

“Could We Have Supposed?”

JACK N. GERARD

My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would like to thank Brother Richardson for his kind introduction and all others who support the mission of this extraordinary institution. I am grateful that Sister Gerard and a few family members and friends could join us today. While we are broadcasting from the Marriott Center, it feels a little lonely without each of you in attendance. I must say I was looking forward to seeing your countenances and feeling your spirits. You are an inspiring and remarkable group of individuals. But I am also glad to know that you are following prophetic direction, and I join President Russell M. Nelson in inviting your prayers for those who are suffering as we protect against the spread of COVID-19. Thanks for all you do to appropriately minister to others during this temporary, uncertain time. During this moment of pause when we seek the calming influence of the Lord, I encourage you to take some quiet time to

reflect deeply on how you “Hear Him.”¹ I hope my message today may be of assistance as you pursue your education but may also have broader application during these challenging times.

I must admit I had never been on this campus until my oldest son expressed an interest in playing lacrosse here some years ago. I was very impressed on my first visit and now proudly declare that five of eight children are graduates, and number six is close. In looking back, I would never have imagined what this experience would do to shape their lives and build a Christ-centered foundation to prepare for the world in which we live. Thanks to all who make it possible.

“How Great Reason Have We to Rejoice”

When I received this assignment, I wondered what practical counsel I could share that may be of value to each of you. My mind raced back to my early adult years, when I struggled to get through school. It was during this time that I met

Jack N. Gerard, a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this devotional address on March 17, 2020.

Sister Gerard. We were working in Washington, DC, where we spent thirty-eight years of our lives. We completed our courtship, from introduction to marriage, in seven short months and felt strong spiritual promptings to move our lives forward. When we commenced our lives together, we committed to each other to make the gospel of Jesus Christ and its attendant responsibilities our top priority. We immediately started our family, and I worked full-time while attending school at night. Six straight years in night school allowed me to complete both an undergraduate degree and a law degree. By the time we were finished, we were expecting our third child, had taught early-morning seminary, had served in a bishopric, and, quite frankly, were exhausted.

It was during this time that we received an anonymous letter—I assume from a well-intentioned individual—that criticized our approach to life and suggested that we were making serious mistakes by working hard, trying to complete school, having a family, and serving in the Church. The writer indicated that our priorities were all wrong. This was a particularly vulnerable time for us because we had very few resources and no real ability to relieve the pressure unless we ignored the impressions we had felt, adjusted our commitments, and gave up on our priorities. But even more troubling was the realization that someone near to us was so observant and critical. Today you may not receive an anonymous letter—that is more for my generation—but your equivalent experience may be a public social media post that, while not specifically sent just to you, makes you feel it is directed at you.

While we experienced moments of joy in our journey, the anonymous letter contributed to our anxious moments when we questioned ourselves and the decisions we had made and wondered how we were ever going to make it through—perhaps not dissimilar to feelings you have experienced on occasion. As difficult as it was for our young family, we now look back in humble amazement, as we could never have imagined how it was all possible. While in the crucible of the moment, our path was not always clear. We were not certain that our efforts would pay off. We wondered aloud

if it was all worth it. Every day seemed to be an act of faith as we tried to stay true to our commitment while wading through the murky waters of life. Now that the experience is over, we reflect on those days fondly and can see the hand of the Lord guiding us every step of the way.

Our experience reminded me of the words of Ammon following his challenging missionary service with Alma and the sons of Mosiah. The scriptures record “the circumstances which attended them in their journeyings, for they had many afflictions; they did suffer much, both in body and in mind.”² On occasion they “were depressed, and . . . about to turn back.”³ Yet at the end of his trying service, Ammon reflected back and rhetorically asked, “How great reason have we to rejoice; for could we have supposed when we started . . . that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?”⁴ I repeat, “For could we have supposed when we started . . . that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?”

Ammon’s words suggest that when he commenced his service, he could not fully foresee the outcome or even the blessings of the Lord while he labored. In fact, his words imply that he may have viewed his entire experience differently if he could have supposed from the outset what the final blessings would be. Like Ammon, each of us may find it difficult to suppose exactly what great blessings the Lord has in store for us.

