

What you do now, today, may have far-reaching consequences. I believe today's Aaronic Priesthood and young women of the Church will lead the youth of the world through the most trying time in history. It is time for the Aaronic Priesthood to come of age. The rod of iron leading to the tree of life for you, our young men, may well be the implementation of the complete and full work of the Aaronic Priesthood. As we marshal your forces in your true identity as deacons, teachers, and priests in the holy Aaronic Priesthood, we mobilize an army of Israel such as has never been known before in the Church. Your numbers are legion. I believe you will be expected to perform the most important work in this dispensation, with the exception of the work done by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

President Spencer W. Kimball said: "When I read Church history, I am amazed at the boldness of the early brethren as they went out into the world. They seemed to find a way. Even in persecution and hardship, they went and opened doors which evidently had been allowed to sag on their hinges and many of them to close. . . .

"These men of valor began to walk the earth with dignity and honor, with mantles on their shoulders, and keys in their hands and love in their hearts" (Regional Representatives' seminar, 4 Apr. 1974, p. 9).

My faithful young friends, you can match their boldness stride for stride. You can walk with equal dignity and honor, with the mantle on your shoulders and keys in your hands and love in your hearts.

Then we will exclaim as did Ammon: "Therefore, let us glory . . . in the Lord; yea, we will rejoice, for our joy is full; yea, we will praise our God forever. Behold, who can glory too much in the Lord? Yea, who can say too much of his great power, and of his mercy, and of his long-suffering towards the children of men? Behold, I say unto you, I cannot say the smallest part which I feel" (Alma 26:16).

I know of no more glorious work. As God is my witness, I love it with every particle of my heart and soul, and I love him with even more than my life. I hold it a high honor to walk by your side as a true and loyal champion of youth.

God bless you, youth of the noble birthright, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone of the First Quorum of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

The assurance that God lives

What John and Paul wrote about God's creations and the plurality of worlds, the restored gospel grandly affirms, declaring that "worlds without number" have been created (Moses 1:33; see also John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2, 11:3; D&C 93:10). These gospel truths are very significant assurances for us, situated as we are on this tiny "speck of sand" at the outer edge of a minor gal-

axy, the Milky Way. Without the gospel's fullness, we would appear to be living during one tick of the geological clock and in the midst of unexplained vastness.

Nevertheless, our focus is to be on this planet, just as the Lord told Moses:

"But only an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, give I unto you. For behold, there are many worlds that have passed away. . . . Innumerable are they unto man; but all things

are numbered unto me, for they are mine and I know them" (Moses 1:35).

Enoch, to whom the Lord revealed so much, praised God amid His vast creations, exclaiming reassuredly, "Yet thou art there" (Moses 7:30; see also Jeremiah 10:12).

This same special assurance can see each of us through all the seasons and circumstances of our lives. A universal God is actually involved with our small, individual universes of experience! In the midst of His vast dominions, yet He numbers us, knows us, and loves us perfectly (see Moses 1:35, John 10:14).

Know God and his plan for us

Along with knowing that God is there, it is equally vital to know what He is like, including His perfected attributes of justice and mercy. More mortals die in ignorance of God's true character than die in actual defiance of Him. Belief in the goodness and power of God is greatly facilitated by understanding His plan of salvation with its crucial allowance for mankind's moral agency, real moral agency—with real mistakes and with real consequences! His plan includes real tests, real dilemmas, real anguish, and real joy.

Even though he knew he had been called personally by a personal God, Enoch wrestled with feelings of personal inadequacy (see Moses 6:31). Enoch also wept over the human condition, but he was told, "Lift up your heart, and be glad; and look" (Moses 7:44). If Enoch had not looked and been spiritually informed, he would have seen the human condition in isolation from the grand reality. If God were not there, Enoch's "Why?" would have become an unanswered scream of despair!

At first, Enoch refused "to be comforted" (Moses 7:44). Finally, he saw God's plan, the later coming of the Messiah in the meridian of time, and the eventual triumph of God's pur-

poses. Enoch saw how the throne of God features justice and mercy (see Moses 7:31).

Significantly, the consequences of misused human agency were explained to Enoch: mortals had been given a commandment to "love one another," yet those then had become a people "without affection" who "hate their own blood" (Moses 7:33).

We, too, can "refuse to be comforted." We can wrongly charge God with that large portion of human misery which is actually caused by mortals' failure to keep His commandments. Or, like Enoch, we can be intellectually meek enough to look and to accept the truths about God's being there and about His personality and plans.

