

13. See also Proverbs 3:12; Revelation 3:19; Doctrine and Covenants 95:1.
14. Russell M. Nelson, in Conference Report, Apr. 1994, 93; or *Ensign*, May 1994, 71.

Elder Robert D. Hales

Importance of belief in God

My brothers and sisters, I express gratitude for the witnesses of God, our Heavenly Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, given by living prophets during this conference and for the teachings of the Holy Ghost.

As prophesied, we live in a time when the darkness of secularism is deepening around us. Belief in God is widely questioned and even attacked in the name of political, social, and even religious causes. Atheism, or the doctrine that there is no God, is fast spreading across the world.

Even so, as members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ, we declare that “we believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”¹

Some wonder, why is belief in God so important? Why did the Savior say, “And this is life eternal, that they might *know* thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”?²

Without God, life would end at the grave and our mortal experiences would have no purpose. Growth and progress would be temporary, accomplishment without value, challenges without meaning. There would be no ultimate right and wrong and no moral responsibility to care for one another as fellow children of God. Indeed, without God, there would be no mortal or eternal life.

If you or someone you love is seeking purpose in life or a deeper conviction of God’s presence in our lives, I offer, as a friend and as an Apostle, my witness. He lives!

Scriptural testimonies

Some may ask, how can I know this for myself? We know He lives because we believe the testimonies of His ancient and living prophets, and we have felt God’s Spirit confirm that the testimonies of these prophets are true.

From their testimonies, recorded in holy scripture, we know that “[God] created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness.”³ Some people may be surprised to learn that we look like God. One prominent religious scholar has even taught that imagining God in the form of man is creating a graven image and is idolatrous and blasphemous.⁴ But God Himself said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.”⁵

The use of the words *us* and *our* in this scripture also teaches us about the relationship between the Father and the Son. God further taught, “By mine Only Begotten [Son] I created these things.”⁶ The Father and the Son are separate and distinct individuals—as any father and son always are. This may be one reason the name of God in Hebrew, *Elohim*, is not singular but plural.

From the New Testament we know that Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, have a physical presence. They stand in one place at one time, as the New Testament disciple Stephen testified: “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”⁷

We also know that the Father and the Son have voices. As recorded in Genesis and the book of Moses, Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the Lord God, as they

were walking in the garden, in the cool of the day.”⁸

We know that the Father and the Son have faces, that They stand, and that They converse. The prophet Enoch declared, “I saw the Lord; and he stood before my face, and he talked with me, even as a man talketh one with another.”⁹

We know that God and His Son have bodies, in form and parts like ours. From the book of Ether in the Book of Mormon, we read, “And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood.”¹⁰ Later the Lord revealed Himself, saying, “Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and . . . I [will] appear unto my people in the flesh.”¹¹

We know that the Father and the Son have feelings for us. The book of Moses records, “And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept.”¹²

And we know that God and His Son, Jesus Christ, are immortal, glorified, and perfected beings. Of the Savior Jesus Christ, the Prophet Joseph Smith recounts, “His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters.”¹³

The testimony of Joseph Smith

No testimony is more significant to us in our time than the witness of Joseph Smith. He was the prophet chosen to restore the ancient Church of Christ in this, the last time when the gospel will be on the earth before the return of Jesus Christ. Like all the prophets who opened the work of God in their dispensations, Joseph was given especially clear and powerful prophetic experiences to prepare the world for the Savior’s Second Coming.

As a 14-year-old boy, he sought to know which church he should join. Then, after pondering on the matter, he turned to the Bible, where he read:

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him [or her] ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally . . . ; and it shall be given him.

“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”¹⁴

Believing those prophetic words and with unwavering, childlike faith, Joseph went to a grove of trees near his home and there knelt and prayed. Later he recorded:

“I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head. . . .

“. . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air.”¹⁵

Looking up at these two beings, even Joseph could not have known who They were—for he had not yet witnessed and learned the true nature of God and Christ. But then, he records, “one of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”¹⁶

From that singular experience and others, the Prophet Joseph bore witness, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also.”¹⁷

The Spirit versus the natural man

Prophets throughout the ages have shared witnesses like this one and continue to do so in this very conference. But each of us has agency to choose. As the eleventh article of faith states, “We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our *own* conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.”¹⁸

In matters of personal belief, how do we know what really is true?

I testify that the way to know the truth *about God* is through the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost, the third member of the Godhead, is a personage of spirit. His work is to “testify of [God]”¹⁹ and to “teach [us] all things.”²⁰

However, we must be careful not to constrain His influence. When we do not do what is right or when our outlook is dominated by skepticism, cynicism, criticism, and irreverence toward others and their beliefs, the Spirit cannot be with us. We then act in a way that the prophets describe as the *natural man*.

