

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Care for the life of the soul

Within the swirling global events—events from which we are not totally immune—is humanity’s real and continuing struggle: whether or not, amid the cares of the world, we will really choose, in the words of the Lord, to “care . . . for the life of the soul” (D&C 101:37). Whatever our anxious involvements with outward events, this inner struggle proceeds in both tranquil and turbulent times. Whether understood or recognized, this is the unchanging mortal agendum from generation to generation.

When we strive to keep God’s commandments, “the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Then, even on bad days, we will still “[keep our] own soul” regardless of external conditions (Proverbs 19:16). Granted, some inward decisions to care for and “keep” our souls occur in otherwise uneventful times, as with the prodigal son. He had fed the swine day by day, finally experiencing a special day when he “came to himself” (Luke 15:17). Whatever else happened on that particular day in that “far country” (Luke 15:13), the prodigal son had “thought on [his] ways” (Psalm 119:59) and firmly concluded that “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18). Transformation followed introspection. Even so, one home-ward-bound swineherd would scarcely have been noticed by the passersby, though things of eternal significance had happened to him.

At other times, however, the interplay of outward and inward things is more visible. Pilate was dealing with a seemingly local disturbance surrounding one Jesus of Nazareth. His new accord with Herod—with whom Pilate had been “at enmity” (Luke 23:12)—was doubtless political news among those in the know. Though ambivalent, he yielded to a conditioned crowd, amnestying Barabbas instead of Jesus.

With washed but dirty hands, Pilate apparently returned to Caesarea. Christ, however, went on to Gethsemane and Calvary, performing the agonizing but emancipating universal Atonement whereby billions and billions would be resurrected.

God’s work often proceeds quietly

Today, war clouds here and there rain upon the just and the unjust, but Christ’s glorious gift of the great Resurrection will be showered upon us all! Just as the white-caps do not disclose the deep sea changes underway, so in the case of the Atonement, things global and eternal in their significance were happening in a small garden and upon an obscure hill.

The unfolding of God’s work often proceeds quietly. For example, whatever the immediate economic reasons the Joseph Smith Sr. family had for moving from New England to upstate New York, they were being led—unawares—to sacred plates, buried in Cumorah’s Hill, waiting to become another testament of Christ for “as long as the earth shall stand” (2 Nephi 25:22).

Do not rationalize breaking covenants

Therefore, though ours is a time of conflict, quietly caring for “the life of the soul” is still what matters most. Though events set up the defining moments which can evoke profiles in righteousness, outward commotions cannot excuse any failure of inward resolve, even if some seem to unravel so easily. If hostilities break out here and there, we still need not break our covenants! For example, adultery cannot be rationalized merely because there is a war on and some wives and husbands are separated. There is no footnote to the seventh commandment reading “Thou shalt not commit adultery except in times of war” (see Exodus 20:14).

In another time of war, President David O. McKay counseled members in the military to “keep yourselves morally clean” amid “the beastliness of war” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 153).

Even though nations shall rise against nations, such turbulence does not justify business partners rising against their partners or against their stockholders by stealing or bearing false witness, violating both the eighth and ninth commandments—for which there are no excusing footnotes (see Exodus 20:15–16).

Uncertainty as to world conditions does not justify moral uncertainty, and distracting churn will not cover our sins nor dim God’s all-seeing eye. Furthermore, military victories are no substitute for winning our individual wars for self-control. Nor do the raging human hatreds lessen God’s perfect and redeeming love for all His children. Likewise, the obscuring mists of the moment cannot change the reality that Christ is the Light of the World!

Let us, therefore, be like the young man with Elisha on the mount. Though he was at first intimidated by the surrounding enemy chariots, his eyes were mercifully opened and he saw “horses and chariots of fire,” verifying that “they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16, 17). Brothers and sisters, the spiritual arithmetic has not changed!

God will lead us and be with us

Our own intellectual shortfalls and perplexities do not alter the fact of God’s astonishing foreknowledge, which takes into account our choices for which we are responsible. Amid the mortal and fragmentary communiques and the breaking news of the day concerning various human conflicts, God lives in an eternal now where the past, present, and future are constantly before Him (see D&C 130:7). His divine determinations are guaranteed, since whatever He takes in His heart to do, He will surely do it (see Abraham 3:17). He knows the end from the beginning!

