

### Gratitude in times of trial

In times of trial we can accept with gratefulness that which is to come, a gratitude for the blessings and gifts the Lord has in reserve for those who keep the commandments and serve Him in thanksgiving. An eternal friend and former neighbor who embraced the teachings of the gospel in our home so many years ago has recently felt the refiner's fire in the loss of his beloved companion. His recent words of indefinable gratitude for the gospel, temple covenants, and eternal marriage are engraved on my mind. In the passing of his sweet wife, this knowledge brings a comfort unknown to them before joining the Church. His words of "How can I ever thank you for sharing with our family this great eternal gift?" join with my own words of unspeakable gratitude to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, for the "precious gifts and privileges" offered to us all.

"And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glori-

ous; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more."<sup>6</sup> God is the gracious giver, and I testify of Him and of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. Luke 17:12-17.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 4-5; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 6.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 59:21.
4. "With the Voice of Thanksgiving," *Sunday Night Talks*, 2nd ed. (1931), 483.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 1990, 110; or *Ensign*, May 1990, 86.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 78:19.

### President Monson

Elder Merrill C. Oaks of the Seventy has just spoken to us, followed by Elder Gordon T. Watts, also of the Seventy.

We shall now hear from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

## Elder Russell M. Nelson

### We are children of God

Recently I observed young men who attracted attention to themselves because of their extreme styles of dress and grooming. One made a revealing remark when he said, "I'm trying to find out who I really am." This occurred after I had come from a Church meeting where Primary children had sung "I Am a Child of God."<sup>1</sup> Such contrasting experiences emphasize the importance of knowing that we are literally children of God.

We are dual beings. Each soul is comprised of body and spirit,<sup>2</sup> both of which emanate from God. A firm understanding of body and spirit will shape our thoughts and deeds for good.

### The body

The marvel of our physical bodies is often overlooked. Who has not encountered feelings of low self-esteem because of physique or appearance? Many people wish their bodies could be more to their liking. Some with naturally straight hair want it curly. Others with curly hair want it straight. Occasionally some ladies, believing that "gentlemen prefer blonds," become "decided blonds."

Your body, whatever its natural gifts, is a magnificent creation of God.<sup>3</sup> It is a tabernacle of flesh—a temple for your spirit.<sup>4</sup> A study of your body attests to its divine design.

Its formation begins with the union of two reproductive cells—one from the

mother and one from the father. Together, these two cells contain all of the new individual's hereditary information, stored in a space so small it cannot be seen by the naked eye. Twenty-three chromosomes from each parent unite in one new cell. These chromosomes contain thousands of genes which determine all of the physical characteristics of the unborn person. Approximately 22 days after these two cells unite, a little heart begins to beat. At 26 days, blood begins to circulate. Cells multiply and divide. Some become eyes that see; others become ears that hear.

Each organ is a wondrous gift from God. The eye has a self-focusing lens. Nerves and muscles control two separate eyes to make a single three-dimensional image. The eyes are connected to the brain, which records the sights seen. No cords or batteries are needed.

Each ear is connected to compact equipment designed to convert sound waves into audible tones. An eardrum serves as a diaphragm. Minute ossicles amplify sound vibrations and transmit a signal via nerves to the brain, which senses and remembers the sounds.

The heart is an incredible pump. It has four delicate valves that control the direction of blood flow. These valves open and close more than 100,000 times a day—36 million times a year. Yet, unless altered by disease, they are able to withstand this stress almost indefinitely. No man-made material developed to date can be flexed so frequently and so long without breaking.

Each day an adult heart pumps enough fluid to fill a 2,000-gallon<sup>5</sup> tank. This work is equivalent to lifting a grown man<sup>6</sup> to the top of the Empire State Building while expending only about four watts of energy. At the crest of the heart is an electrical generator that transmits energy down special lines, causing myriads of muscle fibers to work together.

Much could be said about each of the other precious organs in the body. They function in a marvelous manner, beyond my time or ability to describe.

Other attributes of the body are equally amazing, though less evident. For example, backup is provided. Each *paired* organ has instant backup available from the other of the pair. *Single* organs, such as the brain, the heart, and the liver, are nourished by *two* routes of blood supply. This design protects the organ if harm should come to any one channel.

