

## **361: House Church (Come, Follow Me Special Episode)**

We are upgrading the podcast from Sunday School to House Church!

Invitation to make a house of worship

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The announcements:

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/gatherings-worldwide-temporarily-suspended>

Beginning immediately, all public gatherings of Church members are being temporarily suspended worldwide until further notice.

This includes:

- Stake conferences, leadership conferences and other large gatherings
- All public worship services, including sacrament meetings
- Branch, ward and stake activities

Where possible, leaders should conduct any essential leadership meetings via technology.

Specific questions may be referred to local priesthood leaders. Further direction related to other matters will be provided. Bishops should counsel with their stake president to determine how to make the sacrament available to members at least once a month.

We encourage members in their ministering efforts to care for one another. We should follow the Savior's example to bless and lift others.

We bear our witness of the Lord's love during this time of uncertainty. He will bless you to find joy as you do your best to live the gospel of Jesus Christ in every circumstance.

Sincerely,

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

General Conference: (President Nelson was right it will be like no other!)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are deeply concerned about the global spreading of illness caused by COVID-19.

We have counseled with worldwide governmental, ecclesiastical, and medical leaders and have prayerfully considered the current circumstances. We want to be good global citizens and do what we can to control this contagious illness. We are most grateful for the many who are working tirelessly to address this health hazard. We pray for them and for all who may be suffering. To help control this problem, we feel it wise to limit attendance at the upcoming April 2020 General Conference. We plan to conduct all five sessions of that conference at the Conference Center. General authorities, general officers and their spouses, musicians, choirs, technicians, and others will participate as assigned. But, proceedings of the conference will be distributed throughout the world via technology only. The public will not be admitted in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, or in stake centers or meetinghouses in areas where contagion is a concern. Questions about other [large gatherings](#) of Church members will be answered in separate announcements.

We live in a remarkable age. The Lord has blessed us with the technology and capacity to participate in and receive messages from Church leaders in all parts of the world. This special conference will commemorate the bicentennial of the First Vision and the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in these latter days.

We invite all to continue to prepare for this conference. As we do, we will be blessed to hear the word of the Lord and participate in a general conference experience that will remain not only memorable, but unforgettable.

Sincerely,

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Temples:

- Where government or other restrictions on public and/or religious gatherings would, in effect, preclude temple activity, proxy and living ordinances will temporarily be suspended.
- Where government or other restrictions do not preclude all temple activity, the following temple ordinances for living persons will be accommodated as capacity permits by appointment only: husband-and-wife and child-to-parents sealing ordinances and living initiatory and endowment ordinances. On a temporary basis, proxy temple ordinances will not be performed.

Lesson:

Invitation to make a house of worship

Context is everything.

(We've heard these messages for years, even decades... but now it feels real in a different way, because it is)

Everything is an **invitation**

This is the single most helpful shift I've experienced/practiced. Everything is an invitation. An invitation to grow, to show up. To live.

**Disruption** is one of the most powerful invitations to grow and change (updating is a superpower of mine. I've been feeling such world/system grief, but have mostly metabolized it)

This is the adaptation principle at work: People's judgments about their present state are based on whether it is better or worse than the state to which they have become accustomed. Adaptation is, in part, just a property of neurons: Nerve cells respond vigorously to new stimuli, but gradually they "habituate," firing less to stimuli that they have become used to. It is change that contains vital information, not steady states. Human beings, however, take adaptation to cognitive extremes. We don't just habituate, we recalibrate. We create for ourselves a world of targets, and each time we hit one we replace it with another. After a string of successes we aim higher; after a massive setback, such as a broken neck, we aim lower. Instead of following Buddhist and Stoic advice to surrender attachments and let events happen, we surround ourselves with goals, hopes, and expectations, and then feel pleasure and pain in relation to our progress. When we combine the adaptation principle with the discovery that people's average level of happiness is highly heritable, we come to a startling possibility: In the long run, it doesn't much matter what happens to you. Good fortune or bad, you will always return to your happiness setpoint—your brain's default level of happiness—which was determined largely by your genes. In 1759, long before anyone knew about genes, Adam Smith reached the same conclusion: In every permanent situation, where there is no expectation of change, the mind of every man, in a longer or shorter time, returns to its natural and usual state of tranquility. In prosperity, after a certain time, it falls back to that state; in adversity, after a certain time, it rises up to it. If this idea is correct, then we are all stuck on what has been called the "hedonic treadmill." On an exercise treadmill you can increase the speed all you want, but you stay in the same place. In life, you can work as hard as you want, and accumulate all the riches, fruit trees, and concubines you want, but you can't get ahead. Because you can't change your "natural and usual state of tranquility," the riches you accumulate will just raise your expectations and leave you no better off than you were before. Yet, not realizing the futility of our efforts, we continue to strive, all the while doing things that help us win at the game of life. Always wanting more than we have, we run and run and run, like hamsters on a wheel.

