



"Apply the Atoning Blood of Christ"

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Christ paid such an enormous, enabling price for us! Will we not apply His Atonement in order to pay the much smaller price required for personal progress?



Brothers and sisters, I renew but also widen and deepen my specific expressions of everlasting gratitude given in April conference.

I have been mercifully granted what might be called a "delay en route." Whether short or long, it is a wonderful blessing from the Lord! I have thereby learned, however, that there is another side to the "Why me?" question, since some are not granted any "delay en route" at all. Whichever side of that question, what is needed is mortal submission, even when there is no immediate divine explanation. Thus we are to press forward, whatever the length of the near horizon, while

rejoicing in what awaits us on the far horizon.

In bringing to pass the beneficent Atonement, certain things were utterly unique to Jesus. These cannot be replicated by us, the beneficiaries of the glorious Atonement with its gift of universal resurrection but also its proffer of eternal life (see Moses 6:57-62). Obviously, unlike our precious Savior, we surely cannot atone for the sins of mankind! Moreover, we certainly cannot bear all mortal sicknesses, infirmities, and griefs (see Alma 7:11-12).

However, on our smaller scale, just as Jesus has invited, we can indeed strive to become "even as [He is]" (3 Ne. 27:27). This process of developmental repentance occurs when we truly take His yoke upon us, thus finally qualifying for God's greatest gift--eternal life (see Matt. 11:29; D&C 6:13; 14:7). It is this latter dimension of the Atonement--now more appreciated by me--on which my brief focus will fall.

Mortality presents us with numerous opportunities to become more Christlike: first, by coping successfully with those of life's challenges which are "common to man[kind]" (1 Cor. 10:13). In addition, there are also our customized trials such as experiencing illness, aloneness, persecution, betrayal, irony, poverty, false witness, unreciprocated love, et cetera. If endured well now, "all these things" can be for our good and can "greatly enlarge the soul," including an enlarged capacity for joy (D&C 122:7; 121:42). Meek suffering often does the excavating necessary for that enlarging! My admiration goes to my many spiritual superiors who so exemplify for us all. In the world to come, to these, the most faithful, our generous Father will give "all that [He] hath" (D&C 84:38). Brothers and sisters, there isn't any more!

These next examples from the Atonement are nonexclusive to Jesus, and special guidance is found in His instructive, personalized words about the Atonement.

As He began to feel the awful weight of the approaching Atonement, Jesus acknowledged, "For this cause came I into the world" (John 18:37). We too, brothers and sisters, came "into the world" to pass through our particularized portions of the mortal experience. Even though our experiences do not even begin to approach our Master's, nevertheless, to undergo this mortal experience is why we too are here! Purposefully pursuing this "cause" brings ultimate meaning to our mortal lives. And we are greatly helped if we enter with faith that pavilion of perspective--the plan of salvation. Then the search for meaning is ended, even though further and resplendent discoveries await us. Alas, as Church members we sometimes behave like hurried tourists, scarcely venturing beyond the entry point.

Next, as we confront our own lesser trials and tribulations, we too can plead with the Father, just as Jesus did, that we "might not . . . shrink"--meaning to retreat or to recoil (D&C 19:18). Not shrinking is much more important than surviving! Moreover, partaking of a bitter cup without becoming bitter is likewise part of the emulation of Jesus.

Continuing, we too may experience moments of mortal aloneness. These moments are nothing compared to what Jesus experienced. Nevertheless, since our prayers may occasionally contain some "whys", we too may experience God's initial silence (see Matt. 27:46).

Certain mortal "whys" are not really questions at all but are expressions of resentment. Other "whys" imply that the trial might be all right later on but not now, as if faith in the Lord excluded faith in His timing. Some "why me" questions, asked amid stress, would be much better as "what" questions, such as, "What is required of me now?" or, to paraphrase Moroni's words, "If I am sufficiently humble, which personal weakness could now become a strength?" (see Ether 12:27).

President Brigham Young spoke of what evoked the "why" from Jesus, saying that during the axis of agony which was Gethsemane and Calvary, the Father at some point withdrew both His presence and His Spirit from Jesus (see *Journal of Discourses* 3:2056). Thereby Jesus' personal triumph was complete and His empathy perfected. Having "descended below all things," He comprehends, perfectly and personally, the full range of human suffering! (see D&C 88:6; 122:8). A spiritual song in yesteryear has an especially moving and insightful line: "Nobody knows the troubles I've seen, nobody knows but Jesus" (see also Alma 7:1112). Truly, Jesus was exquisitely "acquainted with grief," as no one else (Isa. 53:3).

By sharing as best we can in the sufferings and sicknesses of others, we too can develop our empathy--that everlasting and vital virtue. We can also further develop our submissiveness to God's will, so that amid our lesser but genuinely vexing moments we too can say, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). When heartfelt, this expression of obedience constitutes real petition followed by real submission. It is much more than polite deference. Rather, it is a deep yielding in which one's momentary uncertainty gives way to the certainty of Father's rescuing love and mercy, attributes which drench His plan of salvation.

