

members of the Church, he showed genuine appreciation for this one by the end of the day. This was the beginning of a long and lasting friendship.

Jesus gave us a new commandment and said it would identify his disciples:

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35).

Love nonmembers unconditionally

As disciples of Christ, we need to feel genuine charity for one another. As we do, new light will come into our own lives. This charity is essential in missionary work, but we must never allow ourselves to treat our neighbors only as potential converts. We have had the sad experience of seeing members of the Church who attempted to convert their neighbors and friends and, when they did not respond, withdrew their friendship and neighborliness. We must not be so anxious to share the gospel that we become insensitive to the feelings of others.

I encourage you to build personal, meaningful relationships with your nonmember friends and acquaintances. Interest in the gospel may come later as a natural extension of a good friendship. Invitations to participate in gospel-related activities often will strengthen relationships with acquaintances. If they are not interested in the gospel, we should show unconditional love through acts of service and kindness, and never imply that we see an acquaintance only as a potential convert. Members must understand that when

a nonmember declines one invitation to investigate the gospel, he has not necessarily rejected the gospel.

Let us adhere to the counsel of the Apostle Paul and be “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19).

Despite some well-publicized criticism to the contrary, I believe Church members want to be good friends and neighbors wherever they live, but some are shy and overly cautious. This can appear to be clannish. We must not reserve our kindness and affection only for our fellow members. We must be sensitive and not oblivious to the feelings of those whose views may differ from ours. Considering the early history of the Church in these latter days, unkindness or indifference toward others should be abhorrent to members of the Church.

I bear my testimony that “God is no respecter of persons”; we should follow his example in all of our associations with our fellowmen. I testify that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of all mankind. He loves all men and looks to each one of us to do the same. May we so do I pray humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

We have just heard from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker, and we shall hear from him now.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

I join in welcoming all the new Brethren, including Elder Richard Scott to the Council of the Twelve.

Years ago, Elder Scott was called as a mission president. The distinguished admiral for whom he worked was puzzled

and even upset that Elder Scott accepted that call. Later, that same admiral, a distinguished public servant, wrote a book called *Why Not the Best?* I suggest the answer to the admiral’s question concerning that call is answered in the title of his

book, which has some applicability today as well, as the Lord has called one of "the best."

Following Jesus: the trek of treks

Sincerely striving to follow Jesus will try our faith and our patience—sometimes sorely (see Mosiah 23:21). Even with all its travail, however, it is the trek of treks.

As we all know, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ gives us abundant answers. But Jesus also asked some searching questions which tell us even more about the stretching journey of discipleship. To those who inquired about His authority, Jesus, in turn, put a pointed question, saying, "Answer me." They could not (see Mark 11:29–30). To all His applicable questions, the invitation "Answer me" stands to this day.

Thank and trust God

"Where are the nine?" inquired Jesus concerning the healed lepers who did not return with thanksgiving (Luke 17:17; italics added). How often are we like the nine? To receive God's blessings without acknowledging their Source is to be unrealistic as well as ungrateful.

We offend God not only by our ingratitude, brothers and sisters, but also by not confessing His competent hand in bringing to pass His transcending purposes on the earth (see D&C 59:21). Too many actually doubt God's plans will finally prevail. Not only in the years ahead, but even now, mortal self-sufficiency will be confounded. Profound fear will eventually pervade this perplexed planet (see D&C 63:33, 88:91). Would that mankind could live in faith, not fear—and with gratitude, not forgetfulness.

Besides, we are all beggars anyway (see Mosiah 4:19), beggars rescued by the Creator of the universe, who lived humbly as a person "of no reputation" (Philippians 2:7). In contrast, we are sometimes so anxious about our personal images, when it is His image we should have in our countenances (see Alma 5:14).

Strive for spiritual balance

"Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath?" Jesus counter-challenged (Mark 3:4; italics added). Can we not keep the spirit of the law without leaving other things undone? Without such spiritual balance, staying on the straight and narrow path will be a great trial for us (see 2 Corinthians 3:6).

Even seeking after things which are praiseworthy or lovely is accelerated by believing all the Articles of Faith which precede article thirteen. Similarly, the followers of the Ten Commandments are not divided into two vast platoons—one specializing in the "thou shalt" and the other in the "thou shalt not."

True orthodoxy consists of keeping the doctrines, ordinances, covenants, and programs of the Church and Christian service in proper balance. In this daily balancing process, we are not excused from exercising good judgment—after all that manuals and handbooks can do.

Render appropriately to God and Caesar

"Whose image and superscription is on it?" asked Jesus, using a coin now extinct, and exposing those seeking to entrap Him, while giving counsel relevant for as long as there are mortal rulers (see Matthew 22:20). Yes, to Caesar we owe taxes. But to God, in whose image we are minted, we owe ourselves!

