

## Becoming True Millennials

Russell M. Nelson, YSA Worldwide Devotional BYU Hawaii, Jan 10, 2016

My dear brothers and sisters, this new year will surely be an eventful one. In its opening days, Wendy and I have already said farewell to my dear sister Marjory, who departed from this mortal life. We have welcomed into our family two new babies—Wade Richard Walker and Isaac Russell McDonough. And now we have the privilege of speaking with you great young adults throughout the entire world. We are very thankful for you.

I deeply appreciate Wendy’s important message and her inspiring example! I too gratefully acknowledge the attendance of Elder Kim B. Clark of the Seventy and Church Commissioner of Education; his wife, Sue; and Chad H. Webb, administrator of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, and his wife, Kristi.

I bring you greetings and love from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We are thankful for your devotion to the Lord and His restored gospel. We are grateful for each time you stand up and speak up for truth—especially when it is not popular.

Many people refer to you as *Millennials*. I’ll admit that when researchers refer to you by that word and describe what their studies reveal about you—your likes and dislikes, your feelings and inclinations, your strengths and weaknesses—I’m uncomfortable. There is something about the way they use the term *Millennial* that bothers me. And frankly, I am less interested in what the *experts* have to say about you than what the Lord has told me about you.

When I pray about you and ask the Lord how *He* feels about you, I feel something far different from what the researchers say. Spiritual impressions I’ve received about you lead me to believe that the term *Millennial* may actually be perfect for you. But for a much different reason than the experts may ever understand.

The term *Millennial* is perfect for you if that term reminds you of who you *really* are and what your purpose in life *really* is. A True Millennial is one who was taught and did teach the gospel of Jesus Christ premortally and who made covenants with our Heavenly Father there about courageous things—even *morally* courageous things—that you would do while here on earth.

A True Millennial is a man or woman whom God trusted enough to send to earth during the most compelling dispensation in the history of this world. A True Millennial is a man or woman who lives now to help prepare the people of this world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and His millennial reign. Make no mistake about it—you were born to be a True Millennial.

The question is “How can you stand and live as a True Millennial?” I have four recommendations.

## Learn Who You Really Are

My first recommendation: Learn who you *really* are.

Take time to think prayerfully about these facts:

- You are an elect son or daughter of God.
- You are created in His image.
- You were taught in the spirit world to prepare you for anything and everything you would encounter during this latter part of these latter days.<sup>1</sup> That teaching endures within you!

You are living in the “eleventh hour.” The Lord has declared that this is the last time that He will call laborers into His vineyard to gather the elect from the four quarters of the earth.<sup>2</sup> And *you* were sent to participate in this gathering. Again and again I have seen firsthand the powerful influence of True Millennials as they bring others to a knowledge of the truth. This is part of your identity and your purpose as the seed of Abraham!<sup>3</sup>

Several months ago Wendy and I had a remarkable experience in remote Siberia. Among those traveling with us on our “P-day” in Irkutsk were the mission president, Gregory S. Brinton; his wife, Sally; and their returned-missionary son, Sam, who had served his mission in Russia. We visited beautiful Lake Baikal and a marketplace on its shores.

When we returned to our van, we noticed that Sam was missing. Moments later he returned, accompanied by a middle-aged woman named Valentina. In her native Russian, Valentina enthusiastically exclaimed, “I want to meet this young man’s mother. He is so polite, intelligent, and kind! I want to meet his *mother!*” Valentina was drawn to Sam’s bright, light-filled countenance.

Sam introduced Valentina to both his mother and father, gave her a tract about the Savior, and arranged for missionaries to visit her. When the missionaries returned later with a copy of the Book of Mormon, she promised to read it. Several women who work at the same place were also excited about the new book Valentina had received. We don’t yet know the end of this story, but because of the distinctive light Sam radiated, Valentina and some of her friends have been introduced to the gospel.

True Millennials, like Sam, know who they really are. They are devout disciples of Jesus Christ who instinctively seize every opportunity to help themselves and others prepare for the millennial reign of our Savior.

Therefore, my first recommendation is to learn *for yourselves* who you really are. Ask your Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, how He feels about you and your mission here on earth. If you ask with real intent, over time the Spirit will whisper the life-changing truth to you. Record those impressions and review them often, and follow through with exactness.

I promise you that when you begin to catch even a glimpse of how your Heavenly Father sees you and what He is counting on you to do for Him, your life will never be the same!

### **Expect and Prepare to Accomplish the Impossible**

My second recommendation: Expect and prepare to accomplish the impossible.

God has always asked His covenant children to do difficult things. Because you are covenant-keeping sons and daughters of God, living in the latter part of these latter days, the Lord will ask *you* to do difficult things. You can count on it—Abrahamic tests did not stop with Abraham.<sup>4</sup>

I know how unnerving it can be to be asked to do something that seems far beyond your capacity. I had been a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for only 19 months when President Spencer W. Kimball passed away. In the first meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles following President Ezra Taft Benson's ordination, he gave specific assignments to the Twelve. His instructions to me included, "Elder Nelson, you are to open the countries of Eastern Europe for the preaching of the gospel."