We too can learn greater meekness by giving more "glory to the Father" in lieu of our attention-getting behavior or any arrogant views of personal accomplishment, such as, "My power and the might of mine [own] hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17). Jesus, who accomplished the most by far, was also the most glad to give all the glory to the Father. Alas, even when you and I do place something on the altar, we sometimes hang around as if waiting for a receipt.

Amid the array of mortal tutorials, we too should strive to "[finish our] preparations" for the third and

everlasting estate, which lies ahead--thanks be to Jesus' glorious Atonement (D&C 19:19). By so doing, we too can become "completed" and "finished," having finally attained our varied individual potentials (see Matt. 5:48, footnote *b*).

Though in a much smaller measure, we too may suffer the intensified, interactive pain of "body and spirit"--physical and mental anguish (D&C 19:18). Whatever the grim physical agonies of Jesus' crucifixion, surely His utterly unique sufferings in spirit were absolutely enormous, as He bore our sins to atone for them and our sicknesses to understand them "according to the flesh" (see Alma 7:1112). Intensification can be part of tutoring. Otherwise we may be like superficial students comfortably coasting and merely auditing a course. Then comes the intensifying moment: we suddenly find ourselves enrolled for credit, and it's pass or fail!

Periodically, we too will experience a measure of irony, that hard crust on the bread of adversity. Jesus met irony constantly as He was taunted by circumstances. For instance, this earth is Jesus' footstool, but at Bethlehem there was "no room . . . in the inn" and "no crib for his bed," as "foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 2:7; *Hymns*, no. 206; Luke 9:58; see also Acts 7:4950). The Most Innocent suffered the most, when some of His subjects did unto Him "as they listed" (D&C 49:6). Bearer of the only salvational name, yet the Lord of the Universe lived modestly as a person "of no reputation" (Philip. 2:7; see also Acts 4:12; 2 Ne. 25:20; Abr. 3:27). Christ "constructed" the universe, yet in little Galilee He was known merely as "the carpenter's son" (Matt. 13:55).

You and I, when impacted by lesser irony, are so much more brittle, often forgetting that some tests by their very nature are unfair, especially when crusty irony is present.

Thus, brothers and sisters, along with the great and free gift of the universal and personal resurrection there is also the personal possibility of meriting eternal life. Though stretched by our challenges, by living righteously and enduring well we can eventually become sufficiently more like Jesus in our traits and attributes, that one day we can dwell in the Father's presence forever and ever. By so living now, our confidence will "wax strong in the presence of God" then (D&C 121:45). Confirmingly, the Prophet Joseph declared, "If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 216).

Again, our experiences surely do not approach those of Jesus, yet the same principles and processes apply. His perfected attributes exemplify what can be much further developed by each of us. There is certainly no shortage of relevant clinical experiences, is there? Strange as it seems, we sometimes respond better to larger challenges than to the incessant small ones. For example, impatience with a spouse may occur while a more public challenge is managed quite well. One can be sincerely grateful for his major blessings but regularly murmur over minor irritations. One can have humility that is hierarchical: being humble up, but not humble down. Enduring large tests while failing the seemingly small quizzes just won't do. Such shortcomings must be addressed if we are really serious about becoming more like Jesus.

While so striving daily, we will fall short. Hence the avoidance of discouragement is so vital. So where is the oft and much needed resilience to be found? Once again, in the glorious Atonement! Thereby we can know the lifting tide flowing from forgiveness.

Furthermore, by applying the Atonement we can continue to access the other nurturing gifts of the Holy Ghost, each with its own rich resilience. The Holy Ghost will often preach sermons to us from the pulpit of memory. He will comfort us and reassure us. The burdens not lifted from us, He will help us to bear, thus enabling, even after we err, to continue with joy the soul-stretching journey of discipleship. After all, while the adversary clearly desires our lasting misery, the Father and the Son

truly and constantly desire our everlasting happiness (see 2 Ne. 2:27).

Brothers and sisters, Christ paid such an enormous, enabling price for us! Will we not apply His Atonement in order to pay the much smaller price required for personal progress? (see Mosiah 4:2). Being valiant in our testimony of Jesus, therefore, includes being valiant in our efforts to live more as He lived (see D&C 76:79). We certainly cannot enter His kingdom without receiving the restored ordinances and keeping their associated covenants, but neither can we enter His kingdom without having significantly developed our charity and the other cardinal attributes (see Ether 12:34). Yes, we need the essential ordinances, but we also need the essential attributes. Yes, we need to keep our covenants, but we also need to develop our character. Do we not sing, "More holiness give me," pleading that we can be "more, Savior, like thee"? (*Hymns*, no. 131).

During this special process, how can you and I better insure that the precious blessings given by God are fully received by us? For my part, I desire that my blessings, including the recent "delay en route," bring about my needed and greater spiritual refinement in addition to my grateful acknowledgment. Yes, you and I should count our blessings, but we should also make them count! Furthermore, since the focus in extremity falls on the things of eternity, such should be our focus in whatever remains of mortal brevity. This is my earnest prayer for me and for you in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[◀ Previous](#) | [Next ▶](#)

© 2007 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved. [Rights and use information.](#) [Privacy policy](#)