Think of the body's system of self-defense. To protect it from harm, the body perceives pain. In response to infection, it generates antibodies. They not only help to combat the immediate problem, but they persist to strengthen resistance to infection in the future. One day my attention was directed to some three-year-old children who had lapped up water from a street gutter. The number of germs they ingested must have been incalculable, but not one of those youngsters became ill. As soon as that dirty drink reached each little stomach, its hydrochloric acid went to work to treat the water and protect the life of the child.

The skin provides protection. It also warns against injuries that excessive heat or cold might cause. It even sends signals that indicate trouble elsewhere. With fever, the skin perspires. When one is frightened, it pales. When one is embarrassed, it blushes.

The body repairs itself. Broken bones mend and become strong once again. Skin lacerations heal themselves. A leak in the circulation can seal itself.

The body renews its own outdated cells. The average red blood cell, for instance, lives about 120 days. Then it is replaced by a newly regenerated cell.

The body regulates its own vital ingredients. Essential elements and chemical constituents are adjusted continuously. And regardless of wide fluctuations

in the temperature of the environment, the temperature of the body is carefully controlled within narrow bounds.

If these qualities of normal function, defense, repair, regeneration, and regulation were to prevail in perpetuity, life here would continue without limit. Mercifully, our Creator provided for aging and other processes which ultimately result in physical death. We often think of death as untimely or tragic. But death, like birth, is part of life. Scripture tells us that "it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness."<sup>7</sup> To return to God through the gateway of death is a joy for those who love Him.<sup>8</sup>

When death claims an individual in the prime of life, we take comfort in knowing that the very laws which do not allow life to persist here are the same laws that will be implemented at the time of the Resurrection, when the body will be endowed with immortality.

### The spirit

Next I speak of the spirit. Prior to our mortal existence here, each spirit son and daughter lived with God. The spirit is eternal; it existed in innocence in the premortal realm<sup>9</sup> and will exist after the body dies.<sup>10</sup> The spirit provides the body with animation and personality.<sup>11</sup> "All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure."<sup>12</sup>

"The spirit of man [is] in the likeness of his person."<sup>13</sup> Jesus so explained as the brother of Jared viewed the Lord's premortal body:

"Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

". . . This body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to

be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh."<sup>14</sup>

Development of the spirit is of eternal consequence. The attributes by which we shall be judged one day are those of the spirit.<sup>15</sup> These include the virtues of integrity, compassion, love, and more.<sup>16</sup> Your spirit, by being housed in your body, is able to develop and express these attributes in ways that are vital to your eternal progression.<sup>17</sup>

Spirit and body, when joined together, become a living soul of supernal worth. Indeed, we are children of God—physically and spiritually.

### Physical limitations

For reasons usually unknown, some people are born with physical limitations. Specific parts of the body may be abnormal. Regulatory systems may be out of balance. And all of our bodies are subject to disease and death. Nevertheless, the gift of a physical body is priceless. Without it, we cannot attain a fulness of joy.<sup>18</sup>

A perfect body is not required to achieve a divine destiny. In fact, some of the sweetest spirits are housed in frail frames. Great spiritual strength is often developed by those with physical challenges precisely because they are challenged. Such individuals are entitled to all the blessings that God has in store for His faithful and obedient children.<sup>19</sup>

Eventually the time will come when each "spirit and . . . body shall be reunited again in . . . perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame."<sup>20</sup> Then, thanks to the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can become perfected in Him.<sup>21</sup>

### Personal behavior

How should these truths influence our personal behavior? We should gratefully acknowledge God as our Creator. Otherwise, we would be as guilty as goldfish swimming in a bowl, oblivious to the

goodness of their provider. "Ye must give thanks unto God," said the Lord, "for whatsoever blessing ye are blessed with."<sup>22</sup> And we can practice virtue and holiness before Him continually.<sup>23</sup>

We will regard our body as a temple of our very own.<sup>24</sup> We will not let it be desecrated or defaced in any way.<sup>25</sup> We will control our diet and exercise for physical fitness.

Should not equal attention be paid to spiritual fitness?<sup>26</sup> Just as physical strength requires exercise, so spiritual strength requires effort. Among the most important of spiritual exercises is prayer. It engenders harmony with God and a desire to keep His commandments. Prayer is a key to wisdom, virtue, and humility.