As a young boy growing up in a very small Idaho farming community and rising at five o’clock every morning to milk cows, I could not have supposed that I would be standing here today. When I took my first jet airplane flight to the mission field, I could not have supposed that in addition to the joy of serving others, my mission experience would teach me the requisite skills to excel in school and the workplace. I could not have supposed that a simple college internship would ultimately lead to career opportunities running significant organizations and to representing some of the most powerful business leaders in the world. Through all my years of Church service, I could never have supposed I would be called by a prophet of God to set my worldly interests aside and serve the Lord full-time. Much like Ammon,

as I look back today, I could not have supposed when we started that God would have granted us such great blessings.

While we learned many lessons during our years of schooling, we have often reflected on exactly what made it possible for us to persevere, to keep going, and to have confidence during challenging times. What was it that allowed us to withstand the anonymous criticism from those who saw life differently and to keep true to our commitment to live the gospel of Jesus Christ?

While each of us will have varied experiences throughout our lives, Sister Gerard and I came to know that our willingness to trust in the Lord and to heed His counsel, even when we did not see clearly, resulted in blessings beyond anything we could suppose.

President Dallin H. Oaks taught, “There are few things more important in this life than knowing your place in mortality and your potential in eternity.”⁵

Even When They Knew Not Why

When Sister Gerard and I started out, our shared aspiration and hope for our family was to achieve “the greatest of all the gifts of God”: the gift of eternal life.⁶ From that time forward, we intentionally sought to heed His counsel, believing that He would bless us beyond our ability to comprehend. Every significant decision we made was measured against the standard of eternal life. When we could not see clearly, when we could not suppose, even after repeated petitions to the Lord, we would ask ourselves which choice was more compatible with the covenant path leading to our hope for eternal life. We anchored ourselves to the hope of eternal life because we needed a clear beacon to pursue, particularly when day-to-day choices were ambiguous and at times even confusing. In addition, a clear objective inoculated us against the gradual slide to relativism, in which many begin to measure their conduct against that of others, no longer seeking to do the will of the Lord but settling for just doing something better than someone else.

We also learned to trust in the Lord and have confidence in our choices, even when our mortal

minds were occasionally confused. President Harold B. Lee said, “When we understand more than we know with our minds, when we understand with our hearts, then we know that the Spirit of the Lord is working upon us.”⁷ Our pursuit of eternal life requires us to elevate our understanding beyond the knowledge of our mortal minds.

Paul captured this principle in his First Epistle to the Corinthians:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. . . .

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God.⁸

Later in 1 Corinthians, Paul vividly described what we often experience in our mortal life: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; . . . now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”⁹ Paul reminded us that in mortality, as we see “through a glass, darkly,” we only see in part.

Our vision is often limited to our mortal understanding as a reflection of what we see in the glass. As Ammon might have said, “It is difficult to suppose.” President James E. Faust said, “Often we do not have even a glimpse of our potential for happiness and accomplishment in this life and in eternity because, as the Apostle Paul said, ‘Now we see through a glass, darkly.’”¹⁰ In the original Greek, *darkly* means “obscurely”—puzzling or tough to figure out.

Our daily walk through life can seem puzzling or tough to figure out. We face decisions every day that define who we are. Yet—like looking through glass, darkly—we are left to choose based on our limited knowledge or experience gained in mortality. Many of these decisions may seem quite routine, but others are life altering. Regardless of how routine or how significant, every decision is a choice that can move us either closer to or away from our ultimate destination.

You are at a time in your life when you are establishing patterns in what principles will govern your decision-making process. Elder Robert D. Hales once described this as “the decade of decisions.”¹¹ Does your pattern reflect exercising faith, seeking to know His will, trusting the Lord, heeding His counsel, and keeping the commandments, even when you cannot suppose what lies ahead? What guides you as you deal with more significant decisions, such as what your course of study will be or whom you will seek for eternal companionship—or whether you will choose to put off such significant decisions, reasoning with your mortal mind that other matters take priority?

As we search the scriptures and liken them unto ourselves, we can learn from the experiences of those who have gone before. Adam, Nephi, Sariah, Joseph Smith, and many others all had moments when they felt it was unclear what they should do. They too may not have supposed exactly why or how they were to overcome obstacles in their lives. But each example shows that while they did not know, they followed the Lord’s commandments and trusted the Lord even when their mortal minds may have suggested otherwise.