God may reveal himself directly

Alas, when the Lord gives us "line upon line" and "precept upon precept" about Himself and His plans, many ignore these great gifts. Instead of lines, some demand paragraphs and even pages. When God provides "here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:10), some want a lot—now!

Even so, the pages of scripture rustle with reassurances, such as were tenderly given to Abraham:

"And he said unto me: My son, my son (and his hand was stretched out), behold I will show you all these. And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made, which were many; and they multiplied before mine eyes, and I could not see the end thereof" (Abraham 3:12).

Whatever the scale of things, the Lord is there! Whether in speaking of how sun, moon, and stars show "God moving in his majesty and power" (D&C 88:47) or in describing the lilies of the field as being better arrayed than Solomon in all his finery, who is better qualified than the Creator to make such descriptions of the heaven and such comparisons between raiment and flowers? (see Matthew 6:28-29).

A solitary Samaritan woman was one of the very first to learn from His lips that Jesus was in fact the Messiah. She marveled how Jesus "told me all things that ever I did" (John 4:29). Jesus had been there in her life for a long time. To hasten recognition, the resurrected Jesus told Peter where to lower his fishing nets to harvest a particular school of fish (see John 21:6-8). Deity called Samuel, Mary Magdalene, Saul, and Joseph Smith by their first names (see 1 Samuel 3:4, John 20:16, Acts 9:4, Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

Macrolove with such micromanifestations!

God may reveal himself by chastening us

God is not only there in the mildest expressions of His presence, but also in those seemingly harsh expressions. For example, when truth "cutteth . . . to the very center" (1 Nephi 16:2), this may signal that spiritual surgery is underway, painfully severing pride from the soul.

God is there also when true but hard words break open the chained door of a mind taken over by a single obsession. Sometimes, brothers and sisters, instead of the mind's wrapping itself around an idea, an idea wraps itself tightly around the mind—another way in which "pride compasseth . . . about as [with] a chain" (Psalm 73:6).

The Lord is truly there to chastise those whom He loves, including the spiritually preeminent. The brother of Jared for too long had failed to pray (see Ether 2:14). Even the good can become careless without the Lord's being there to chasten. Later, the chastened brother of Jared saw Christ! (see Ether 3:13-16).

God has foreseen all things

What we mortals encounter as the unforeseen, God has already seen, such as how the oil deposits of this earth would shape the latter-day conflicts

among nations. God's "is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations" (Isaiah 4:26). He likewise foresaw all the awful famines, some resulting from the unwise, unnecessary erosions of precious topsoil. He surely foresaw the terrible persecutions of the Jews. Having created the earth, He has anticipated the impact of continental drifts on the frequency and intensity of latter-day earthquakes. He who analogized that "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Isaiah 57:20) also knows where and when, in latter days, the seas' tidal waves will heave themselves savagely "beyond their bounds" (D&C 88:90).

Without the revelations, however, the answers as to the why of our existence and the why of human suffering would elude even the best intellectual excursions:

"Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways. And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God" (Jacob 4:8).

The gospel helps us understand life's purpose

The ultimate human questions are really the "why" questions! The gospel is positively "brim" with answers to the "why" queries concerning human purpose. Gospel truths are the vital integrating and ordering truths, not only telling us of "things as they really are" but also "as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13).

"All things denote there is a God"

No wonder we should "live in thanksgiving daily" (Alma 34:38) because "all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do

witness that there is a Supreme Creator" (Alma 30:44).

Furthermore, "all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]" (2 Nephi 11:4).

Providing adequate oxygen for us on this planet is a form of God's "lending [us] breath," as in King Benjamin's litany (Mosiah 2:21). God keeps this planet habitable, "preserving [us] from day to day" (v. 21). Given all He has done, no wonder we are, comparatively, "unprofitable servants" (v. 21).

Jesus' continual service to us

Even given our unprofitability, our Redeemer is still there. In fact, Jesus' transcending service to us stretches back to pre-mortal days. When God brought before us His plan of salvation, Jesus was there, volunteering meekly and humbly, "Here am I, send me" (Abraham 3:27), saying, "Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever" (Moses 4:2). The Father, ever anxious that all be free to choose, gave Lucifer opportunity to campaign:

"Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor" (Moses 4:1; see also Abraham 3:27, Isaiah 6:8).

Note the ego dripping from only three lines: two *me*'s and four *I*'s. Those vertical pronouns are usually accompanied by unbending knees, because the proud, as in Jesus' parable, trust "in themselves that they [are] righteous, and [despise] others" (Luke 18:9).

