

Thanks Be to God

By Elder Russell M. Nelson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

How much better it would be if all could be more aware of God's providence and love and express that gratitude to Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, we thank you for your sustaining support and your devotion. We express our gratitude and love to each of you.

Recently, Sister Nelson and I enjoyed the beauty of tropical fish in a small private aquarium. Fish with vivid colors and of a variety of shapes and sizes darted back and forth. I asked the attendant nearby, "Who provides food for these beautiful fish?"

She responded, "I do."

Then I asked, "Have they ever thanked you?"

She replied, "Not yet!"

I thought of some people I know who are just as oblivious to their Creator and their true "bread of life."¹ They live from day to day without an awareness of God and His goodness unto them.

How much better it would be if all could be more aware of God's providence and love and express that gratitude to Him. Ammon taught, "Let us give thanks to [God], for he doth work righteousness forever."² Our degree of gratitude is a measure of our love for Him.

God is the Father of our spirits.³ He has a glorified, perfected body of flesh and bone.⁴ We lived with Him in heaven before we were born.⁵ And when He created us physically, we were created in the image of God, each with a personal body.⁶

Think of our physical sustenance. It is truly heaven-sent. The necessities of air, food, and water all come to us as gifts from a loving Heavenly Father. The earth was created to support our brief sojourn in mortality.⁷ We were born with a capacity to grow, love, marry, and form families.

Marriage and family are ordained of God. The family is the most important social unit in time and in eternity. Under God's great plan of happiness, families can be sealed in temples and be prepared to return to dwell in His holy presence forever. That is eternal life! It fulfills the deepest longings of the human soul—the natural yearning for endless association with beloved members of one's family.

We are part of His divine purpose: "My work and my glory," He said, is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."⁸ In order to achieve those objectives, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but

have everlasting life.”⁹ That act was a supernal manifestation of God’s love. “For [He] sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”¹⁰

Central to God’s eternal plan is the mission of His Son, Jesus Christ.¹¹ He came to redeem God’s children.¹² Because of the Lord’s Atonement, resurrection (or immortality) became a reality.¹³ Because of the Atonement, eternal life became a possibility for all who would qualify. Jesus so explained:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”¹⁴

For the Atonement of the Lord and His gift of resurrection—for this sublime message of Easter—thanks be to God!

Physical Gifts

Our Heavenly Father loves His children.¹⁵ He has blessed each with physical and spiritual gifts. Let me speak of each type. When you sing “I Am a Child of God,” think of His gift to you of your own physical body. The many amazing attributes of your body attest to your own “divine nature.”¹⁶

Each organ of your body is a wondrous gift from God. Each eye has an autofocusing lens. Nerves and muscles control two eyes to make a single three-dimensional image. The eyes are connected to the brain, which records the sights seen.

Your heart is an incredible pump.¹⁷ 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 such stress almost indefinitely.

Think of the body’s defense system. To protect it from harm, it perceives pain. In response to infection, it generates antibodies. The skin provides protection. It warns against injury that excessive heat or cold might cause.

The body renews its own outdated cells and regulates the levels of its own vital ingredients. The body heals its cuts, bruises, and broken bones. Its capacity for reproduction is another sacred gift from God.

Be we reminded that a perfect body is not required to achieve one’s divine destiny. In fact, some of the sweetest spirits are housed in frail or imperfect bodies. Great spiritual strength is often developed by people with physical challenges, precisely because they are so challenged.

Anyone who studies the workings of the human body has surely “seen God moving in his majesty and power.”¹⁸ Because the body is governed by divine law, any healing comes by obedience to the law upon which that blessing is predicated.¹⁹

Yet some people erroneously think that these marvelous physical attributes happened by chance or resulted from a big bang somewhere. Ask yourself, “Could an explosion in a printing shop produce

a dictionary?" The likelihood is *most* remote. But if so, it could never heal its own torn pages or reproduce its own newer editions!

If the body's capacity for normal function, defense, repair, regulation, and regeneration were to prevail without limit, life here would continue in perpetuity. Yes, we would be stranded here on earth! Mercifully for us, our Creator provided for aging and other processes that would ultimately result in our physical death. Death, like birth, is part of life. Scripture teaches that "it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness."²⁰ To return to God through the gateway we call death is a joy for those who love Him and are prepared to meet Him.²¹ 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,"²² never to be separated again. For these physical gifts, thanks be to God!