In our members' diverse and sometimes stressful situations the world over, can we not follow the twelfth article of faith, rendering appropriately unto God and Caesar? After all, Jesus' immediate audience was a repressed people living under a military protectorate supporting corrupt civil authority.

Keep perspective

"If ye know how to give, how much more shall your Father give?" (see Matthew 7:11). Though imperfect, we mortals do good, sometimes much good. But can we keep mortal goodness in perspective? Comparatively, we are so much

quicker to return favors and to pay our debts to mortals—and we should be responsive and grateful. But what of Him who gave us mortal life itself, who will ere long give us all immortality, and who proffers to the faithful the greatest gift of all, eternal life?

We are poor bookkeepers, indeed!

Walk by faith

Why does this generation seek a sign? queried Jesus with a deep sigh (see Mark 8:11). The more wicked and adulterous the people of a particular period, the more they demand signs as a condition of belief. Sensual individuals crave and live by sensations. Disciples, instead, walk and “overcome by faith” (D&C 76:53), accepting gratefully the evidence of things not seen which are true (see Hebrews 11:1, Alma 32:21) and using quietly God’s spiritual gifts.

Christ will tutor us

What desirest thou of me? the resurrected Jesus inquired one by one of the Nephite Twelve (see 3 Nephi 28:1). He knows our individual bearing capacities. He will lead us along, not herd us (see D&C 78:18, 50:40). Foremost, the gospel can even educate our desires; then these desires can work affirmatively in us and for us.

Are we really ready, however, for the responsibility and the high adventure of being tutored by Him who genuinely wishes to honor our individual desires, if we do not desire amiss?

As for what God gives differentially to others, we need not be concerned. Peter, inquiring about John’s future role, was asked by Jesus, “What is that to thee? follow thou me” (John 21:22). Sometimes, brothers and sisters, we do too much comparing and too little following. Sometimes also a few resent God’s having chosen someone else; perceiving themselves as passed over, they then go under spiritually.

The great question

“What think ye of Christ?” (Matthew 22:42; italics added). However the world ignores or responds to it, this is the reverberating and the great question! (see Alma 34:5–6). Can we answer with both our lives and our tongues, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”? (Matthew 16:16). Until we can, whatever else we say and do will, in the end, make little difference.

Be grounded and rooted in Christ

“Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67; italics added), the Master asked His disciples after many of his fair-weather followers went back and “walked no more with him” (v. 66). The very process of daily living makes and breaks followers. Life’s stern seasons and storms overturn those not grounded and rooted (see Ephesians 3:17, Colossians 1:23, 1 Peter 5:10). However, those who “believe and are sure” (John 6:69) about Jesus’ divinity do not panic, for instance, at the arrival of a new volley of fiery darts; they merely hold aloft the quenching shield of faith.

Such are but a few of Jesus’ searching questions.

May I add several much lesser questions of my own? Some are addressed to all, and some to members as we follow the counsel of an ancient prophet to “consider [our] ways” (Haggai 1:7).

Obey to keep focus

Why is our life-style sometimes blurred and out of focus when we have been told clearly what “manner of men” and women we ought to be? (3 Nephi 27:27; see also 2 Peter 3:11). Of course, as individuals, we are free to choose! But wrong choices will make us less free. Furthermore, erosive error gradually makes one less and less of an individual. God and His prophets would spare us that shrinkage.

True disciples nourish faith

Why are a few members, who somewhat resemble the ancient Athenians, so eager to hear some new doubt or criticism? (see Acts 17:21). Just as some weak members slip across a state line to gamble, a few go out of their way to have their doubts titillated. Instead of nourishing their faith, they are gambling "offshore" with their fragile faith. To the question "Will ye also go away?" these few would reply, "Oh, no, we merely want a weekend pass in order to go to a casino for critics or a clubhouse for cloakholders." Such easily diverted members are not disciples but fair-weather followers.

Instead, true disciples are rightly described as steadfast and immovable, pressing forward with "a perfect brightness of hope" (2 Nephi 31:20; see also D&C 49:23).

Accept life's tests

Why do we resist and resent life's developmental and obedience tests? By declaring, "I will walk in my own way and do that which is right in my own eyes," we reject the curriculum of the mortal school in which we are irrevocably enrolled (see Judges 21:25, D&C 1:16). There is only one exit gate leading unto eternal life. Unhappily, only a few find it—but not because God is exclusionary, but because they exclude God from their lives. Even God cannot bring to pass a reconciliation involving only one party.

