

O How Great the Plan of Our God!

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How blessed we are to assemble again in this worldwide conference under the direction and leadership of our dear prophet and President, Thomas S. Monson. President, we love you and we sustain you with all our hearts!

During my professional life as a pilot, I relied greatly on the precision and reliability of computer systems but rarely had to work my own personal computer. In my office work as an executive, I had assistants and secretaries who kindly helped me with the tasks.

All this changed in 1994, when I was called as a General Authority. My calling consisted of many wonderful opportunities to minister, but it also included a great deal of Church office work—more than I ever thought possible.

To my shock, the main tool to stay on top of my work was a personal computer.

For the first time in my life, I had to delve into this strange, mystifying, incomprehensible world.

From the start, the computer and I were not on the friendliest of terms.

Able tech people tried to teach me how to use the computer. They literally stood behind me, reaching over my shoulder, their fingers moving quickly and tapping a percussive symphony against the keyboard.

“See?” they would say proudly. “That’s how you do it.”

I did not see. It was a rocky transition.

My learning curve was more like a brick wall.

It took a great deal of time, repetition, patience; no small amount of hope and faith; lots of reassurance from my wife; and many liters of a diet soda that shall remain nameless.

Now, 22 years later, I am surrounded by computer technology. I have an email address, a Twitter account, and a Facebook page. I own a smartphone, a tablet, a

laptop, and a digital camera. And, while my tech skills may not quite measure up to those of a typical seven-year-old, for a septuagenarian, I do all right.

But I have noticed something interesting. The more adept I get at technology, the more I take it for granted.

For a large part of human history, communication happened at the speed of a horse. Sending a message and getting a reply could take days or even months. Today our messages travel thousands of miles into the sky or thousands of meters beneath the oceans to reach someone on the other side of the world, and if there is a delay of even a few seconds, we get frustrated and impatient.

It seems to be human nature: as we become more familiar with something, even something miraculous and awe-inspiring, we lose our sense of awe and treat it as commonplace.

Do We Take Spiritual Truths for Granted?

Taking for granted our modern technologies and conveniences may be a relatively small matter. But, sadly, we sometimes take a similar attitude toward the eternal and soul-expanding doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Church of Jesus Christ, we have been given so much. We are surrounded by such an astonishing wealth of light and truth that I wonder if we truly appreciate what we have.

Think of those early disciples who walked and talked with the Savior during His earthly ministry. Imagine the thanksgiving and reverence that must have flooded their hearts and filled their minds when they saw Him risen from the tomb, when they felt the wounds in His hands. Their lives would never be the same!

Think of the early Saints of this dispensation who knew the Prophet Joseph Smith and heard him preach the restored gospel. Imagine how they must have felt to know that the veil between heaven and earth had parted again, shedding light and knowledge upon the world from our celestial home above.

But most of all, think of how you felt when for the first time you believed and understood that you are truly a child of God; that Jesus Christ willingly suffered for *your* sins so that you may be clean again; that priesthood power is real and can bind you to your loved ones for time and for all eternity; that there is a living prophet on the earth today. Isn't that wonderful and amazing?

Considering all of this, how could it ever be possible that we of all people would not be excited about attending our Church worship services? Or get tired of reading the holy scriptures? I suppose this could be possible only if our hearts were *past feeling* to experience gratitude and awe for the sacred and sublime gifts God has granted us. Life-changing truths are before our eyes and at our fingertips, but sometimes we sleepwalk on the path of discipleship. Too often we let ourselves be distracted by the

imperfections of our fellow members instead of following the example of our Master. We tread a path covered with diamonds, but we can scarcely distinguish them from ordinary pebbles.

A Familiar Message

When I was a young man, my friends would ask me about my religion. Often I would start to explain the differences, like the Word of Wisdom. Other times I would emphasize the similarities with other Christian religions. None of this would impress them very much. But when I talked about the great plan of happiness our Father in Heaven has for us as His children, I had their attention.

I remember trying to draw the plan of salvation on a blackboard in a classroom of our chapel in Frankfurt, Germany. I made circles that represented premortal life, mortality, and the return to our Heavenly Parents after this life.

As a teenager, how I loved to share this exciting message. When I explained these principles in my own simple words, my heart would overflow with gratitude for a God who loves His children and a Savior who redeemed all of us from death and hell. I was so proud of this message of love, joy, and hope.

Some of my friends would say that this message felt familiar, even though such things were never taught in their religious upbringing. It was as if they had always known these things to be true, as if I was simply casting light on something that was always and deeply rooted in their hearts.

