

“Called to Serve”

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As President Merrill Oaks was so kindly introducing me, it occurred to me that I have now had the privilege of being introduced in the Marriott Center by President Dallin Oaks and President Merrill Oaks. I love them both! I did not know their father, but I did know their mother, Stella. She was a very special woman, and one can see her spiritual genes in Merrill and Dallin Oaks.

I am delighted to be with you tonight and to be in the presence of President Rex Lee and his wife, Janet. We sometimes feel a sense of being kindred spirits with certain people when we first get to know them. These friendships are not friendships of initiation, but of resumption. I certainly feel that way about President and Sister Lee, and about others on this stand whom I’ve come to know, again.

As we approach Easter, with all its glorious significance, we should rejoice in God’s great gift of immortality, unearned and universally given—“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). However, God’s greatest gift—eternal life—will be given only to a comparative few: those who respond to Jesus’ invitation, “Come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). It is this invitation to discipleship about which I will speak tonight.

The great gift of the Resurrection, therefore, will be “added upon” by the exaltation inherent in eternal life, which is contingent upon the degree of our discipleship.

Consistent with the lovely invocation tonight, I ask for your hearts as well as your ears, because we will consider some of the deep things of God. Such doctrines of the kingdom should not be treated superficially or lightly, so I ask for your pondering as well as your listening.

When Jesus took upon him the heavy, atoning yoke to redeem all mankind by paying the agonizing price for our sins, he thereby experienced what he himself termed the “fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God” (D&C 76:107). The phrase itself makes the soul tremble. Jesus also volunteered to take upon him additional agony that he might experience and thus know certain things “according to the flesh”; namely, human sicknesses and infirmities and human griefs, including those not associated with sin

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(Alma 7:11–12). Therefore, as a result of his great atonement, Jesus was filled with unique empathy and with perfect mercy.

In turn, however, he who bore the atoning yoke has asked, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me” (Matthew 11:29). So the taking of Jesus’ yoke upon us constitutes serious discipleship. I speak especially to those of you who are young, saying to you that there is no greater calling, no greater challenge, and no greater source of joy—both proximate joy and ultimate joy—than is found in the process of discipleship. This process brings its own joys and reassurances. Don’t, however, expect the world to understand or to value your discipleship. They will not. In a way, they may admire you from afar, but they will be puzzled about the priorities resulting from your devotion.

Shouldering the yoke of discipleship greatly enhances both our adoration and knowledge of Jesus, because then we experience, firsthand, through our parallel but smaller-scaled experiences, a small but instructive portion of what the Savior experienced. In this precious process, the more we do what Jesus did (allow our wills to be “swallowed up in the will of the Father”), the more we will learn (Mosiah 15:7). This emulation directly enhances our adoration of Jesus.

Simultaneously, in this same process, the more we become like Jesus, the more we come to know him. There may even be, more than we now know, some literalness in his assertion “When ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). We lack deep understanding of the implications of that remark of Jesus. As with so many things, he is telling us more than we are now prepared to receive.

But back to submissiveness. The Prophet Joseph Smith, writing redemptively to his rebellious brother William, said, “God requires the will of his creatures, to be swallowed up in his will.” The Prophet Joseph then pled with William to make “one tremendous [*sic*] effort

[to] overcome [his] passions, and please God” (Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984], p. 115). Alas, William didn’t do it, just as some of us fail to overcome our passions and thereby fail to “please God.” We are too busy pleasing ourselves.

In contrast, meek Enoch reached a point in his discipleship, wrote Paul, when Enoch received a testimony that he pleased God (see Hebrews 11:5). Ponder that, brothers and sisters. One can come to the point where he or she knows that they please God.

One mistake we can make during this mortal experience, especially in an academic setting, is to value knowledge apart from the other qualities to be developed in submissive discipleship. Knowledge is very important. Its discovery, its preservation, its perpetuation is one reason we have this special university. Yet being knowledgeable, by itself, while leaving undeveloped the virtues of love, mercy, meekness, and patience, is not enough for full discipleship. Mere intellectual assent to a truth, if it is unapplied, deprives us of the relevant, personal experiences. It’s like hearing a lecture without experiencing a lab. It’s like being briefed on a field trip but never taking the field trip. There were probably orientation briefings in the premortal world about how this mortal life would unfold for us, but the real experience is another thing!

Thus, although knowledge is clearly very important, standing alone it cannot save us. I worry sometimes in various Church classes that we get so busy discussing the doctrines that talking about them almost becomes a substitute for applying them! One cannot improve upon the sobering words of King Benjamin, who said, “Now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them” (Mosiah 4:10). Such is still the test. Deeds, not words—and becoming, not describing—are dominant in true discipleship!

