



By President Thomas S. Monson

The Race of Life

Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go after this life? No longer need these universal questions remain unanswered.

My beloved brothers and sisters, this morning I wish to speak to you of eternal truths—those truths which will enrich our lives and see us safely home.

Everywhere people are in a hurry. Jet-powered aircraft speed their precious human cargo across broad continents and vast oceans so that business meetings might be attended, obligations met, vacations enjoyed, or families visited. Roadways everywhere—including freeways, thruways, and motorways—carry millions of automobiles, occupied by more millions of people, in a seemingly endless stream and for a multitude of reasons as we rush about the business of each day.

In this fast-paced life, do we ever pause for moments of meditation—even thoughts of timeless truths?

When compared to eternal verities, most of the questions and concerns of daily living are really rather trivial. What should we have for dinner? What color should we paint the living room? Should we sign Johnny up for soccer? These questions and countless others like them lose their

significance when times of crisis arise, when loved ones are hurt or injured, when sickness enters the house of good health, when life's candle dims and darkness threatens. Our thoughts become focused, and we are easily able to determine what is really important and what is merely trivial.

I recently visited with a woman who has been battling a life-threatening disease for over two years. She indicated that prior to her illness, her days were filled with activities such as cleaning her house to perfection and filling it with beautiful furnishings. She visited her hairdresser twice a week and spent money and time each month adding to her wardrobe. Her grandchildren were invited to visit infrequently, for she was always concerned that what she considered her precious possessions might be broken or otherwise ruined by tiny and careless hands.

And then she received the shocking news that her mortal life was in jeopardy and that she might have very limited time left here. She said that at the moment she heard the doctor's diagnosis, she knew

immediately that she would spend whatever time she had remaining with her family and friends and with the gospel at the center of her life, for these represented what was most precious to her.

Such moments of clarity come to all of us at one time or another, although not always through so dramatic a circumstance. We see clearly what it is that really matters in our lives and how we should be living.

Said the Savior:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”¹

In our times of deepest reflection or greatest need, the soul of man reaches heavenward, seeking a divine response to life's greatest questions: *Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go after we leave this life?*

Answers to these questions are not discovered within the covers of academia's textbooks or by checking the Internet. These questions transcend mortality. They embrace eternity.

Where did we come from? This query is inevitably thought, if not spoken, by every human being.

The Apostle Paul told the Athenians on Mars' Hill that “we are the offspring of God.”² Since we know that our physical bodies are the offspring of our mortal parents, we must probe for

the meaning of Paul's statement. The Lord has declared that "the spirit and the body are the soul of man."³ Thus it is the spirit which is the offspring of God. The writer of Hebrews refers to Him as "the Father of spirits."⁴ The spirits of all men are literally His "begotten sons and daughters."⁵

We note that inspired poets have, for our contemplation of this subject, written moving messages and recorded transcendent thoughts. William Wordsworth penned the truth:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a
forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's
Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we
come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our
infancy!*⁶

Parents ponder their responsibility to teach, to inspire, and to provide guidance, direction, and example. And while parents ponder, children—and particularly youth—ask the penetrating question, why are we here? Usually it is spoken silently to the soul and phrased, why am *I* here?

How grateful we should be that a wise Creator fashioned an earth and placed us here, with a veil of forgetfulness of our previous existence so that we might experience a time of testing, an opportunity to prove ourselves in order to qualify for all that God has prepared for us to receive.

Clearly, one primary purpose of our existence upon the earth is to obtain a body of flesh and bones. We have also been given the gift of agency. In a thousand ways we are privileged to choose for ourselves. Here we learn from the hard taskmaster of experience. We discern between good and evil. We differentiate as to the bitter and the sweet. We

discover that there are consequences attached to our actions.

By obedience to God's commandments, we can qualify for that "house" spoken of by Jesus when He declared: "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, there ye may be also."⁷

Although we come into mortality "trailing clouds of glory," life moves relentlessly forward. Youth follows childhood, and maturity comes ever so imperceptibly. From experience we learn the need to reach heavenward for assistance as we make our way along life's pathway.

