

President Benson, it appears that the voting has been unanimous in the affirmative.

President Monson

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our first speaker at this session.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton

"To every man is given a gift"

One of the great tragedies of life, it seems to me, is when a person classifies himself as someone who has no talents or gifts. When, in disgust or discouragement, we allow ourselves to reach depressive levels of despair because of our demeaning self-appraisal, it is a sad day for us and a sad day in the eyes of God. For us to conclude that we have no gifts when we judge ourselves by stature, intelligence, grade-point average, wealth, power, position, or external appearance is not only unfair but unreasonable.

From Doctrine and Covenants 46:11-12, we have this truth: "For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God.

"To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby."

God has given each of us one or more special talents. Socrates made the famous statement, "The unexamined life is not worth living" ("Apology," *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett [Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952], p. 210). It is up to each of us to search for and build upon the gifts which God has given. We must remember that each of us is made in the image of God, that there are no unimportant persons. Everyone matters to God and to his fellowmen.

Less-conspicuous gifts

From the Book of Mormon, particularly 3 Nephi, chapters 11 through 26, when the Savior Jesus Christ showed himself to the people on the

American continent, many gifts are referred to as being very real and most useful. Taken at random, let me mention a few gifts that are not always evident or noteworthy but that are very important. Among these may be your gifts—gifts not so evident but nevertheless real and valuable.

Let us review some of these less-conspicuous gifts: the gift of asking; the gift of listening; the gift of hearing and using a still, small voice; the gift of being able to weep; the gift of avoiding contention; the gift of being agreeable; the gift of avoiding vain repetition; the gift of seeking that which is righteous; the gift of not passing judgment; the gift of looking to God for guidance; the gift of being a disciple; the gift of caring for others; the gift of being able to ponder; the gift of offering prayer; the gift of bearing a mighty testimony; and the gift of receiving the Holy Ghost.

We must remember that to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. It is our right and responsibility to accept our gifts and to share them. God's gifts and powers are available to all of us.

Time will permit my emphasizing only a few of these God-given gifts.

The gift of pondering

As I study the scriptures, I am challenged and moved by the word *ponder* used so frequently in the Book of Mormon. Dictionaries say that *ponder* means to weigh mentally, think deeply about, deliberate, meditate.

When Jesus Christ came to teach the Nephites, he said, "Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said, and ask of

the Father, in my name, that ye may understand, and prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again" (3 Nephi 17:3).

Moroni used this term as he closed his record. "Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, . . . ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, . . . and ponder it in your hearts" (Moroni 10:3).

By pondering, we give the Spirit an opportunity to impress and direct. Pondering is a powerful link between the heart and the mind. As we read the scriptures, our hearts and minds are touched. If we use the gift to ponder, we can take these eternal truths and realize how we can incorporate them into our daily actions.

Today, millions, at President Benson's encouragement, are reading the Book of Mormon, some for the first time, others as a regular habit. We must remind all that the fruits of this great book are the most beneficial when we ponder as we read.

Pondering is a progressive mental pursuit. It is a great gift to those who have learned to use it. We find understanding, insight, and practical application if we will use the gift of pondering.

Look to God for direction

How often have we ourselves said or have heard others exclaim in times of crisis or trouble, "I just don't know where to turn"?

If we will just use it, there is a gift available to all of us—the gift of looking to God for direction. Here is an avenue of strength, comfort, and guidance.

"Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life" (3 Nephi 15:9).

"Look to God and live." This is the wonderful promise given so often in the scriptures.

If we look to God for guidance, what do we look for in his children that we may be profited thereby? Some of

us seem to prefer the practice of looking for and pointing out the weaknesses of our associates. The gifts others have, not their failings, make it possible for all to profit thereby.

What a spiritual comfort and blessing it is to know that, if we look to our Savior Jesus Christ and endure to the end, eternal life and exaltation can be ours. Our capacity to see and comprehend is increased only in proportion to our willingness to look. God becomes more approachable as we look to him. Looking to God teaches us to serve and live without compulsion. Being a leader in the Church should never diminish our "looking to God" time.

Hear and heed the small voice

Still, small heavenly voices penetrate the heart with their gentle, convincing declarations:

"And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, inasmuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn" (3 Nephi 11:3).

Most often, hope, encouragement, and direction come from a soft, piercing voice.

Small voices are heard only by those who are willing to listen. Soft and small voice communications with our associates make priceless friendships possible. I am appreciative of people who find no need to raise their voices as they try to impress or convince. It seems most people who argue and shout have ceased listening to what the small voice could powerfully contribute.

We love the small voice of a child saying, "Mommy, Daddy, I love you."

How powerful is a small voice that knows how and when to say, "Thank you."

Think of the heavenly voice saying, Joseph, this is my beloved son. Hear him (see Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

It is heartwarming and reassuring to hear the small voice declare, "Be still and know" (D&C 101:16).