Of necessity, of course, we are to teach and learn the doctrines. We would be spiritually

stranded without them, and, likewise, without the saving and exalting gospel ordinances, because

in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh. [D&C 84:20–21]

So it is that discipleship requires all of us to translate doctrines, covenants, ordinances, and teachings into improved personal behavior. Otherwise, brothers and sisters, we may be doctrinally rich but end up developmentally poor!

The celestial attributes—such as love, patience, mercy, meekness, and submissiveness—embody what we are to become. They are not just a litany of qualities to be recited! Awareness of them—even articulate awareness—without their application will not do. Furthermore, these same attributes cannot be developed in the abstract. The relevant experiences are required, even when you and I would try to avoid them. Moreover, our individual developmental schedules reflect God’s timetable, not ours. His timetable, if followed, prepares us incrementally for the journey of discipleship and for going home!

Any serious disciple yearns to go home to Heavenly Father and to be welcomed there by Jesus. But the Prophet Joseph Smith declared we cannot go where they are unless we become more like them in the principles and attributes and character they possess (see *Teachings*, p. 216).

Of the many restored truths, God has surely given us “enough and to spare.” Soberingly, however, we have been told that unto whom “much is given much is required” (D&C 82:3). I hope we feel the cutting edge of the word *required*. It is used instead of the milder *expected*. Neither does the Lord say, “It would

be nice if . . .” The word is *required*, bringing us back again to the need for submissiveness in discipleship.

The gospel’s rich and true doctrines combine to constitute a call to a new and more abundant life, but this is a lengthy process. It requires much time, learning through relevant experiences, keeping covenants, and receiving the essential ordinances—all in order to spur us along the discipleship path of personal progression. In the journey of discipleship we lose our old selves. The natural man and the natural woman are “put off,” and then we find ourselves having become more saintly (see Mosiah 3:19). We see such saintliness all about us in the Church—quiet, good women and men, not particularly status-full, who are becoming saintly. This is what should be happening in the lives of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

There are even some noticeable and helpful tuggings—you and I feel them at times—to remind us who we really are. As eternal beings living very temporarily in time, it is often much more than a whisper that tells us we are strangers here and that our ultimate home is someplace else (see “O My Father,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 292).

Walking and overcoming by faith is not easy. For one thing, the dimension of time constantly constrains our perspective. Likewise, the world steadily tempts us. No wonder we are given instructive words from Jesus about the narrowness and the straightness of the only path available to return home: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And then he said, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Jesus laid down strict conditions.

We live in a world in which, happily, many others regard themselves as Christians. Some live rich and marvelous lives. But there are some who style themselves as Christians who admire but do not worship Jesus. Some regard him as a great teacher but not as the Great Redeemer. Yes, Jesus is the generous Lord of

the Expansive Universe, but, brothers and sisters, he is also the Lord of the Narrow Path! Some people forget his latter lordship.

The ravines on both sides of that narrow path—which, by the way, has much loose gravel on it—are deep and dangerous. Moreover, until put off, the shifting, heavy, unsettling burden of the natural man tilts us and sways us. It is dangerous.

Nor does the natural man or the natural woman go away quietly or easily. Hence, the most grinding form of calisthenics we will ever know involves the individual isometrics required to put off the natural man. Time and again the new self is pitted against the stubborn old self. Sometimes, at least it's so with me, just when at last we think the job is done, then the old self reminds us that he or she has not fully departed yet.

A vital, personal question for each of us, therefore, is, "Are we steadily becoming what gospel doctrines are designed to help us become?" Or are we merely rich inheritors of an immense treasure trove of truth but poor investors in the process of personal development so essential to discipleship?

Significantly, when the Lord described his purposes by saying, "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39), he used the word *work*, even though his is a "marvelous work." For us, becoming even as Jesus is certainly is work (see 3 Nephi 27:27)! Of necessity, this process requires the cross of discipleship to be taken up daily—not occasionally or seasonally.

Sometimes, as we commence taking up the cross, we ignore or neglect the first part of Jesus' instruction. He said, "Deny [yourselves], and take up [your] cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). This self-denial is especially challenging in a world filled with so many sensual and secular stimuli. Greed and lust, though they have always been friends, have never formed quite the cartel that they have formed

now. It is global. It is profitable.

Denying oneself has never been popular as a lifestyle, and it is clearly not today. Self-denial is portrayed by many as too puritanic and too ascetic. Scoffers in this nation have acquired powerful pulpits from which they bray their message, which constantly puts down discipleship and encourages the natural man to think highly of himself and to please himself.