When tragedy strikes, however, it knocks you off the treadmill and forces a decision: Hop back on and return to business as usual, or try something else? There is a window of time—just a few weeks or months after the tragedy—during which you are more open to something else. During this time, achievement goals often lose their allure, sometimes coming to seem pointless. If you shift toward other goals—family, religion, or helping others—you shift to inconspicuous consumption, and the pleasures derived along the way are not fully subject to adaptation (treadmill) effects. The pursuit of these goals therefore leads to more happiness but less wealth (on average). Many people

change their goals in the wake of adversity; they resolve to work less, to love and play more. **If in those first few months you take action—you do something that changes your daily life—then the changes might stick. But if you do nothing more than make a resolution (“I must never forget my new outlook on life”), then you will soon slip back into old habits and pursue old goals.** The rider can exert some influence at forks in the road; but the elephant handles daily life, responding automatically to the environment. Adversity may be necessary for growth because it forces you to stop speeding along the road of life, allowing you to notice the paths that were branching off all along, and to think about where you really want to end up.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (p. 144).

For decades, research in health psychology focused on stress and its damaging effects. A major concern in this research literature has always been resilience—the ways people cope with adversity, fend off damage, and “bounce back” to normal functioning. But it’s only in the last fifteen years that researchers have gone beyond resilience and begun to focus on the benefits of severe stress. These benefits are sometimes referred to collectively as “posttraumatic growth,”<sup>6</sup> in direct contrast to posttraumatic stress disorder. Researchers have now studied people facing many kinds of adversity, including cancer, heart disease, HIV, rape, assault, paralysis, infertility, house fires, plane crashes, and earthquakes. Researchers have studied how people cope with the loss of their strongest attachments: children, spouses or partners, and parents. This large body of research shows that although traumas, crises, and tragedies come in a thousand forms, people benefit from them in three primary ways—the same ones that Greg talked about. The first benefit is that rising to a challenge reveals your hidden abilities, and seeing these abilities changes your self-concept. None of us knows what we are really capable of enduring. You might say to yourself, “I would die if I lost X,” or “I could never survive what Y is going through,” yet these are statements spun out of thin air by the rider. If you did lose X, or find yourself in the same position as Y, your heart would not stop beating. You would respond to the world as you found it, and most of those responses would be automatic. People sometimes say they are numb or on autopilot after a terrible loss or trauma. Consciousness is severely altered, yet somehow the body keeps moving. Over the next few weeks some degree of normalcy returns as one struggles to make sense of the loss and of one’s altered circumstances. What doesn’t kill you makes you, by definition, a survivor, about whom people then say, “I could never survive what Y is going through.” One of the most common lessons people draw from bereavement or trauma is that they are much stronger than they realized,

and this new appreciation of their strength then gives them confidence to face future challenges. And they are not just confabulating a silver lining to wrap around a dark cloud; people who have suffered through battle, rape, concentration camps, or traumatic personal losses often seem to be inoculated <sup>7</sup> against future stress: They recover more quickly, in part because they know they can cope. Religious leaders have often pointed to exactly this benefit of suffering. As Paul said in his Letter to the Romans (5:3-4): “Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” More recently, the Dalai Lama said: “The person who has had more experience of hardships can stand more firmly in the face of problems than the person who has never experienced suffering. From this angle, then, some suffering can be a good lesson for life.”<sup>8</sup>

Haidt, Jonathan. The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom (p. 139). Basic Books. Kindle Edition.

### **What on earth is going on? Covid-19 Virus and what to do about it**

Recap on human nature: Small. Selfish. Social.