God, our Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord, have marked the way to perfection. They beckon us to follow eternal verities and to become perfect, as They are perfect.⁸

The Apostle Paul likened life to a race. To the Hebrews he urged, "Let us lay aside . . . the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."⁹

In our zeal, let us not overlook the sage counsel from Ecclesiastes: "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."¹⁰ Actually, the prize belongs to him or her who endures to the end.

When I reflect on the race of life, I remember another type of race, even from childhood days. My friends and I would take pocketknives in hand and, from the soft wood of a willow tree, fashion small toy boats. With a triangular-shaped cotton sail in place, each would launch his crude craft in the race down the relatively turbulent waters of Utah's Provo River. We would run along the river's bank and watch the tiny vessels sometimes bobbing violently in the swift current and at other times sailing serenely as the water deepened.

During a particular race we noted that one boat led all the rest toward the appointed finish line. Suddenly, the current carried it too close to a large whirlpool, and the boat heaved to its side and capsized. Around and

around it was carried, unable to make its way back into the main current. At last it came to an uneasy rest amid the flotsam and jetsam that surrounded it, held fast by the tentacles of the grasping green moss.

The toy boats of childhood had no keel for stability, no rudder to provide direction, and no source of power. Inevitably, their destination was downstream—the path of least resistance.

Unlike toy boats, we have been provided divine attributes to guide our journey. We enter mortality not to float with the moving currents of life but with the power to think, to reason, and to achieve.

Our Heavenly Father did not launch us on our eternal voyage without providing the means whereby we could receive from Him guidance to ensure our safe return. I speak of prayer. I speak too of the whisperings from that still, small voice; and I do not overlook the holy scriptures, which contain the word of the Lord and the words of the prophets—provided to us to help us successfully cross the finish line.

At some period in our mortal mission, there appears the faltering step, the wan smile, the pain of sickness—even the fading of summer, the approach of autumn, the chill of winter, and the experience we call death.

Every thoughtful person has asked himself the question best phrased by Job of old: "If a man die, shall he live again?"¹¹ Try as we might to put the question out of our thoughts, it always returns. Death comes to all mankind. It comes to the aged as they walk on faltering feet. Its summons is heard by those who have scarcely reached midway in life's journey. At times it hushes the laughter of little children.

But what of an existence beyond death? Is death the end of all? Robert Blatchford, in his book *God and My Neighbor*, attacked with vigor accepted Christian beliefs such as God, Christ, prayer, and particularly immortality. He boldly asserted that death was the end of our existence and that no

one could prove otherwise. Then a surprising thing happened. His wall of skepticism suddenly crumbled to dust. He was left exposed and undefended. Slowly he began to feel his way back to the faith he had ridiculed and abandoned. What had caused this profound change in his outlook? His wife died. With a broken heart he went into the room where lay all that was mortal of her. He looked again at the face he loved so well. Coming out, he said to a friend: "It is she, and yet it is not she. Everything is changed. Something that was there before is taken away. She is not the same. What can be gone if it be not the soul?"

Later he wrote: "Death is not what some people imagine. It is only like going into another room. In that other room we shall find . . . the dear women and men and the sweet children we have loved and lost."¹²

My brothers and sisters, we know that death is not the end. This truth has been taught by living prophets throughout the ages. It is also found in our holy scriptures. In the Book of Mormon we read specific and comforting words:

"Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection—Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that

God who gave them life.

"And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow."¹³

After the Savior was crucified and His body had lain in the tomb for three days, the spirit again entered. The stone was rolled away, and the resurrected Redeemer walked forth, clothed with an immortal body of flesh and bones.