Remember that one of our greatest gifts is the small voice of the Holy Ghost whispering directions in our lives and making mighty testimonies possible.

The gift of calming others

What a majestic gift it is to be able to calm others! We thank God for those who are calm instead of contentious.

"For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29).

Contention is a tool of the adversary. Peace is a tool of our Savior. What a wonderful tribute we pay people when we describe them as being gentle, firm, and calm!

Contention stops progress. Love brings eternal progression.

Where contention prevails, there can be no united effort in any purposeful direction.

"Cease to contend one with another; cease to speak evil one of another" (D&C 136:23).

Argument and debate must be supplanted by calm discussion, study, listening, and negotiation.

The gospel is one of harmony, unity, and agreement. It must be presented in love, and with glad tidings, by those who are calm.

We should learn to talk together, listen together, pray together, decide together, and avoid all forms of possible contention. We must learn to curb anger. Satan knows that when conten-

tion begins, orderly progress is thwarted.

There has never been a time when it is more important for us as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to take a stand, remain firm in our convictions, and conduct ourselves with calm assurance under all circumstances. We must not be manipulated or enraged by those who subtly foster contention over issues of the day.

"Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away" (3 Nephi 11:30).

"Ye should live in peace one with another" (Mosiah 2:20). Those with the gift of being calm make lasting peace possible.

The gift of caring

How grateful we should be for families, friends, and organizations who care! They make life easier and more meaningful. They, too, reap rewards in their Christlike caring when they serve for the right reasons. Leaders on every level should be primarily interested in rendering compassionate caring for others.

"And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17).

Our Savior cares for all of his sheep. What a tribute it is to be recognized as one who cares. Let me share with you a story about the quiet caring of an unusual person who was brought to my attention during the last few weeks.

"Best Scouter Ever"

Recently, during a twenty-fifth anniversary ward reunion in the Salt Lake Valley, a "Best Scouter Ever" award was presented. The special eve-

ning in the cultural hall, which included dinner as well as a fine program, drew many people back to the ward event because of the good feelings created over the past twenty-five years.

The person acting as master of ceremonies introduced a young man to make this special award. He looked to be about six feet four inches tall and well over two hundred pounds. He walked to the microphone and said, "We would now like to pay tribute to the best Scouter this ward has ever had."

Immediately names and faces of past Scout leaders jumped into the minds of those attending. Who would it be? There had been many great Scoutmasters in this ward. How could those in charge decide?

The tall, handsome young man mentioned many names of past Scout leaders and then said, "No, it is none of these, though they have all been great Scouters. Our ward 'Best Scouter Ever' award goes to someone who has worked in the Primary and as a Scout leader teaching boys for forty years. This individual has received the Silver Beaver Award, one of the highest awards given in Scouting, and the Silver Beehive Award, the highest award given by the Church in Scouting." Then with a voice that trembled slightly, he said, "Our 'Best Scouter Ever' recognition goes to Sister Jennie Verl Keefer." There came a hush over the audience, then knowing voices of approval, then a burst of applause that seemed to go on forever.

Sister Keefer was called up to the front. All present intently watched her quietly make her way. From the back of the room, this gray-haired bundle of energy hesitatingly came forward, her five-foot frame barely taller than those who were seated. Once at the microphone, the surprised recipient expressed a quiet and emotional, yet firm, thanks. She said between tears of gratitude it wasn't quite forty years she had served. It was only thirty-seven years. And then Sister Keefer proudly added

that during all her time of service, she had never had a bad boy.

Then the presenter asked all those whom Sister Keefer had ever taught and cared for to come to the stage. Here was the amazing thing. Men and boys started from the audience and filled the space behind this tiny woman. Big men, men in suits, doctors, bishops, presidents of companies, husbands, fathers holding babies, returned missionaries, contractors, computer workers, dentists, carpenters, and more. All these Scouts had been boys touched by the service and caring of this one noble and great woman—the best Scouter ever in the ward's entire history. She had the gift of caring, and here were some of the fruits of her labors. Generations yet to come will bless her name for what she has done. What a great gift have those who know how to care!

Develop and share gifts

"And to every man is given a gift" (D&C 46:11). This is true. God help us to recognize, develop, and share our gifts that all may profit thereby is my earnest hope and plea.

God does live. He does bless us with gifts. As we develop and share our God-given gifts and benefit from the gifts of those around us, the world can be a better place and God's work will move forward at a more rapid pace. To these truths I bear my testimony and leave my personal witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder Marvin J. Ashton, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us. Thank you for that tribute to a Scouter, Brother Ashton.

We shall now be pleased to listen to two of the Brethren who were sustained as members of the First Quorum of the Seventy at April conference: first, from the land of the long white cloud, way down in New Zealand,