Long ago, it was also meek, loving, and redeeming Jesus who anticipated the need to take the gospel to those in the spirit prison, including the wicked of Noah's time when the "chosen hath pled before [God's] face" (Moses 7:39). Jesus has been there as our long-suffering Shepherd for ages.

Mild expressions of God's presence

We need not be atop high mountains or in sacred groves for God to be there. God is also there even in the mildest expressions of His presence.

Conscience permits the Lord to be there, whether in early warnings or final warnings. He gives us a flash of insight or a twinge of remembrance, pulling us back from a precipice or prompting us to do good. Conscience can warn that we are only falling further behind by insisting on getting even. Conscience warns us not to sink our cleats too deeply in mortal turf, which is so dangerously artificial.

"Yet thou art there!"

In a hundred ways, Deity will always be there, just as Enoch testified, including in our suffering.

Some among us, desperately ill, know the loneliness of a hospital room by night when loved ones have departed or are "sleeping for sorrow" (Luke 22:45), unable to "watch" another "hour" (Matthew 26:40). The night magnifies the stillness of the hospital corridors, as these individuals brush against the veil of death. Even so, whether or not "appointed unto death" (D&C 42:48), these faithful are in His hands. They can and do know of God, "Yet thou art there!"

Widows and widowers whose deprivation stretches into years, when the caress of dimmed memories is insufficient, sometimes sob to see purpose in it all. However, they will later know moments when the Lord shall "wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isaiah 25:8). Meanwhile, they can truly testify, "Yet thou art there!"

Wives and husbands whose lives are shattered by the betrayal of a deserting spouse may feel forsaken or drenched by injustice. Yet they, too, can know, "Thou art there," by responding to Jesus' invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that . . . are heavy laden" (Matthew 11:28).

Parents, striving to reach and to rescue the truculent teenager, experiencing disappointment after disappointment and wondering when it all will end, can be assured, "Yet thou art there!"

To those of you who so suffer and who, nevertheless, so endure and so testify by the eloquence of your examples, we salute you in Christ! Please forgive those of us who clumsily try to comfort you. We know from whence your true comfort comes. God's "bosom" is there to be leaned upon.

Jesus' promised peace is a special form of rest amid unrest. Even when other things are in commotion, His disciples can still stand (see D&C 45:26, 32). His disciples know the Lord is there in latter-days. "I am he who led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; and my arm is stretched out in the last days, to save my people Israel" (D&C 136:22).

We can confidently cast our cares upon the Lord because, through the agonizing events of Gethsemane and Calvary, atoning Jesus is already familiar with our sins, sicknesses, and sorrows (see 1 Peter 5:7, 2 Nephi 9:21, Alma 7:11-12). He can carry them now because He has successfully carried them before! (see 2 Nephi 9:8).

God loves us perfectly

Yes, God's creations are "stretched out," but so is his redeeming arm (see Exodus 6:6, Psalm 136:6).

He who is ever there is perfect in His love. Moreover, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9; see also Isaiah 64:4).

The Restoration's assurances

The Restoration is thus filled with such abundant assurances about God,

about life, about the universe, and about us.

As you and I dash about the wonder-filled landscape of the Restoration, exclaiming and observing, it should not surprise us that our first impressions are less than definitive. Little wonder that some of us mistake a cluster of trees for the whole forest or that, in some of our joyful exclamations, there are some unintended exaggerations.

As we rove amid the tall timber of truth, the pervasive scent of pine is inevitably upon us. Our pockets are bulging with souvenir rocks and cones. And we are filled with childish glee. There is no way to survey it all—in one tour or several. Besides, further familiarization will only increase our wonder. After all, One not given to hyperbole used the word *marvelous* to describe the Restoration!

Further reconnoitering, in fact, produces a hushed expectancy because, one day, the faithful will have it all. "The day cometh that . . . all things shall be revealed unto the children of men which ever have been . . . and which ever will be even unto the end of the earth" (2 Nephi 27:11).

Like Moses, Nephi was atop "exceedingly high mountains" and "beheld great things . . . too great for man" (2 Nephi 4:25). Like Enoch, Nephi cited the attributes of God, who is there amid worlds without number, declaring:

"O how great the goodness of our God!" (2 Nephi 9:10).

"O the greatness of the mercy of our God!" (2 Nephi 9:19).

"O how great the plan of our God!" (2 Nephi 9:13).

Gladly and firmly, I add my small voice of witness to these wonderful declarations of adoration, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen!

The choir sang "Faith" without announcement.