The answer to Job's question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" came when Mary and others approached the tomb and saw two men in shining garments who spoke to them: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."¹⁴

As the result of Christ's victory over the grave, we shall all be resurrected. This is the redemption of the soul. Paul wrote: "There are . . . celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another."¹⁵

It is the celestial glory which we seek. It is in the presence of God we desire to dwell. It is a forever family in which we want membership. Such blessings are earned through a lifetime of striving, seeking, repenting, and finally succeeding.

Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go after this

life? No longer need these universal questions remain unanswered. From the very depths of my soul and in all humility, I testify that those things of which I have spoken are true.

Our Heavenly Father rejoices for those who keep His commandments. He is concerned also for the lost child, the tardy teenager, the wayward youth, the delinquent parent. Tenderly the Master speaks to these and indeed to all: "Come back. Come up. Come in. Come home. Come unto me."

In one week we will celebrate Easter. Our thoughts will turn to the Savior's life, His death, and His Resurrection. As His special witness, I testify to you that He lives and that He awaits our triumphant return. That such a return will be ours, I pray humbly in His holy name—even Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 6:19–21.
2. Acts 17:29.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 88:15.
4. Hebrews 12:9.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 76:24.
6. William Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1884), 23–24.
7. John 14:2–3.
8. See Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48.
9. Hebrews 12:1.
10. Ecclesiastes 9:11.
11. Job 14:14.
12. See Robert Blatchford, *More Things in Heaven and Earth: Adventures in Quest of a Soul* (1925), 11.
13. Alma 40:11–12.
14. Luke 24:5–6.
15. 1 Corinthians 15:40.

Teachings for Our Time

Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society lessons on fourth Sundays will be devoted to “Teachings for Our Time.” Each lesson can be prepared from one or more talks given in the most recent general conference (see chart below). Stake and district presidents may choose which talks should be used, or they may assign this responsibility to bishops and branch presidents. Leaders emphasize the value of Melchizedek Priesthood brethren and Relief Society sisters studying the same talks on the same Sundays.

Those attending fourth-Sunday lessons are encouraged to study and bring to class the latest general conference issue of the magazine.

Suggestions for Preparing a Lesson from Talks

Pray that the Holy Spirit will be with you as you study and teach

the talk(s). You may be tempted to prepare the lesson using other materials, but the conference talks are the approved curriculum. Your assignment is to help others learn and live the gospel as taught in the most recent general conference of the Church.

Review the talk(s), looking for principles and doctrines that meet the needs of class members. Also look for stories, scripture references, and statements from the talk(s) that will help you teach these truths.

Make an outline of how to teach the principles and doctrines. Consider including questions that help class members:

- Look for principles and doctrines in the talk(s).
- Think about their meaning.
- Share understanding, ideas, experiences, and testimonies.
- Apply these principles and doctrines in their lives.

| MONTHS LESSONS ARE TAUGHT | FOURTH-SUNDAY LESSON MATERIALS |
|---------------------------|---|
| April 2012–October 2012 | Talks given in the April 2012 general conference* |
| October 2012–April 2013 | Talks given in the October 2012 general conference* |

**For April and October fourth-Sunday lessons, talk(s) may be selected from the previous conference or from the most recent one. The talks are available in many languages at conference.lds.org.*



By President Henry B. Eyring

First Counselor in the First Presidency

Mountains to Climb

If we have faith in Jesus Christ, the hardest as well as the easiest times in life can be a blessing.

I heard President Spencer W. Kimball, in a session of conference, ask that God would give him mountains to climb. He said: “There are great challenges ahead of us, giant opportunities to be met. I welcome that exciting prospect and feel to say to the Lord, humbly, ‘Give me this mountain,’ give me these challenges.”¹

My heart was stirred, knowing, as I did, some of the challenges and adversity he had already faced. I felt a desire to be more like him, a valiant servant of God. So one night I prayed for a test to prove my courage. I can remember it vividly. In the evening I knelt in my bedroom with a faith that seemed almost to fill my heart to bursting.

Within a day or two my prayer was answered. The hardest trial of my life surprised and humbled me. It provided me a twofold lesson. First, I had clear proof that God heard and answered my prayer of faith. But second, I began a tutorial that still goes on to learn about why I felt with such confidence that night that a great blessing could come from adversity to more than compensate for any cost.