I am always inspired when I read the account of Adam in the book of Moses. Adam and Eve had children and took care of the necessities of life by tilling the land and tending their flocks. The scriptures record that the Lord

gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.¹²

Here we find Adam, who had conversed with God, responding to the angel that he knew not why he offered sacrifices, save the Lord commanded him to do so. Nevertheless, Adam hearkened to the voice of the Lord and remained faithful in keeping the commandments, even when he knew not why.

Could Adam have supposed the significance of his obedience or the purpose of offering sacrifices prior to the angel’s instruction? Yet he acted in faith, and the angel taught him. “And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon [him].”¹³

Another oft-cited example is Nephi. We are all familiar with the efforts to secure the plates of Laban. After two failed attempts, Nephi recorded that he “was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do.”¹⁴ But how many of us remember that a few chapters later Nephi was commanded to make two sets of plates? “Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not.”¹⁵

While Nephi did not “know” the purpose of the second set of plates—the small plates—today we understand that much of what he recorded was used to replace the loss of 116 pages of manuscript translated from the first part of the Book of Mormon, the book of Lehi.¹⁶

Elder Kim B. Clark explained:

Without Lehi’s record [which was lost with the 116 pages], there would be no account of Lehi’s family, the journey to the promised land, or the origin of the Nephites and Lamanites.

In May of 1829 the Lord revealed to Joseph a plan, centuries in the making, to replace the book of Lehi with what we now know as the small plates of Nephi.¹⁷

Do you think Nephi could have supposed more than 2,000 years ago that the second set of plates, the small set of plates, would preserve the family record, now read and recounted by millions who have come to a knowledge of the truth through the conversion power of the Book of Mormon?

While we often point to Nephi and his father Lehi, I would invite you to consider Nephi’s mother, Sariah. It is significant that Sariah did all they did, but she did not have the benefit of the visions of her husband or of her son. We are all more like her than we are like Lehi and Nephi. Most of us will not have direct visions and hear the voice of the Lord or see angels. Neither did she. But she was faithful and heeded the Lord’s commandments to leave her comfortable life and

home in Jerusalem and head out into the wilderness to a place she had never seen, on a path she had never traveled, with only the confirmation of the Spirit that, somewhere out there, the Lord would guide them to the promised land and that the promised life would be better than anything she could imagine.

After feeling great anguish, feeling that her sons may have perished in their efforts to secure the plates, upon their return, the scriptures recount:

*She spake, saying: Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and given them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them.*¹⁸

She obeyed, and God was true to His promise, even though she did not see that for many years and not until after much tribulation. Sariah is but one example of many strong women in ancient times and even now who clearly must have felt and understood the promise revealed to us in our day that “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say.”¹⁹

Yet another example in our dispensation is the young Prophet Joseph Smith. As we commemorate the bicentennial of the Restoration, beginning with the First Vision, we can look to his experience and learn from his example. What did Joseph really know as he began his quest to understand his relationship to God and to seek answers to his prayers?

The record recounts that after reading in the book of James—“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God”²⁰—Joseph reflected on this powerful passage “again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, [he] did; for how to act [he] did not know.”²¹ But he trusted the Bible’s promise that said to “ask in faith, nothing wavering.”²²

Do you think that young Joseph supposed beforehand what would occur in the Sacred Grove? Do you think that young Joseph had any

idea that his seemingly simple act of faith would open the heavens to commence his foreordained role to begin the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dispensation?

Do you think the Saints who endured unspeakable adversity crossing the plains could have supposed that their sacrifice would lead to temples dotting the earth or that one day more than 16 million Church members would be invited by a living prophet to assist in the gathering of Israel on both sides of the veil?

Do you think that we can suppose today what the next many years of our lives may bring and what great blessings God will grant unto us?

These scriptural accounts give us insight and hope. They help us understand that we are not alone, for in many ways our walk in life is very similar to that of the noble and great ones who have preceded us. They too walked by faith, and they too did not always know how to accomplish what the Lord commanded. However, we see a pattern emerge in each example. They exercised faith, demonstrated a deep trust in the Lord by heeding His counsel, and kept the commandments—even when they knew not—and He blessed them beyond anything they could suppose.

