND AVOID DISTRACTIONS?

A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles

Our world is becoming increasingly filled with distractions. Information moves faster and louder than ever before. Entertainment, social media, and marketing have never been so prevalent. They all beg for our attention and our focus and in so doing, we can find ourselves being drawn, intentionally or unintentionally toward the less important things of life. Jesus said, ***“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”*** Matthew 6:20-22. Said another way, ‘Stay focused on the things that are really important (having a strong faith and hope in Christ, possessing charity or the pure love of God, upholding the covenant made at the water’s shore when baptized, raising children to know the Lord, valuing the love of our families, upholding marriage vows, etc.) and the Lord will bless your life.’

No doubt, this is why the Priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ recent approved two revelations, cautioning us to not be distracted from our focus on Christ.

The challenge: How can all this be accomplished?

While there are many different types of distractions, one obvious example might be the amount of time spent checking social media, e-mail, watching television, or playing games on our phone. Most would agree, that some amount ‘distraction’ from the stresses and challenges of life is valuable – as it often helps to relax and calm us, however when these distractions become our primary source of stress release, they actually become detrimental and impactful to our lives. Many of these distractions are subtle and they can easily and quietly surround us. In fact, they have become so commonplace that we hardly even notice their existence. These distractions take residence in our mind and draw our attention away from the important elements of our life. But what if there was a list of principles to adopt or practices to follow that would help us live less distracted lives? – wouldn’t you give

a try? Broadly speaking, this is the advice the Apostle Paul gave the Thessalonians: **“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.”** 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22.

Consider the list of distractions below and ask yourself if any have taken residence in your heart. If any ring true, we encourage you to make intentional efforts to lessen their effect on your life and apply these words: “And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; easy to be entreated; full of patience and long-suffering; being temperate in all things; being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times; asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive.” Alma 7:23.

- **The Accumulation of Wealth and Possessions.** The things we own require our time, our energy, our money, and our attention. Often, increased possessions add the potential to increase stress in our lives. Money itself is not an interference in our walk with Christ - the love of money however is. ‘More’ can become a distraction if we are motivated to acquire ‘more wealth and things’ to be seen of others and become prideful, to fill an emptiness in our lives or seek power to satisfy our ego. If we trust God, He will take care of us. That doesn’t mean we should quit our jobs, or not earn money - we just need to realize and accept that God is more important and is far more capable of taking care of us than we are. See Luke 12:15-31.
- **The Labor Associated with our Work.** It’s so easy to get caught up in our natural work, job or career because we rationalize it – saying to ourselves, ‘we need to provide for our families’ or ‘I find this work personally gratifying’, etc. But the truth is, we can devote so much time to our work, that we have no time for anything else, including a relationship with Christ, our families, etc. What we need to really be worrying about is asking ourselves if what I’m doing is what the Lord wants me to do. When we seek His direction and counsel, we can be confident, knowing that He’ll take care of the rest. See Luke 10:38-42.
- **The Pursuit of Perfection.** We should pursue excellence in all we do, however when perfection becomes the only goal, it becomes the enemy of progress - and in this way, it often paralyzes and distracts us from moving forward. Doing our best and achieving perfection are rarely the same. Have you ever noticed, when standing at the water’s shore, no one is every asked if they promise to be perfect in serving Christ? Why? because we can only achieve perfection in this life, through the grace of God through Christ – achieving perfection, while in the flesh, is merely another concept placed in our minds to distract us. See Moroni 10:32 and John 17:23.
- **The Need for Notoriety and to be Seen by Others.** Those who live lives focused on the need to be recognized for it, are usually the first to take shortcuts to get there. Pride and the thirst for personal recognition has an ugly way of

slowly squeezing its way into our lives. Instead, we each need to find significance in the eyes and hearts of those who know you best – Jesus Christ, your family, your spouse, your friends, etc., because in the end, that is all that matters. See Matthew 6:1-6 and Alma 5:26-18.