The adversity that hit me in that

faraway day now seems tiny compared to what has come since—to me and to those I love. Many of you are now passing through physical, mental, and emotional trials that could cause you to cry out as did one great and faithful servant of God I knew well. His nurse heard him exclaim from his bed of pain, “When I have tried all my life to be good, why has this happened to me?”

You know how the Lord answered that question for the Prophet Joseph Smith in his prison cell:

“And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

“The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

“Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.”²

There seems to me no better answer to the question of why trials come and what we are to do than the words of the Lord Himself, who passed through trials for us more terrible than we can imagine.

You remember His words when He counseled that we should, out of faith in Him, repent:

“Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

“Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

“Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.”³

You and I have faith that the way to rise through and above trials is to believe that there is a “balm in Gilead”⁴ and that the Lord has promised, “I will not . . . forsake thee.”⁵

That is what President Thomas S. Monson has taught us to help us and those we serve in what seem lonely and overwhelming trials.⁶

But President Monson has also wisely taught that a foundation of faith in the reality of those promises takes time to build. You may have seen the need for that foundation, as I have, at the bedside of someone ready to give up the fight to endure to the end. If the foundation of faith is not embedded in our hearts, the power to endure will crumble.

My purpose today is to describe what I know of how we can lay that unshakable foundation. I do it with great humility for two reasons. First, what I say could discourage some who are struggling in the midst of great adversity and feel their foundation of faith is crumbling. And second, I know that ever-greater tests lie before me before the end of life. Therefore, the prescription I offer you has yet to be proven in my own life through enduring to the end.

As a young man I worked with a contractor building footings and foundations for new houses. In the summer heat it was hard work to prepare the ground for the form into which we poured the cement for the footing. There were no machines. We used a pick and a shovel. Building lasting foundations for buildings was hard work in those days.

It also required patience. After we poured the footing, we waited for it to cure. Much as we wanted to keep the jobs moving, we also waited after the pour of the foundation before we took away the forms.

And even more impressive to a novice builder was what seemed to be a tedious and time-consuming process to put metal bars carefully inside the forms to give the finished foundation strength.

In a similar way, the ground must be carefully prepared for our foundation of faith to withstand the storms that will come into every life. That solid basis for a foundation of faith is

personal integrity.

Our choosing the right consistently whenever the choice is placed before us creates the solid ground under our faith. It can begin in childhood since every soul is born with the free gift of the Spirit of Christ. With that Spirit we can know when we have done what is right before God and when we have done wrong in His sight.

Those choices, hundreds in most days, prepare the solid ground on which our edifice of faith is built. The metal framework around which the substance of our faith is poured is the gospel of Jesus Christ, with all its covenants, ordinances, and principles.

One of the keys to an enduring faith is to judge correctly the curing time required. That is why I was unwise to pray so soon in my life for higher mountains to climb and greater tests.

That curing does not come automatically through the passage of time, but it does take time. Getting older does not do it alone. It is serving God and others persistently with full heart and soul that turns testimony of truth into unbreakable spiritual strength.

Now, I wish to encourage those who are in the midst of hard trials, who feel their faith may be fading under the onslaught of troubles. Trouble itself can be your way to strengthen and finally gain unshakable faith. Moroni, the son of Mormon in the Book of Mormon, told us how that blessing could come to pass. He teaches the simple and sweet truth that acting on even a twig of faith allows God to grow it:

“And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

“For it was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him; wherefore,

it must needs be that some had faith in him, for he showed himself not unto the world.

“But because of the faith of men he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby others might be partakers of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen.

“Wherefore, ye may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift, if ye will but have faith.”⁷

That particle of faith most precious and which you should protect and use to whatever extent you can is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Moroni taught the power of that faith this way: “And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first believed in the Son of God.”⁸

I have visited with a woman who received the miracle of sufficient strength to endure unimaginable losses with just the simple capacity to repeat endlessly the words “I know that my Redeemer lives.”⁹ That faith and those words of testimony were still there in the mist that obscured but did not erase memories of her childhood.