Each of us will have moments when the pressures of this life seem to cloud our ability to see clearly. The world will test our resolve to heed the counsel of the Lord and live the commandments. We sometimes begin to despair and start to convince ourselves that our challenges are so unusual that no one has ever gone through them before. We may even slip into self-pity, which makes us vulnerable to the enticings of the adversary, who desires that we become miserable like unto him.²³ We wonder if we will ever get a decent job and be able to provide for our family. We fret over relationships. We worry that we are not yet in a secure position to provide for a family, so we rationalize delaying eternal life choices. We feel the intense pressures of the world to abandon the Savior as merely “a foolish and a vain hope.”²⁴ We may even go so far as to feel that the Lord has forgotten us and that we are all alone.

But just as did those who have gone before, each of us will have moments when life's pressures will force us to turn for help. One of the great tests in life is how we respond in those moments. Elder Robert D. Hales asked, "Won't all of us, sometime, have reason to ask, 'O God, where art thou?'"²⁵

During the Prophet Joseph's imprisonment in Liberty Jail, when he cried out, the Lord reminded him:

All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. . . .

*Therefore, hold on thy way. . . . Fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.*²⁶

During these moments of despair, when we feel all is lost, we are reminded:

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. . . .

*Be not wise in thine own eyes.*²⁷

The pattern is to trust in the Lord in those moments in which we do not understand, we cannot suppose, or "we see through a glass, darkly." Just as did Adam, Nephi, Sariah, Joseph, and many others, we should turn first to the Lord. This is not always easy, as our natural man instincts take us to our mortal understanding. We often shift from trust in the Lord and put trust in the arm of the flesh.²⁸ This is a natural tendency that we have been cautioned against. Nephi described the "cunning plan of the evil one" as including "the vainness, . . . frailties, and . . . foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves."²⁹

But, to be abundantly clear, Nephi continued, "But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God."³⁰

In the April 2018 general conference, President Russell M. Nelson said, "In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost."³¹

Our Washington Experience

Lest we feel these experiences are for another time or for another people, in closing, I would like to share a recent personal experience that illustrates the principles shared today. It occurred just a few months ago while I was on a stake conference assignment in Spokane, Washington. Prior to our Saturday afternoon meetings, the stake president and I made a ministering visit to the Pulver family. The Pulvers were identified from a long list of names submitted by the bishops and high councilors. The stake president did not know them well but felt a strong spiritual impression that we should visit.

We arrived at the home and sat down with Brother Pulver, who considered himself less active and had not been to the temple since his mission nineteen years earlier. Sister Pulver was working, and he was tending the children. Brother Pulver was gracious but wondered why we had decided to call on his family. As we started to visit, I asked where they had grown up. Brother Pulver indicated that his wife was from the small town of Ferron, Utah. I responded that I had been in Ferron just ten months earlier on assignment, and I started to recount a sacred experience I had had with a faithful sister during a home visit.

Brother Pulver blurted out, "You were the one."

It turned out that the faithful sister I visited in Ferron was Sister Pulver's mother—Brother Pulver's mother-in-law. Brother Pulver gave me permission to share excerpts from his journal, in which he recorded the details of our visit that day:

After I mentioned Ferron, Elder Gerard lit up, saying that he had been to Ferron. It was at that moment everything connected for me, and I knew why he was at my home. When Genevieve [Sister Pulver's mother] was hours from passing away, Elder Gerard visited her. . . . As he explained his story, the Holy Spirit entered my home to a degree I have never encountered before. The feeling was nearly palpable, and it testified of the Lord's hand in our meeting.

It turns out that I was one of the last to visit with Sister Pulver's mother, Genevieve, before her passing. When we had arrived at her home in Ferron,

she was lying on the sofa in a semiconscious state. Sister Pulver's father, a very faithful man, indicated that she had very little time to live. We sat at the small kitchen table and quietly visited, as we could hear her strained breathing in the adjoining room. As we prepared to leave, Sister Pulver's father asked if we would give his wife a blessing. As we placed hands on her head, the Spirit of the Lord filled the room. It was a very sacred moment for us, as the veil of eternity was parted for a brief moment. She passed a few hours later.

As I shared the details of the final hours of his mother-in-law's life, it became clear there was more to the story. Let me again read from Brother Pulver's journal:

About a year earlier, Genevieve [Sister Pulver's mother] was spending the holidays with us. She came into my bedroom and had a conversation with only me at that time. She asked my opinion on what to do with the continuation of her cancer treatment. I asked her what she wanted to do, and she told me she wanted to be done. She asked me then to take care of her daughter and grandkids. Then she did not ask, she told me, "You take this family to the temple."