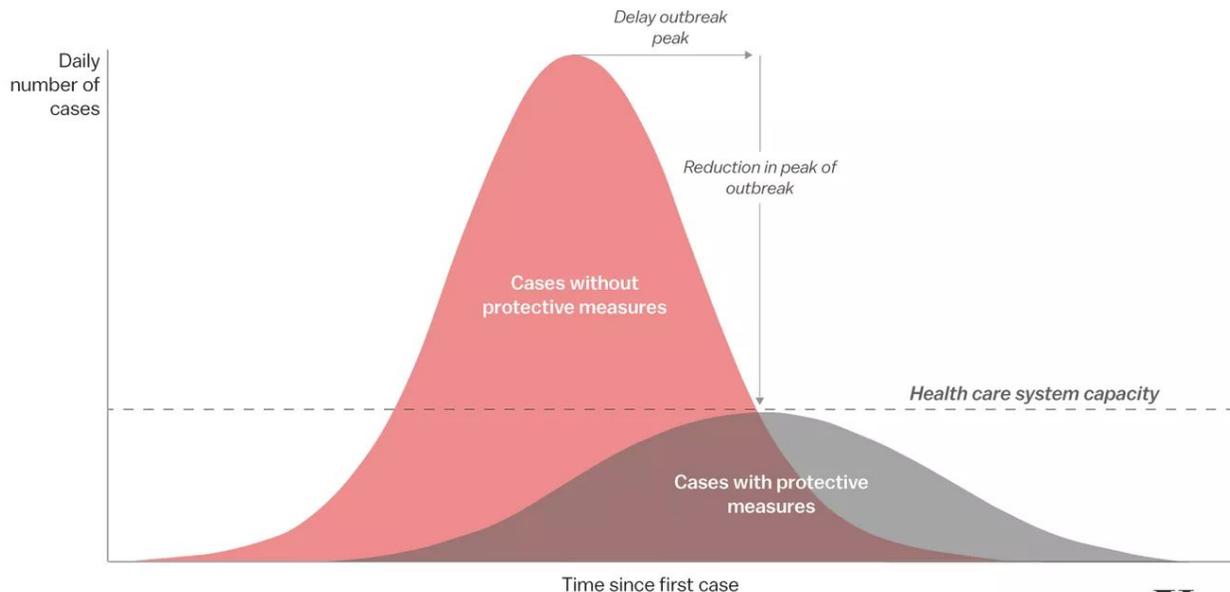
Systems make decisions. Humans feel the consequences. (We are all limited by the options that our jobs, schools, government etc give us. We do the best we can within all those limitations)

I think the Corona Virus (Covid-19) is a wake up call and systems check. It is serious. Cases double about every four days, and things will get very hard over the next few months. Many of us will get the virus, and the elderly are especially vulnerable.

The goal: “Flatten the curve” so that health care facilities and workers can handle the cases

<https://www.vox.com/2020/3/10/21171481/coronavirus-us-cases-quarantine-cancellation?fbclid=IwAR1dGvm7ouPN4HHwSeSLE0ZokaFTPEQIDbizKwNSmbV6G6eskPldda-MlfM>

## Flattening the curve



This is an instance where we need everything: Science. Gospel. Humanity. I don't think there is any better network in a crisis than the LDS Church. Let's each do the best we can and keep checking in with each other.

[https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51840233?fbclid=IwAR2NhaQUyKXmbpvnfCwy\\_b7mSdWx8hzPwbuuEECNFF2gFnFa3MrBP5UGxg8](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51840233?fbclid=IwAR2NhaQUyKXmbpvnfCwy_b7mSdWx8hzPwbuuEECNFF2gFnFa3MrBP5UGxg8)

And while public health workers are one of the groups with the highest risk of infection, they also fall foul of another systemic issue in the US under the spotlight during this crisis; the fact that there is no requirement for American employers to offer paid sick leave.

"I'm really worried for my patients that can't take time off work to come and get care and who will go to work even when they are sick because they have no other way to pay for their food and utilities. Coronavirus does not change that," says Dr Ravi Grivois-Shah.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/03/10/coronavirus-what-matters-isnt-what-you-can-see-what-you-cant/?fbclid=IwAR3T1lgketyPHMkMLF0QldxHvGEZ1oK8P4O4tZvckfg4DY9y0aLYFxIHCW0#comments-wrapper>

One of the biggest problems with being human is we aren't wired to understand exponential growth. The impact of Covid-19 doubles every four days. We won't see how serious this is for months.

There's an old brain teaser that goes like this: You have a pond of a certain size, and upon that pond, a single lily pad. This particular species of lily pad reproduces once a day, so that on day two, you have two lily pads. On day three, you have four, and so on. Now the teaser. "If it takes the lily pads 48 days to cover the pond completely, how long will it take for the pond to be covered halfway?"

The answer is 47 days. Moreover, at day 40, you'll barely know the lily pads are there... But go back to those lily pads: When something dangerous is growing exponentially, everything looks fine until it doesn't. In the early days of the Wuhan epidemic, when no one was taking precautions, the number of cases [appears to have doubled](#) every four to five days.

The crisis in northern Italy is what happens when a fast doubling rate meets a "threshold effect," where the character of an event can massively change once its size hits a certain threshold.

In this case, the threshold is things such as ICU beds. If the epidemic is small enough, doctors can provide respiratory support to the significant fraction of patients who develop complications, and relatively few will die. But once the number of critical patients exceeds the number of ventilators and ICU beds and other critical-care facilities, mortality rates spike.