We will be careful about which counsel we heed. Many so-called experts give advice for the body—without thought for the spirit. Anyone who accepts direction contrary to the Word of Wisdom, for example, forsakes a law revealed to bring both physical *and* spiritual blessings.<sup>27</sup> Some recommendations regarding use of our reproductive organs are based solely—and inadequately—upon physical considerations. Beware of such one-sided views! Paul taught that "if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."<sup>28</sup>

That caution pertains to pornography, which is highly addictive. Scriptural warning is clear: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."<sup>29</sup> In time, addictions enslave *both* the body and the spirit. Full repentance from addiction is best accomplished in this life, while we still have a mortal body to help us.

As children of God, we should not let anything enter the body that might defile it. To allow sensors of sight, touch, or hearing to supply the brain with unclean memories is a sacrilege. We will cherish our chastity and avoid "foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown [us] in de-

struction and perdition."<sup>30</sup> We will "flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] meekness"<sup>31</sup>—traits that edify the whole soul.

Who are we? We are children of God.<sup>32</sup> Our potential is unlimited. Our inheritance is sacred. May we always honor that heritage—in every thought and deed—I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. See *Hymns*, no. 301.
2. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 88:15.
3. See Russell M. Nelson, "The Magnificence of Man," *Ensign*, Jan. 1988, 64–69. The Psalmist stated: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? . . . For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalm 8:3–5; see also Hebrews 2:7, 9).
4. See 1 Corinthians 6:19.
5. About 7,570 liters.
6. Weighing 150 pounds (about 68.2 kilograms).
7. Alma 42:8; see also Alma 12:24–27.
8. The Psalmist expressed the viewpoint of Deity: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).
9. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:38.
10. See Alma 40:11; Abraham 3:18.
11. See Job 32:8.
12. *Doctrine and Covenants* 131:7.
13. *Doctrine and Covenants* 77:2.
14. Ether 3:15–16.
15. The spirit, not the body, is the active, responsible component of the soul. Without the spirit, the body is dead (see James 2:26). It is the spirit, therefore, that chooses good or evil and will be held accountable for both the positive and negative attributes it possesses at the final judgment (see Alma 41:3–7).
16. Such as "faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness,

- godliness, charity, humility, [and] diligence" (D&C 4:6).
17. See 2 Nephi 2:11-16, 21-26; Moroni 10:33-34.
  18. See Doctrine and Covenants 138:17.
  19. See Abraham 3:25-26.
  20. Alma 11:43; see also Alma 40:23; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Doctrine and Covenants 138:17.
  21. See Moroni 10:32.
  22. Doctrine and Covenants 46:32.
  23. See Doctrine and Covenants 46:33.
  24. See 1 Corinthians 3:16.
  25. Referring to the human body, the Apostle Paul taught, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Corinthians 3:17).
  26. See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:9.
  27. See Doctrine and Covenants 89:18-21; see also Romans 8:6; 2 Nephi 9:38-39; Doctrine and Covenants 29:34-35.
  28. Romans 8:13.
  29. Romans 6:12.
  30. 1 Timothy 6:9.
  31. 1 Timothy 6:11. Verse 12 continues: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." That is our choice.
  32. Looking up scriptural references that refer to *create* or *form* (or their derivatives), with either *man*, *men*, *male*, or *female* in the same verse, I found 55 instances that attest to our divine creation. One may represent the many that convey the same message: "The Gods took counsel among themselves and said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them" (Abraham 4:26-27).

The decision to believe our creation was divine must be based on spiritual evidence and not on physical evidence alone, for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

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The choir sang "How Gentle God's Commands."

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### President Monson

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us, following which the choir sang "How Gentle God's Commands."

As we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Mormon Youth Chorus; the Young Women choir from the Murray, Utah, area; and the Tabernacle Choir; and their conductors and organists for the truly beautiful and inspiring music.

We thank our city officials for the cooperation given this conference; the doctors, Church Health Unit nurses, and ambulance services which have been on hand to render assistance; the ushers and interpreters; and those who are responsible for the beautiful flowers on Temple Square and in the Tabernacle.

We also express appreciation to local and national press representatives for their coverage of the conference and to the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations and cable systems who have given time and made facilities available to carry sessions of this conference to many countries.

We are grateful that Sister Inis Hunter, the wife of President Howard W. Hunter, has been able to be with us in this and other sessions.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet and President, will be our concluding speaker. Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "Let My Heart Be Pure" and "Lord, I Would Follow Thee." After the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder D. Lee Tobler of the Seventy.