

## Elder Neal A. Maxwell

### The spiritually undernourished

Having all been richly nourished by this general conference, it is fitting to focus prescriptively on the few in the Church who remain spiritually undernourished, including those who have grown weary and fainted in their minds (see Hebrews 12:3).

A few of these few have had their faith scorched, such as by the circumstances of wrenching or unrelieved sickness, grinding economic pressures, loss of a loved one, or deep disappointment with a spouse or friend. Adversity can increase faith or instead can cause the troubling roots of bitterness to spring up (see Hebrews 12:15). A few have been overcome by the preoccupying cares of the world—those wearying surface things of life (see Matthew 13:6–7). Emerson's plea is surely appropriate: "Give me truths: for I am weary of the surfaces" ("Blight," in *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* [New York: Wm. H. Wise and Co., 1929], p. 874). A few are fatigued by unconfessed sins. A few tire from milling about haltingly in the "valley of decision" (Joel 3:14; see also 1 Kings 18:21). A few, foolishly focusing on something other than Jesus, the Sure and True Foundation, are drained by disappointment (see Helaman 5:12).

Whatever the preceding causes, any fainting in our minds brings a loss of spiritual consciousness and, with this, the inclination to charge God foolishly (see Job 1:22).

### Be not weary in well-doing

The urgings for us not to weary in well-doing contain prescriptions to avoid such weariness (see Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; Alma 37:34). We are to work steadily but realistically and only expect to reap "in due season" (Galatians 6:9). We are to serve

while being "meek and lowly" (Alma 37:34), avoiding thereby the wearying burdens of self-pity and hypocrisy. We are to pray always so that we will not faint, so that our performance will actually be for the welfare of our souls, which is so much more than just going through the motions (see 2 Nephi 32:5, 9; D&C 75:11; 88:126).

### Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth

Even when righteously chastised or rebuked, we need not faint, for in the correcting is renewing love:

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:5–6; see also 12:7–8).

One's life, therefore, cannot be both faith-filled and stress-free. President Wilford Woodruff counseled us all about the mercy that is inherent in some adversity: "The chastisements we have had from time to time have been for our good, and are essential to learn wisdom, and carry us through a school of experience we never could have passed through without" (in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:198).

Therefore, how can you and I really expect to glide naively through life, as if to say, Lord, give me experience, but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal, and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made Thee what Thou art! Then let me come and dwell with Thee and fully share Thy joy!

### Perfecting our faith

Serving, studying, praying, and worshipping are four fundamentals in perfecting "that which is lacking in [our] faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:10). If

we cease nurturing our faith in any of these four specific ways, we are vulnerable.

Failure to study, for instance, is to be intellectually and spiritually malnourished. Inspired words do matter, for "when a man works by faith he works by . . . words" (*Lectures on Faith*, 7:3). In a hardening world, the Lord can pierce our consciousness by using "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17; see also Jarom 1:12). However, hearing must be "mixed with faith" (Hebrews 4:2) and with Christian service, as we have heard again and again in this conference.

"For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?" (Mosiah 5:13).

A lack of deep personal prayer and deep genuine worship also erodes our faith, and we may "faint in the day of trouble" (D&C 109:38).

Much of any weariness is attributable to carrying the heavy natural man. Unlike others we might carry, the natural man is heavy, and he is not our brother!

So much depends upon our individual faith. The Apostles pled, "Lord, Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). No wonder, brothers and sisters, because we are to "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Life is so designed that we are to "overcome by faith" (D&C 76:53), not by intellectual acuity or wealth or political prowess.

Nevertheless, seekers after the rewards of faith are often disappointed when they are told to study, serve, pray, and worship. As with leprous Naaman, they apparently expect some great thing which requires no obedience to counsel (see 2 Kings 5:13).

### **Give place for the seed of faith to grow**

Faith brings with it the expanding "evidence of things not seen" (He-

brews 11:1). Some mortals dismiss this real, spiritual evidence because "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him . . . because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). But this provincialism on the part of others should not deprive the rest of us of energizing evidence.

Building faith is often preceded by shaping circumstances, benefiting those who are "in a preparation to hear the word" (Alma 32:6). These beginnings require at least a "desire to believe," and then comes the exercising of a "particle of faith" (Alma 32:27).

As we "give place" and plant the seed of faith, it grows discernibly. We are invigorated as it enlightens and swells. (See Alma 32:28-30.) We become our own internal auditors, confirming this increase in our faith. It is better to so nourish our faith in what seems to be an ordinary process than to experience extraordinary things only to stumble later over life's ordinary challenges.

However, in this process of personal experimentation and verification, the several, sacred steps cannot be skipped over: "For ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith" (Ether 12:6).

Moreover, acquiring faith is not a onetime thing: "But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away" (Alma 32:38).

Our "neglect," brothers and sisters, takes so many forms. Similarly, the withering "heat of the sun" is felt in so many ways.

Experience by experience, faith can yield to knowledge "in that thing" (Alma 32:34), meaning the particularized verifications of gospel truths. It was so with the brother of Jared: "He had faith no longer, for he knew"

(Ether 3:19). Brigham Young assured that “every principle God has revealed carries its own convictions of its truth to the human mind” (in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:149). Jesus clearly declared that “if any man will do his will, he shall know” (John 7:17). However, Jesus described the steady process as being one of “line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:12).