I was stunned to learn that another woman had forgiven a person who had wronged her for years. I was surprised and asked her why she had chosen to forgive and forget so many years of spiteful abuse.

She said quietly, “It was the hardest thing I have ever done, but I just knew I had to do it. So I did.” Her faith that the Savior would forgive her if she forgave others prepared her with a feeling of peace and hope as she faced death just months after she had forgiven her unrepentant adversary.

She asked me, “When I get there, how will it be in heaven?”

And I said, “I know just from what I have seen of your capacity to exercise faith and to forgive that it will be a wonderful homecoming for you.”

I have another encouragement to those who now wonder if their faith in Jesus Christ will be sufficient for them to endure well to the end. I was blessed to have known others of you who are listening now when you were younger, vibrant, gifted beyond most of those around you, yet you chose to do what the Savior would have done. Out of your abundance you found ways to help and care for those you might have ignored or looked down upon from your place in life.

When hard trials come, the faith to endure them well will be there, built as you may now notice but may have not at the time that you acted on the pure love of Christ, serving and forgiving others as the Savior would have done. You built a foundation of faith from loving as the Savior loved and serving for Him. Your faith in Him led to acts of charity that will bring you hope.

It is never too late to strengthen the foundation of faith. There is always time. With faith in the Savior, you can repent and plead for forgiveness. There is someone you can forgive. There is someone you can thank. There is someone you can serve and lift. You can do it wherever you are and however alone and deserted you may feel.

I cannot promise an end to your adversity in this life. I cannot assure you that your trials will seem to you to be only for a moment. One of the

characteristics of trials in life is that they seem to make clocks slow down and then appear almost to stop.

There are reasons for that. Knowing those reasons may not give much comfort, but it can give you a feeling of patience. Those reasons come from this one fact: in Their perfect love for you, Heavenly Father and the Savior want you fitted to be with Them to live in families forever. Only those washed perfectly clean through the Atonement of Jesus Christ can be there.

My mother fought cancer for nearly 10 years. Treatments and surgeries and finally confinement to her bed were some of her trials.

I remember my father saying as he watched her take her last breath, "A little girl has gone home to rest."

One of the speakers at her funeral was President Spencer W. Kimball. Among the tributes he paid, I remember one that went something like this: "Some of you may have thought that Mildred suffered so long and so much because of something she had done wrong that required the trials." He then said, "No, it was that God just wanted her to be polished a little more." I remember at the time thinking, "If a woman that good needed that much polishing, what is ahead for me?"

If we have faith in Jesus Christ, the hardest as well as the easiest times in life can be a blessing. In all conditions, we can choose the right with

the guidance of the Spirit. We have the gospel of Jesus Christ to shape and guide our lives if we choose it. And with prophets revealing to us our place in the plan of salvation, we can live with perfect hope and a feeling of peace. We never need to feel that we are alone or unloved in the Lord's service because we never are. We can feel the love of God. The Savior has promised angels on our left and our right to bear us up.¹⁰ And He always keeps His word.

I testify that God the Father lives and that His Beloved Son is our Redeemer. The Holy Ghost has confirmed truth in this conference and will again as you seek it, as you listen, and as you later study the messages of the Lord's authorized servants, who are here. President Thomas S. Monson is the Lord's prophet to the entire world. The Lord watches over you. God the Father lives. His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, is our Redeemer. His love is unending. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, "Give Me This Mountain," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 79.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7-9.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 19:15-19.
4. Jeremiah 8:22.
5. Joshua 1:5.
6. See Thomas S. Monson, "Look to God and Live," *Ensign*, May 1998, 52-54.
7. Ether 12:6-9.
8. Ether 12:18.
9. "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," *Hymns*, no. 136.
10. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.