As we concluded the visit to their home, the Pulvers agreed to attend the Saturday evening session of stake conference for the first time in many years. Furthermore, they committed to fulfill the request of Sister Pulver's mother to take the family to the temple. I am pleased to report that when I visited with the Pulvers just last week—when they authorized me to share parts of the journal—they indicated that Brother Pulver had recently attended the temple and that Sister Pulver is finishing the temple preparation lessons to receive her own endowment in the next few weeks.

Let me quote once again from Brother Pulver's journal:

The Lord had the foresight to first assign Elder Gerard to the stake conference in the Ferron area. Then he was sent to the Spokane Valley East Stake just a little over a year after I had had a conversation with Genevieve. I have no doubt Genevieve had influence

in this event. I do not believe this was a chance coincidence. This would not have happened if the Lord had not intervened. The Lord's faithful disciples followed His promptings exactly as He wanted. It wasn't just the events of this meeting that make it miraculous. The feeling of extreme power and extreme peace is what made this encounter life changing and something I will never forget. The gospel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, it's real, and it is wonderful.

My dear brothers and sisters, I would have never supposed that my time with Grandma Genevieve just prior to her passing was in preparation to meet her daughter and family a few months later in fulfillment of her final request to make sure they received the blessings of the temple. I knew not what the Lord had planned, but as I exercised faith, put my trust in the Lord, and heeded His counsel—even when I could not suppose—I became once again a witness to the great blessings He grants to His children.

As we continue life's journey, I would encourage you now during your schooling years and throughout your life to always place your trust in the Lord, to heed His counsel, and—even when the path is not clear—to know the great blessings He will grant unto you. And while we often cannot suppose in our daily lives precisely what great blessings we will receive, the day will come when we will look back just as Ammon did and declare, "For could we have supposed when we started that this journey we call mortality would lead us to the greatest blessing of all, even the gift of eternal life, to live as families in the presence of our Heavenly Father and our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ?"

I bear witness that They live. I bear witness that God, our Eternal Father, is the Father of our spirits and that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. And in this commemoration year, let us follow the Prophet Joseph Smith's example and turn to the Lord, knowing with confidence that we can hear Him. May we lift our sights to eternity and learn to listen is my humble invitation and prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “How Do You #HearHim? A Special Invitation,” Church of Jesus Christ, 26 February 2020, churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/how-do-you-hear-him-a-special-invitation?lang=eng; also Luke 9:35; Mark 9:7; JS—H 1:17.
2. Alma 17:5.
3. Alma 26:27.
4. Alma 26:1.
5. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel in Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2002.
6. D&C 14:7.
7. Harold B. Lee, “The Message: When Your Heart Tells You Things Your Mind Does Not Know,” *New Era*, February 1971.
8. JST, 1 Corinthians 2:9–11.
9. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
10. James E. Faust, “It Can’t Happen to Me,” *Ensign*, May 2002; quoting 1 Corinthians 13:12.
11. Robert D. Hales, “Our Essential Spiritual Agency,” BYU devotional address, 14 September 2010.
12. Moses 5:5–6.
13. Moses 5:9.
14. 1 Nephi 4:6.
15. 1 Nephi 9:5.
16. See D&C 3.
17. Kim B. Clark, “Thou Art Joseph,” worldwide devotional for young adults, Church of Jesus Christ, 7 May 2017, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/broadcasts/worldwide-devotional-for-young-adults/2017/05/thou-art-joseph?lang=eng.
18. 1 Nephi 5:8.
19. D&C 82:10.
20. James 1:5.
21. Joseph Smith—History 1:12; see also verse 11.
22. James 1:6.
23. See 2 Nephi 2:27.
24. Alma 30:13.
25. Robert D. Hales, “Waiting upon the Lord: Thy Will Be Done,” *Ensign*, November 2011; quoting D&C 121:1.
26. D&C 122:7, 9.
27. Proverbs 3:5, 7.
28. See 2 Nephi 4:34.
29. 2 Nephi 9:28.
30. 2 Nephi 9:29.
31. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018.