That was 1985. During those politically frigid years that we refer to as the Cold War, not only did a literal wall divide the city of Berlin, but all of Eastern Europe was under the oppressive yoke of communism. Churches were closed, and religious worship was strictly limited.

I had spent much of my professional life opening hearts to perform life-saving operations, but I had *no* experience that would lead me to believe I could open countries for the preaching of the gospel. And yet, a prophet had given me an assignment, so I set out to do what seemed utterly impossible.

From the outset, obstacles were placed in my way. I arrived in most countries not knowing where to go. Even when I was able to find the name of an appropriate government official, it was not unusual for a meeting to be canceled at the last minute or to be postponed. In one country, when an appointment was delayed for two days, a number of temptations were intentionally placed in my way to test me—including traps for black market money and other illicit activities. On another occasion, a meeting was opened with the demand that I depart *immediately!*

But the Lord is able to do His own work,<sup>5</sup> and I was privileged to watch the unfolding of one miracle after another—always, and only, *after* I had brought my best thinking, my most courageous efforts, and my most fervent prayers to the task.

Recognition of the Church was granted by some of those countries before the Berlin Wall came down. Others came later. In the year 1992, I was able to report to President Benson that the Church was now established in every country in Eastern Europe!

As a True Millennial whom the Lord can count on, *you* will make history too! You will be asked to accept challenging assignments and become an instrument in the Lord's hands. And He will enable you to accomplish the impossible.

How will you accomplish the impossible? By doing whatever it takes to strengthen your faith in Jesus Christ by increasing your understanding of the doctrine taught in His restored Church and by relentlessly seeking truth. As a True Millennial, anchored in pure doctrine, when you are asked to do impossible things, you will be able to step forward with faith and dogged persistence and cheerfully do all that lies in your power to fulfill the purposes of the Lord.<sup>6</sup>

You will have days when you will be thoroughly discouraged. So, pray for courage not to give up! You will need that strength because it will become less and less popular to be a Latter-day Saint. Sadly, some whom you thought were your friends will betray you. And some things will simply seem unfair.

However, I promise you that as you follow Jesus Christ, you will find sustained peace and true joy. As you keep your covenants with increasing precision, and as you defend the Church and kingdom of God on the earth today, the Lord will bless you with strength and wisdom to accomplish the impossible.

### **Learn How to Access the Power of Heaven**

My third recommendation: Learn how to access the power of heaven.

Every one of us has questions. Seeking to learn, understand, and recognize truth is a vital part of our mortal experience. Much of my life has been spent in research. You too will learn best by asking inspired questions.

At this very moment some of you are struggling to know what you should be doing with your life. Others of you may wonder if you have been forgiven of your sins. Most of you are wondering who and where your eternal companion is—and those who aren't should be.

Some may question why the Church does some of the things it does. Perhaps many of you are not sure how to get answers to your prayers.

Our Heavenly Father and His Son stand ready to respond to your questions through the ministering of the Holy Ghost. But it is up to you to learn how to qualify for and receive those answers.

Where can you start? Begin by spending more time in holy places. The temple is a holy place. So is the chapel, where you make new sacramental covenants each Sunday. I invite you also to make your apartment, your dorm, your home, or your room a holy place where you can safely retreat from the dark distractions of the world.

Prayer is a key. Pray to know what to stop doing and what to start doing. Pray to know what to add to your

environment and what to remove so the Spirit can be with you in abundance.

Plead with the Lord for the gift of discernment. Then live and work to be worthy to receive that gift so that when confusing events arise in the world, you will know exactly what is true and what is not.<sup>7</sup>

Serve with love. Loving service to those who have lost their way or who are wounded in spirit opens your heart to personal revelation.

Spend more time—much more time—in places where the Spirit is present. That means more time with friends who are seeking to have the Spirit with them. Spend more time on your knees in prayer, more time in the scriptures, more time in family history work, more time in the temple. I promise you that as you consistently give the Lord a generous portion of your time, He will multiply the remainder.

We sustain 15 men who are ordained as prophets, seers, and revelators. When a thorny problem arises—and they only seem to get thornier each day—these 15 men wrestle with the issue, trying to see all the ramifications of various courses of action, and they diligently seek to hear the voice of the Lord. After fasting, praying, studying, pondering, and counseling with my Brethren about weighty matters, it is not unusual for me to be awakened during the night with further impressions about issues with which we are concerned. And my Brethren have the same experience.

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counsel together and share all the Lord has directed us to understand and to feel individually and collectively. And then we watch the Lord move upon the President of the Church to proclaim the Lord's will.