Take up the cross daily

Why do some think adultery and similar sins are permissible as long as anything else they do is commendable? The Lord's focus is not on the one thing we do which is good, but, instead, on the one or more things we still lack in order to have eternal life (see Mark 10:21, 2 Peter 1:9). To compose a symphony, to win a battle, or to save a company—each can be a commendable and worthy entry in the book of life, but these do not compensate for breaking the seventh commandment. In the arithmetic of heaven, several

commendables do not cancel out one inexcusable! The clear command from Jesus is to deny ourselves immorality and "to take up [the] cross daily," not to indulge ourselves and to take up the cross occasionally! (Luke 9:23; see also 3 Nephi 12:30). The Old Testament advises, "He that ruleth" himself is better "than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

Refuse ritual prodigalism

Why do some of our youth risk engaging in ritual prodigalism, intending to spend a season rebelling and acting out in Babylon and succumbing to that devilishly democratic "everybody does it"? Crowds cannot make right what God has declared to be wrong. Though planning to return later, many such stragglers find that alcohol, drugs, and pornography will not let go easily. Babylon does not give exit permits gladly. It is an ironic implementation of that ancient boast, "One soul shall not be lost" (Moses 4:1).

The philosophy of ritual prodigalism is "eat, drink, and be merry, . . . [and] God will beat us with a few stripes" (2 Nephi 28:8). This is a cynical and shallow view of God, of self, and of life. God never can justify us "in committing a little sin" (v. 8). He is the God of the universe, not some night-court judge with whom we can haggle and plea bargain!

Of course God is forgiving! But He knows the intents of our hearts. He also knows what good we might have done while AWOL. In any case, what others do is no excuse for the disciple from whom much is required (see Alma 39:4). Besides, on the straight and narrow path, there are simply no corners to be cut (see D&C 82:3).

Be sensitive and true

Why do some crush and break the tender hearts of spouses and children through insensitivity and even infidelity? Unable to sustain lasting relationships, shouting, in effect, "I am my own, I am in charge!" they retreat like cowards from their real responsibilities (see Jacob 2:35).

In such pathetic men or women, so strong is the competition between self-pity and self-indulgence that these urges both come in second! Furthermore, just as gender was of no saving significance in the self-destructive dash of the Gadarene swine to the sea, neither is it today.

God's work is one of finding, helping, reconciling—not of leaving, betraying, and deserting. Betrayed Uriah, deserted in the fray, represents many (see 2 Samuel 11:15).

Jesus' majesty and humility

In closing, these next observations underscore both the majesty and the humility of Him who said simply, "Answer me."

Though crucified briefly between two thieves, Jesus now sits eternally on the right hand of God! (see Luke 22:69, 1 Peter 3:22). He is the Lord of the constructed universe, yet He was known merely as "the carpenter's son" (Matthew 13:55).

He fashioned worlds without number, providing us with astrophysical awe when we view even "the least of these" (D&C 88:47). Yet, to aid just one blind man—with clay formed from spittle, "He from thick films [purged] the visual ray, / And on the sightless eyeball [poured] the day" (Alexander Pope, in Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ* [New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1893], p. 394; see also John 9:6).

Jesus was weary but never bored. He was ever tutoring but never condescending. His doctrines are like glistening diamonds with many dimensions, displaying their verity and beauty, facet by facet, depending on the faith and preparation of the beholder.

Jesus had access to immense power but never used it improperly. He refused to put on a show for sign-seeking Herod (see Luke 23:8). Legions of protective angels waited Christ's command, a command which never came (see Matthew 27:42).

Jesus was often misunderstood and rejected. But He felt most forsaken and alone on Calvary—just as the final act of

the Atonement was enveloping mankind in His eternal love. Ironically, during the moments when in agony He was benefiting billions upon billions of mortals, He was attended by only a faithful few.

His infinite atonement affected every age, every dispensation, and every person (see 2 Nephi 9:7, 25:16). Hence the appropriate symbolism of His bleeding at each and every pore—not just some—in order that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

There will be no end to the ripples of the Resurrection resulting from the infinite Atonement. There will be no end either to the posterity of those who receive eternal life—eventually more posterity than the stars in the heavens (see Genesis 26:3–4). How infinite indeed!

These observations describe only in small part Him who said, "Answer me," reminding us from Whom that invitation has come. May we, brothers and sisters, answer Him with the entirety of our lives, sincerely singing, "We feel it a pleasure to serve thee, And love to obey thy command" (*Hymns* [1985], no. 19). May we be thankful for all God's prophets in every dispensation, including President Benson, I so pray in the name of the Lord of all the prophets, even Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Maxwell. Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just spoken to us.

We remind the brethren of the General Priesthood Meeting which will convene in the Tabernacle this evening at 6:00 P.M.

The nationwide CBS Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 A.M. Those desiring to attend this broadcast must be in their seats no later than 9:15 A.M.

We express gratitude to the Salt Lake Tongan Choir for the beautiful music we have heard this afternoon and express to them in their own language the fond greeting *mälō e lelei*.