“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.”²¹ This “natural man is an enemy to God, . . . and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, . . . and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, [and] full of love.”²²

Korihor’s rejection of the truth

If we do not yield to the gentle influence of the Holy Ghost, we stand in jeopardy of becoming like Korihor, an anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon. Not only did Korihor disbelieve in God, but he also ridiculed the Savior, the Atonement, and the spirit of prophecy, falsely teaching that there is no God and no Christ.²³

Korihor was not content merely to reject God and quietly go his own way. He mocked the believers and demanded that the prophet Alma convince him with a sign of God’s existence and power. Alma’s response is as meaningful today as it was then: “Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and 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.”²⁴

Eventually Korihor was given a sign. He was struck dumb. “And Korihor put forth his hand and wrote, saying: . . . I know that nothing save it were the power of God could bring this upon me; yea, and I always knew that there was a God.”²⁵

Seeking a testimony of God

Brothers and sisters, you may already know, deep in your soul, that God lives. You may not know all about Him yet and do not understand all His ways, but the light of belief is within you, waiting to be awakened and intensified by the Spirit of God and the Light of Christ, which you are born with.

So come. Believe the testimonies of the prophets. Learn of God and Christ. The pattern to do so is clearly taught by prophets of old and prophets today.

Cultivate a diligent desire to know that God lives.

This desire leads us to ponder on the things of heaven—to let the evidence of God all around us touch our hearts.

With softened hearts we are prepared to heed the Savior’s call to “search the scriptures”²⁶ and to humbly learn from them.

We are then ready to ask our Heavenly Father sincerely, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, if the things we have learned are true. Most of us will not see God, as the prophets have, but the still, small promptings of the Spirit—the thoughts and feelings that the Holy Ghost brings into our minds and hearts—will give us an undeniable knowledge that He lives and that He loves us.

Gaining this knowledge is ultimately the quest of all God’s children on the earth. If you cannot remember believing in God or if you have ceased to believe or if you believe but without real conviction, I invite you to seek a testimony of God now. Do not be afraid of ridicule. The strength and peace that come from knowing God and having the comforting companionship of

His Spirit will make your efforts eternally worthwhile.

Even more, with your own testimony of God, you will be able to bless your family, your posterity, your friends, your own life—all those you love. Your personal knowledge of God is not only the greatest gift you will ever give, but it will bring you the greatest joy you will ever have.

As a special witness of the Only Begotten Son of our loving Heavenly Father, even Jesus Christ, I testify that God lives. I *know* He lives. I promise that if you and those you love will seek Him in all humility, sincerity, and diligence, you will know with a surety too. Your witness will come. And the blessings of knowing God will be yours and your family's forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Articles of Faith 1:1.
2. John 17:3; italics added.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 20:18; see also Genesis 1:27; Moses 2:27.

4. See Krister Stendahl, "To Speak about God," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, vol. 36, no. 2 (spring 2008): 8–9.
5. Genesis 1:26; Moses 2:26; italics added.
6. Moses 2:1.
7. Acts 7:56.
8. Moses 4:14; see also Genesis 3:8.
9. Moses 7:4.
10. Ether 3:6.
11. Ether 3:16.
12. Moses 7:28.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 110:3.
14. James 1:5–6.
15. Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17.
16. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
18. Articles of Faith 1:11; italics added.
19. John 15:26.
20. John 14:26.
21. 1 Corinthians 2:14.
22. Mosiah 3:19.
23. See Alma 30.
24. Alma 30:44.
25. Alma 30:52.
26. John 5:39.

Elder Jorge F. Zeballos

The command to be perfect

When the twelve disciples were called in the Americas, the Lord Jesus Christ commanded them: "Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect."¹ The Savior had recently finalized His successful, selfless, and transcendental mission on earth. This allowed Him to declare with authority that He and His Father, our Father, are the models to be followed by each one of us.

From a purely human point of view, at first this seems to be an impossible task. However, it begins to appear possible upon understanding that in order to achieve it, we are not alone. The most marvelous and powerful helps for which a human being may seek are always available. First is the

generous and loving hand of the Eternal Father, who desires that we return to His presence forever. As our Father, He is always willing and desirous to forgive our errors and weaknesses and the sins we commit, subject only to total and sincere repentance. And as a complement to that—and as the maximum manifestation of His immense love for each one of His children—He provides us with the consequences of the singular work wrought by the Savior, namely the Atonement, brought about by an obedient Son always willing to do the Father's will in benefit to each one of us.

The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith the following: "And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God."²