This prophetic process was followed in 2012 with the change in minimum age for missionaries and again with the recent additions to the Church's handbook, consequent to the legalization of same-sex marriage in some countries. Filled with compassion for all, and especially for the children, we wrestled at length to understand the Lord's will in this matter. Ever mindful of God's plan of salvation and of His hope for eternal life for each of His children, we considered countless permutations and combinations of possible scenarios that could arise. We met repeatedly in the temple in fasting and prayer and sought further direction and inspiration. And then, when the Lord inspired His prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, to declare the mind of the Lord and the will of the Lord, each of us during that sacred moment felt a spiritual confirmation. It was our privilege as Apostles to sustain what had been revealed to President Monson. Revelation from the Lord to His servants is a sacred process, and so is your privilege of receiving personal revelation.

My dear brothers and sisters, you have as much access to the mind and will of the Lord for your own life as we Apostles do for His Church. Just as the Lord requires *us* to seek and ponder, fast and pray, and study and wrestle with

difficult questions, He requires *you* to do the same as you seek answers to your own questions.

You can learn to hear the voice of the Lord through the whisperings of the Holy Ghost.<sup>8</sup> As helpful as Google, Twitter, and Facebook may seem, they simply do not provide answers to your most important questions!

My dear young friends, you can know the mind and will of the Lord for your own life. You do not have to wonder if you are where the Lord needs you to be or if you are doing what He needs you to do. You can know! The Holy Ghost will tell you "all things what ye should do."<sup>9</sup>

### **Follow the Prophets**

My fourth recommendation: Follow the prophets.

In 1979, while serving as Sunday School general president, I was invited to attend a Regional Representatives seminar during which President Spencer W. Kimball gave an inspiring address about opening the doors of nations then closed to the Church, such as China. He challenged all present to study the Mandarin language so we could offer our professional skills to help the people of China.

To me, President Kimball's challenge seemed like a prophetic mandate. So that very night I asked my wife, Dantzel, if she would be willing to study Mandarin with me. She agreed, and we found a tutor to help us. Of course we didn't learn to speak Mandarin very well, but we learned enough that, when I was invited the very next year (through a series of highly unexpected events) to go to China as a visiting professor to teach open-heart surgery, I was in a better position to accept the invitation.

Fast forward six years to 1985, the year after I had been called to the Quorum of the Twelve. One day I received an urgent request to go to China to perform open-heart surgery on their famous opera star, regarded throughout China as a national hero. I explained that my full-time ecclesiastical responsibility prevented my coming, but the doctors in China pleaded with me to come at once to perform the life-saving operation.

I discussed the matter with my quorum president and the First Presidency. They felt impressed that, as a favor to the people of China, I should make the trip and perform the operation.

That I did. Gratefully, the operation was a success! Incidentally, that was the last open-heart operation I ever performed. It was in Jinan, China, on March 4, 1985.

Now, fast-forward again, this time to October 2015, just three months ago. Wendy and I were invited to return to Shandong University School of Medicine in Jinan. We were amazed when I was warmly welcomed as "an old friend" of China and was reunited with surgeons I had taught 35 years earlier. A highlight of our visit was meeting with the son and grandson of that famous opera star. All of these amazing experiences were enabled for

one reason: I heeded the counsel of a prophet to study Mandarin!

Prophets see ahead. They see the harrowing dangers the adversary has placed or will yet place in our path. Prophets also foresee the grand possibilities and privileges awaiting those who listen *with the intent to obey*. I know this is true! I have experienced it for myself over and over again.

The Lord has promised us that He will never allow the prophet to lead us astray. President Harold B. Lee declared: “You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord Himself, with patience and faith, the promise is that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory’ (D&C 21:6).”<sup>10</sup>

You may not always understand every declaration of a living prophet. But when you know a prophet is a prophet, you can approach the Lord in humility and faith and ask for your own witness about whatever His prophet has proclaimed.

Around 41 b.c., many Nephites joined the Church, and the Church prospered. But secret combinations also began to grow, and many of their cunning leaders hid among the people and were difficult to detect. As the people became more and more prideful, many of the Nephites made “a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation.”<sup>11</sup>

Those same threats are among us today. The somber reality is that there are “servants of Satan”<sup>12</sup> embedded throughout society. So be very careful about whose counsel you follow.<sup>13</sup>

My beloved brothers and sisters, you were born to be True Millennials! You are a chosen generation,<sup>14</sup> fore-determined by God to do a remarkable work—to help prepare the people of this world for the Second Coming of the Lord.

Now, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I bless each one of you, as though I had my hands upon your heads, with the ability to become the True Millennial you were born to be. I bless you to have the desire and ability to learn your true identity and purpose, that you will expect and prepare to do “impossible” things, that you will be undaunted in your efforts to learn how to access the powers of heaven to help you solve your problems and answer your questions. And I bless you to follow the prophets with exactness, to feel peace in your heart as you do so. I bless you to know and feel how much the Lord loves you and how much confidence He has in you.

I love and sustain President Thomas S. Monson in this sacred work of Almighty God. Jesus Christ is our Savior.

This is His Church. We are His people! I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.