- **The Desire to Compare.** It seems, by nature, we feel compelled at times to compare our lives to the people around us. We compare our belongings, our appearance, our families, and our successes. We're often encouraged to compare products or merchandise before making purchases, but buying a refrigerator is very different than placing our focus and energy on 'keeping up with the Jones's' by comparing what others are doing, how they're active or what they're driving. Comparing yourself to others will always cause you to regret what you are not, rather than allow you to enjoy and grow who you are. Not an easy concept to grasp, but a distracting concept when we fail. See III Nephi 6:12-16 and I Timothy 6:6-9.
- **The Fascination with Relationships.** Every kind of relationship falls into this category; friends, parents, siblings, spouses, girlfriends/boyfriends, children, co-workers, bosses, etc. It is our relationships that are our connection with the world, and it is our human nature to have them, but when we allow any one of these relationships threaten to become more important to us than God... then they become a distraction. We need to give God ample time every day. One of the most complex relationships that can become a distraction from our walk with the Lord would be that of a boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse. These relationships, by their very nature, demand the most time, and that is why it is extremely important that they are centered around God. If they aren't, you will see your walk with God spiraling downward. Relationships are extremely important, but our relationship with Christ is of the *utmost* importance. See Mark 12:29-30.
- **The Attraction of the Media.** It's so easy to get caught up in the media (Internet, TV, movies, music, video games, newspapers, magazines, etc.). Sadly, much of it is filled with violence and concepts that are opposite that of Christ's teachings. TV commercials, advertisements on the Internet, visual enticements are all trying to convince us that we are missing something in our lives, and they can provide it. Women (and men) are bombarded with how they should look and act. Movies, music, and TV can be horrible influences because they can subliminally tell us how to live, what's right and wrong. Video games can become all-consuming as we hunt down the killer or steal a car and escape the police chase. Not all of it is bad, but it requires a discriminating eye by being wise in what we watch, read, play, etc., and in how much time we spend with it. A simple test to determine our level of attachment is whether we'd be willing to give it up. See Ephesians 5:1-17.
- **The Quest of Hobbies.** Not that hobbies are bad, but a potentially dangerous aspect with hobbies is that they can consume a lot of our time. A great way to keep them in check is to do them with God in mind! If music is your hobby, use it as means to worship God. Also, we can play video games or sports, etc. with people to

develop relationships with others rather than become isolated. Having hobbies is a great way to get yourself into the world to be an influence rather than to simply satisfy yourself. See Matthew 5:16.

- **The Promise of Tomorrow.** While it's not foolish to look toward the future and plan accordingly, when we merely tolerate our days only for the sake of tomorrow (the weekend, the vacation, or the retirement), we miss out on the full beauty and potential of the present. See Alma 36:3 and Matthew 6:31-34.
- **The Regret of Yesterday.** Everyone experiences regret at one time or another during their life. We regret our actions, our decisions, and at times, even our motivations. But no amount of regret can ever change the past and only those who have come to recognize their imperfections are able to move beyond them. Don't allow regret to negatively distract you from opportunity in the present. See Philippians 3:13-14.
- **The Obsession with Ourselves.** We are, by nature, sinful and selfish, and if we live by our nature, we will not be able to develop a closeness with Christ and the relationship that is needed to help us maintain a focus on what's important in this life. Therefore, as the Apostle Paul stated to the Romans, 'we need to die to ourselves and live in Christ'. But no matter what we do, there will be a constant battle within ourselves between spirit and flesh, which is why prayer and fasting, reading His Word, meditating on the blessing of God in our lives and giving thanks, meeting together as a Church, worshiping Him in song, enjoying the fellowship of the saints, etc., all provide what's needed to keep us focused and not distracted. That is why we need to constantly allow God to search our hearts and purify it that we might focus on Him and not ourselves. See Psalms 51:9-10 and Psalms 139:23-24.

Although not a complete list of distractions, we hope you'll agree that any one of these can turn our focus away from the things of God if they are not kept in-check. It is a constant struggle to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus but if we are aware of what can, and does, interfere with our walk with Christ, we can begin to take the necessary actions to prevent them. Remember Jesus said, ***"...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*** Matthew 6:33.

In the Love of God,

The Quorum of Twelve Apostles

To learn more about *The Church of Jesus Christ*, with Headquarters in Monongahela, PA, please visit our web site. The World Operations Center for world-wide missionary efforts is in Greensburg, PA.

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