But we’re all at different points in this process, aren’t we, of desiring, experimenting, verifying, and knowing. Hence “to some it is given . . . to know. . . . To others it is given to believe on their words” (D&C 46:13–14).

While faith is not a perfect knowledge, it brings a deep trust in God, whose knowledge is perfect! Otherwise, one’s small data base of personal experience permits so few useful generalizations! But by searching the holy scriptures, we access a vast, divine data bank, a reservoir of remembrance. In this way the scriptures can, as the Book of Mormon says, enlarge the memory (see Alma 37:8).

### Facets of faith

Fully formed faith has several distinct facets. Faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ includes not only faith in their existence but also in their redemptive capacities. The Lord has assured us, “I will show unto the children of men that I am able to do mine own work” (2 Nephi 27:21). Is He ever able! Indeed, “in him all things hold together” (Revised Standard Version, Colossians 1:17). Nevertheless, some doubt that God’s announced purposes will actually triumph.

Faith also includes trust in God’s timing, for He has said, “All things must come to pass in their time” (D&C 64:32). Ironically, some who acknowledge God are tried by His timing, globally and personally!

Faith likewise includes faith in God’s developmental purposes, for “the

Lord seeth fit to chasten his people; yea, he trieth their patience and their faith” (Mosiah 23:21). Still, some of us have trouble when God’s tutoring is applied to us! We plead for exemption more than we do for sanctification, don’t we, brothers and sisters.

A reassuring promise is given us in this journey: “And any man that shall go and preach this gospel of the kingdom, and fail not to continue faithful in all things, shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened” (D&C 84:80).

### What if blessings do not come?

But what if, from time to time, we appear to be doing all four of these essential things—serving, studying, praying, and worshiping—and still seem to obtain a lesser measure of the promised blessings?

First, check “the equipment”! All four components are needed, and one may be missing or malfunctioning.

Second, go back to a very basic question: Does one really have an inner “desire to believe”? (Alma 32:27). Frankly, some find discipleship constraining and the world appealing. These individuals are merely going through the motions without real intent.

Third, do we naively expect Christ to come to us—instead of our going to Him? Truly He waits “all the day long” with open arms to receive the repentant (2 Nephi 28:32; see also Mormon 6:17). There are no restrictive office hours. But it is we who must arise and go to Him! (see Luke 15:18).

Blessed are the meek, for they shall not be easily offended, which is especially important since “my people must be tried in all things, . . . and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom” (D&C 136:31).

Genuine faith makes increasing allowance for these individual tutorials. In view of these tutorials, God cannot, brothers and sisters, respond

affirmatively to all of our petitions with an unbroken chain of yeses. This would assume that all of our petitions are for that "which is right" and are spiritually "expedient" (3 Nephi 18:20; D&C 18:18; 88:64-65). No petitioner is so wise! Paul even acknowledged that we sometimes "know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Romans 8:26; see also D&C 46:30).

For example, in process of time our personal inconsistencies may be made inconveniently clear. How else shall we see what we lack? Spiritual refinement is not only to make the gross more pure but to further refine the already fine! Hence, said Peter, we should not think a "fiery trial" to be "some strange thing" (1 Peter 4:12).

### **Enduring the developmental process**

Real faith, however, is required to endure this necessary but painful developmental process. As things unfold, sometimes in full view, let us be merciful with each other. We certainly do not criticize hospital patients amid intensive care for looking pale and preoccupied. Why then those recovering from surgery on their souls? No need for us to stare; those stitches will finally come out. And in this hospital, too, it is important for everyone to remember that the hospital chart is not the patient. Extending our mercy to someone need not wait upon our full understanding of their challenges! Empathy may not be appreciated or reciprocated, but empathy is never wasted.

When you and I make unwise decisions, if we have frail faith, we not only demand to be rescued, but we want to be rescued privately, painlessly, quickly—or at least to be beaten only "with a few stripes" (2 Nephi 28:8). Brothers and sisters, how can we really feel forgiven until we first feel responsible? How can we learn from our own experiences unless these lessons are owned up to?

In the trial of faith we may sometimes feel God has deserted us. The reality is that our behavior has isolated us from Him. It is when we first feel the consequences of our mistakes and are just turning away from these, but have not yet turned fully to God, that we may have these feelings of being forsaken.

No part of walking by faith is more difficult than walking the road of repentance. However, with "faith unto repentance" (Alma 34:16), we can push the roadblock of pride away and beg God for mercy. One simply surrenders, worrying only about what God thinks, not about what "they" think.

Growing out of our faith in the Lord is our sustaining of His anointed leaders, as we have done at this April conference. Faithful Church members have what Peter called an "unfeigned love of the brethren" (1 Peter 1:22). Collectively but not perfectly, those sustained do the work to which God has called them. As with Joseph Smith, so it is for his succeeding Brethren. The operative promise persists: namely, the people of the Church will never be turned away "by the testimony of traitors" (D&C 122:3). But the faithful know something about divine determination. They know that the Lord's purposes will finally triumph, for "there is nothing that the Lord thy God shall take in his heart to do but what he will do it" (Abraham 3:17). Of that divine determination and divine love I gladly and publicly testify in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Monson**

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us.

Before hearing the closing remarks of President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, we wish to express appreciation to the Mormon Youth Chorus, Ricks College