[Daniele Macchini](#), a doctor in Bergamo, Italy, recently posted a heart-stopping account to Facebook of what he and his colleagues have endured: the hospital emptying out, the wards eerily silent as they waited for the patients they couldn't quite believe would come ... and then, the "tsunami."

“One after the other the departments that had been emptied fill up at an impressive pace. ... The boards with the names of the patients, of different colors depending on the operating unit, are now all red and instead of surgery you see the diagnosis, which is always the damned same: bilateral interstitial pneumonia.”

A British health-care worker [shared a message](#) from a doctor in Italy, who alleged that covid-19 patients in their hospital who are over 65, or have complicating conditions, aren't even being considered for the most intensive forms of supportive treatment.

So in sum, keep calm. Wash your hands. Isolate as much as possible. Take care of yourself and others. This is an invitation to greater presence and awareness. As many scriptures say, “Wake up.” Don't panic, but be careful.

### **Strengths of the Come, Follow Me Curriculum**

Isn't it interesting that President Nelson has been focusing on a home worship model supplemented by the Church?

#### [Deep and Lasting Conversion to Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ](#)

Church leaders have been working for a long time on “a *home-centered* and *Church-supported* plan to learn doctrine, strengthen faith, and foster greater personal worship.” President Nelson then announced an adjustment to achieve “a new balance and connection between gospel instruction in the home and in the Church.”

#### [Come, Follow Me—the Lord's Counterstrategy and Proactive Plan](#)

We see Latter-day Saints everywhere growing in faith and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. We see individuals and families setting aside time throughout the week to study the words of our Savior. We see improving gospel instruction in our Sunday classes as we study the scriptures at

home and share our insights at church. We see greater family joy and unity as we have moved from simply reading the scriptures to studying the scriptures in a profound way.

It has been my privilege to visit with many Latter-day Saints and hear firsthand of their experiences with Come, Follow Me. Their expressions of faith fill my heart with joy. Here are just a few of the comments I have heard from various members of the Church in different parts of the world:

- A father shared: “I enjoy Come, Follow Me, as it provides an opportunity to testify of the Savior to my children.”
- In another home, a child said: “This is a chance to hear my parents bear their testimonies.”
- A mother shared: “We have been inspired as to how to put God first. The time we [thought we] ‘didn’t have’ has been [filled] with hope, joy, peace, and success in ways we didn’t know were possible.”
- A couple observed: “We are reading the scriptures entirely differently than we have ever read them before. We are learning so much more than we have ever learned before. The Lord is wanting us to see things differently. The Lord is preparing us.”
- A mother remarked: “I love that we are learning the same things together. Before, we were reading it. Today, we are learning it.”
- A sister shared this insightful perspective: “Before, you had the lesson and the scriptures supplemented it. Now, you have the scriptures and the lesson supplements it.”
- Another sister commented: “I feel a difference when I do it [compared to] when I don’t. I find it is easier to talk to others about Jesus Christ and our beliefs.”
- A grandmother remarked: “I call my children and grandchildren on Sundays, and we share insights from Come, Follow Me together.”
- A sister observed: “Come, Follow Me feels like the Savior is personally ministering to me. It is heaven inspired.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/come-follow-me?lang=eng>

## History of House Church

Here’s something fun and meaningful to think about... house/home Church is how Christianity began! And we can go far, far earlier than that... talking about the gospel

around the firepit or hearth is likely the most common way of sharing the gospel and spirituality in the entire history of humanity

(First Urban Christians, 74-77)

Recommendations for House Church

So that's some what and why and when, let's talk about how.

Church at home (Set aside a particular time, make it as formal and consistent as you can) I have faith this will strengthen our relationships among our family and friends.

Music: Singing together, ask members to perform, listen to performances (do all these in hospice visits)

Prayer (be real and honest)

Sacrament (My EQP sent out an email with the following guidance, I imagine it's pretty standard)

Spiritual messages (assign them in advance)

Individual spirituality and worship: I think this is one of the greatest potential benefits of a time of crisis. We are stretched and challenged, and so we discover and exercise strengths we may not have been aware we have. Take this time (and time off, if you are fortunate to have it) to study, pray, meditate, nurture your relationship with God

I'll work to incorporate these elements into future episodes of EGD, and I'm also looking into ways we can create a virtual congregation, whether it's Facebook Live, Zoom, etc.

C.S. Lewis on pandemics and other horrors:

"In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. "How are we to live in an atomic age?" I am tempted to reply: "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents."

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to

die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors—anaesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.”

Conclusion: Leaning and growing into the new normal. Stay human. Stay Christlike.

One of the very strongest benefits of the gospel is a focus on being prepared and caring for ourselves and others. This virus is an invitation and reminder to recommit ourselves to those principles. Keep checking in with each other.