Spiritual Gifts

Important as is the body, it serves as a tabernacle for one's eternal spirit. Our spirits existed in the premortal realm²³ and will continue to live after the body dies.²⁴ The spirit provides the body with animation and personality.²⁵ In this life and in the next, spirit and body, when joined together, become a living soul of supernal worth.

Because one's spirit is so important, its development is of eternal consequence. It is strengthened as we communicate in humble prayer with our loving Heavenly Father.²⁶

The attributes by which we shall be judged one day are all spiritual.²⁷ These include love, virtue, integrity, compassion, and service to others.²⁸ Your spirit, coupled with and housed in your body, is able to develop and manifest these attributes in ways that are vital to your eternal progression.²⁹ Spiritual progress is attained through the steps of faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end, including the endowment and sealing ordinances of the holy temple.³⁰

Just as the body requires daily food for survival, the spirit needs nourishment as well. The spirit is nurtured by eternal truth. Last year we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the King James translation of the Holy Bible. And we have had the Book of Mormon for nearly 200 years. It has now been translated in its entirety or as selections into 107 languages. Because of these and other precious scriptures, we know that God is our Eternal Father and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer. For these spiritual gifts, thanks be to God!

Gospel Gifts

We know that prophets of many dispensations, such as Adam, Noah, Moses, and Abraham, all taught of the divinity of our Heavenly Father and of Jesus Christ. Our present dispensation was introduced by Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ when They appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1820. The Church was organized in 1830. Now, 182 years later, we remain under covenant to take

the gospel to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.”³¹ As we do so, both givers and receivers will be blessed.

Ours is the responsibility to teach His children and awaken in them an awareness of God. Long ago, King Benjamin said:

“Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; ...

“... Believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.”³²

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but we are not. Each day, ours is the challenge to access the power of the Atonement so that we can truly change, become more Christlike, and qualify for the gift of exaltation and live eternally with God, Jesus Christ, and our families.³³ For these powers, privileges, and gospel gifts, thanks be to God!

I testify that He lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that this is His Church, restored in these latter days to accomplish its divine destiny. We are led today by President Thomas S. Monson, whom we love and sustain with all our hearts, as we also sustain his counselors and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. John 6:35, 48; see also verse 51.
2. Alma 26:8; see also Alma 7:23.
3. See Acts 17:27–29.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
5. See Jeremiah 1:4–5; Romans 8:16; Hebrews 12:9; Moses 6:51.
6. See Genesis 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:44; Moses 3:7.
7. See 1 Nephi 17:36.
8. Moses 1:39.
9. John 3:16.
10. John 3:17.
11. His purposes are succinctly summarized in 3 Nephi 27:13–22.
12. See Alma 11:40.
13. See 2 Nephi 9:6–7, 20–22.
14. John 11:25–26.
15. See 1 John 4:10; 1 Nephi 17:40.

16. 2 Peter 1:4.
17. The heart pumps about 2,000 gallons (7,570 L) per day.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 88:47.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:21. Indeed, that divine law is incontrovertible.
20. Alma 42:8.
21. The Psalmist expressed the viewpoint of Deity: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15); see also Ecclesiastes 12:7.
22. Alma 11:43; see also Ecclesiastes 12:7; Alma 40:23; Doctrine and Covenants 138:17.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:38.
24. See Alma 40:11; Abraham 3:18.
25. The spirit is in the likeness of the person (see Doctrine and Covenants 77:2).
26. See 3 Nephi 14:9–11.
27. 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).
28. Spiritual attributes also include “faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, [and] diligence” (Doctrine and Covenants 4:6).
29. See 2 Nephi 2:11–16, 21–26; Moroni 10:33–34.
30. This is the doctrine of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:11–21).
31. Mosiah 15:28; see also 1 Nephi 19:17; 2 Nephi 26:13; Mosiah 3:20; 15:28; 16:1; Alma 37:4; Doctrine and Covenants 1:18–23; 77:11; 133:37.
32. Mosiah 4:9–10.
33. “Eternal life ... is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 14:7).