We Have Answers!

I believe every human being carries in his or her heart some form of fundamental questions regarding life itself. Where did I come from? Why am I here? What will happen after I die?

These kinds of questions have been asked by mortals since the dawn of time. Philosophers, scholars, and pundits have spent their lives and fortunes seeking for answers.

I am grateful that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ has answers to the most complex questions in life. These answers are taught in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They are true, plain, straightforward, and easy to understand. They are inspired, and we teach them to our three-year-olds in the Sunbeam class.

Brothers and sisters, we are eternal beings, without beginning and without end. We have always existed.¹ We are the literal spirit children of divine, immortal, and omnipotent Heavenly Parents!

We come from the heavenly courts of the Lord our God. We are of the royal house of Elohim, the Most High God. We walked with Him in our premortal life. We heard Him speak, witnessed His majesty, learned His ways.

You and I participated in a Grand Council where our beloved Father presented His plan for us—that we would come to earth, receive mortal bodies, learn to choose between good and evil, and progress in ways that would not otherwise be possible.

When we passed through the veil and entered this mortal life, we knew that we would no longer remember the life before. There would be opposition and adversity and temptation. But we also knew that gaining a physical body was of paramount importance for us. Oh, how we hoped that we would quickly learn to make the correct choices, withstand the temptations of Satan, and eventually return to our beloved Parents in Heaven.

We knew we would sin and make mistakes—perhaps even serious ones. But we also knew that our Savior, Jesus Christ, had pledged to come to earth, live a sinless life, and voluntarily lay down His life in an eternal sacrifice. We knew that if we gave our heart to Him, trusted Him, and strived with all the energy of our soul to walk in the path of discipleship, we could be washed clean and once again enter the presence of our beloved Father in Heaven.

So, with faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you and I accepted, by our free will, Heavenly Father's plan.

That is why we are here on this beautiful planet earth—because God offered us the opportunity, and we chose to accept it. Our mortal life, however, is only temporary and will end with the death of our physical body. But the essence of who you and I are will not be destroyed. Our spirits will continue living and await the Resurrection—a free gift to all by our loving Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.² At the Resurrection, our spirits and bodies will be reunited, free from pain and physical imperfections.

After the Resurrection, there will be a Day of Judgment. While all will eventually be saved and inherit a kingdom of glory, those who trust in God and seek to follow His laws and ordinances will inherit lives in the eternities that are unimaginable in glory and overwhelming in majesty.

That Day of Judgment will be a day of mercy and love—a day when broken hearts are healed, when tears of grief are replaced with tears of gratitude, when all will be made right.³

Yes, there will be deep sorrow because of sin. Yes, there will be regrets and even anguish because of our mistakes, our foolishness, and our stubbornness that caused us to miss opportunities for a much greater future.

But I have confidence that we will not only be satisfied with the judgment of God; we will also be astonished and overwhelmed by His infinite grace, mercy, generosity, and

love for us, His children. If our desires and works are good, if we have faith in a living God, then we can look forward to what Moroni called “the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge.”⁴

Pro Tanto Quid Retribuamus

My beloved brothers and sisters, my dear friends, does it not fill our hearts and minds with wonder and awe to contemplate the great plan of happiness our Heavenly Father has prepared for us? Does it not fill us with unspeakable joy to know of the glorious future that is prepared for all who wait upon the Lord?

If you have never felt such wonder and joy, I invite you to seek, study, and ponder the simple yet profound truths of the restored gospel. “Let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds.”⁵ Let them bear testimony unto you of the divine plan of salvation.

If you have felt these things before, I ask you today, “Can [you] feel so now?”⁶

Recently I had the opportunity to travel to Belfast, Northern Ireland. While there, I noticed the Belfast Coat of Arms, which includes the motto “Pro tanto quid retribuamus,” or “What shall we give in return for so much?”⁷

I invite each of us to consider this question. What shall we give in return for the flood of light and truth God has poured out upon us?

Our beloved Father simply asks that we live by the truth we have received and that we follow the path He has provided. Therefore, let us take courage and trust in the guidance of the Spirit. Let us in word and in deed share with our fellowmen the amazing and awe-inspiring message of God’s plan of happiness. May our motive be our love for God and for His children, for they are our brothers and sisters. This is the beginning of what we can do in return for so much.

Someday “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess” that God’s ways are just and His plan is perfect.⁸ For you and me, let that day be today. Let us proclaim, with Jacob of old, “O how great the plan of our God!”⁹

Of this I testify in deep gratitude to our Heavenly Father, as I leave you my blessing, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.