(see Abraham 2:8). God is fully “able to do [His] . . . work” (2 Nephi 27:20) and to bring all His purposes to pass, something untrue of the best-laid plans of man since we so often use our agency amiss!

God has assured us:

“I will lead you along” (D&C 78:18).

“I will be in your midst” (D&C 49:27).

He will be with us, brothers and sisters, “in [our] time of trouble” (D&C 3:8), including through the guidance of His living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Be kind and generous even during turmoil

Meanwhile, the defining moments in the “life of the soul” continue to turn on whether we respond with self-indulgence or self-denial in our daily, individual decisions, as between kindness and anger, mercy and injustice, generosity and meanness.

Wars do not repeal the second commandment. It knows no borders. Its adherents wear no national insignia, nor do they have skin of a particular color.

We may experience hunger, for instance, but if so, we can still respond as did the widow who used the last of her meal to feed Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:8–16). Such sharing amid real deprivation and poverty is always touching. Earlier in his life, a wonderful bishop of my youth, M. Thirl Marsh, repeatedly tried to be hired at the mines during the Depression. Being underage but large of stature, he persisted and was hired, but several friends were not. Apparently, on more than one occasion after his hard day’s work, generous young Thirl shared his earnings equally with these friends until they too were hired. No wonder he was such a caring shepherd of the flock later on.

Strive for full conversion

When pondering “the life of the soul,” it helps to strive for our own full conversion whereas the gospel seed first falls on

“good ground”—which is defined by Jesus as those with an “honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). Sequentially, such an individual “heareth the word” with “joy,” “understandeth it,” “beareth fruit,” “endureth,” and finally learns what it is to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 13:20, 23; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 13:21; Matthew 5:6). It is “a mighty change” (Mosiah 5:2). Conversion basically represents the transformation from the “natural man” to becoming the “man of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19; Helaman 3:29; see also 2 Corinthians 5:17). It is a labor which takes more than an afternoon.

The outcomes of this ongoing process include having “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). No wonder, therefore, this process enables those so converted to “strengthen [their] brethren” (Luke 22:32) and so lift others by being “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Such righteous individuals perform another vital but quiet service to mankind:

they become part of the critical mass that can evoke God’s much-needed blessings on all humanity.

Care for the soul in all circumstances

Truly converted disciples, though still imperfect, will pursue “the life of the soul” on any day, in any decade, amid any decadence and destruction. This process constitutes being about our “Father’s business” (Luke 2:49; see also Moses 1:39).

Since this full conversion is what is supposed to be happening anyway, stern events and turbulence may actually even help us by causing a resumption of the journey or an acceleration.

Brothers and sisters, amid the volatile and vexing cares of the world, let us, as instructed, care for the “life of the soul.” Thanks to Jesus’ glorious Atonement, the life of that immortal soul outlasts the stretching longevity of any star and hence the short span of passing mortal events, even if grim!

I so testify, in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen!

Elder Dennis B. Neuenschwander

Places of spiritual refuge

In answer to Pilate’s question “Art thou the King of the Jews?” the Savior answered, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:33, 36). With these few words, Jesus declares His kingdom independent and distinct from this world. The Savior’s teachings, doctrine, and personal example lift all who truly believe in Him to a divine standard that requires both eye and mind be single to the glory of God (see D&C 4:5; 88:68). The glory of God encompasses all that is holy and sacred. Our ability to seek, recognize, and reverence the holy above the profane, and the sacred above the secular, defines our spirituality. Indeed,

without the holy and sacred, we are left with only the profane and secular.

Amidst the bustle of the secular world, with its certain uncertainty, there must be places that offer spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and peace. There are indeed such places. They are both holy and sacred. They are places where we meet the divine and find the Spirit of the Lord.

Stand in holy places

Three times in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord counsels His people to “stand in holy places” (see D&C 45:32; 87:8; 101:22). The context of His counsel is all the more significant as we look at the