What is it that we are we to deny ourselves? The ascendancy of any appetites or actions that produce not only the seven deadly sins but all the others. Happily, self-denial, when we practice it, brings great relief. It represents emancipation from all the "morning-after" feelings, whether caused by adultery or gluttony. True disciples, being concerned with tomorrow, are very careful about today!

Self-denial also includes not letting our hearts become too set on any trivial or worldly thing. Then we can learn the great lessons about the relationship of righteousness to the powers and the joys of heaven.

There's a lot of talk currently in America about empowerment. Certainly economic and political slavery should concern us, and rightly so, but what of being in bondage in other ways? What of emancipation from the enslavement resulting from so many subtle forms of servitude? Listen to these words of Peter: "For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19). So many different things can overcome and capture us.

The fundamental fact is that if we do not deny ourselves, we are diverted. Even if not wholly consumed with the things of the world, we are still diverted sufficiently to make serious discipleship impossible. As a consequence, all the gifts and talents God has given us are not put meekly on the altar to serve others and to please God. Instead, we withhold to please ourselves. Diversion, therefore, is not necessarily gross transgression, but it is a genuine deprivation—especially if we consider what

we might have become and what more we might have done to bless and to help others.

Ironically, brothers and sisters, the natural man who is so very selfish in so many ordinary ways is strangely unselfish in that he reaches for too few of the things that bring real joy. He settles for a mess of pottage instead of eternal joy.

By denying the desires of the natural man (to the degree that these exist in each of us), we avoid this diversion, making it easier for us to take up the cross of discipleship. Of course, when it occurs in our lives, emancipation from various forms of bondage brings no celebrating parades, nor does it make the evening news. But it is big news because *we come off conqueror!*

So it is that discipleship, far from being ascetic, is to choose joy over pleasure. It is to opt for the things of eternity over the trendy and appealing things of the moment. Eventually we become readied for the final moment of consecration, when, gladly and completely, we let our wills be swallowed up in the will of the Father. Jesus did this in Gethsemane and on Calvary: “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). What was God’s will? That Jesus complete the Atonement. Even so, Jesus cried out, “Take away this cup from me” (Mark 14:36), and still later, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Yet Jesus yielded.

Is it possible to develop discipleship when one has no initial, inner desires for discipleship? I don’t know. Can we plant inner “desires” in someone against their will? External exhortation of such individuals won’t usually produce much change. For most of us, however, even when the inner desire is there, it requires periodic sharpening of some outward circumstances to quicken any existing inner desires and to get us to act upon these. It was so with Abraham. Abraham desired a better life, more happiness, and the blessings of the holy priesthood (see Abraham 1:1-2). Outward circumstances were a spur to

Abraham’s yearnings, but clearly he had firm and basic desires of discipleship.

It’s different in the case of prodigals, in the sense that turning away from the world and toward God, toward home, requires of them to make what I call the Great Pivot. This Great Pivot begins slowly and tentatively when the mind perceives *what is* in comparison with *what might be*. This represents the first tentative steps in the process of beginning to develop “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Regarding the varying degrees of progress we have made in our personal development, ponder, if you will, this bit of imagery. What if, brothers and sisters, our individual lack of inner, spiritual symmetry were somehow visibly reflected in our outward physiology? How odd, swollen, and misshapen, or anemically underdeveloped some of us would appear! All intellect and no heart! Earnest and eager, but without a trace of empathy! Egoistic with not a single sinew of mercy! Fixated on pleasing self with little concern for neighbors. Ciphers as to substance, but perhaps with large, mortal wardrobes. Perhaps this latter condition is the flip side of “Look, the emperor has no clothes,” in which one would say, “Look, the clothes have no emperor!” People have so many trappings that cover the absence of substance of a spiritual nature—it’s all about us in the world’s passing parade: “Princes come and princes go; an hour of pomp, an hour of show” (lyrics from *Kismet*).

Of course, our actual degree of inward, spiritual symmetry is somewhat hidden—at least until we get to know each other and to experience each other! So, the lingering question should not be “How many imperfections do I have?” but, rather, “Is my discipleship sufficiently serious that I am working patiently and steadily to overcome those weaknesses, perhaps even changing some of them into strengths?” (See Ether 12:27.)

Sometimes our outward selves are no better indicators of what we’re really like

than the mortal résumés that are feverishly circulated in the academic and business worlds. Usually these résumés give little reflection of character or conduct. Similarly, one’s bibliographies seldom hint as to what kind of neighbor one actually is.

If, however, discipleship becomes a daily duty, this genuinely helps us in developing our spiritual symmetry and character. We then have much less concern, for instance, with things of the moment. The banter in the cafeteria with peers or at the office round table with colleagues would so reflect, and, likewise, family discussions around the dinner table. We would also be much less concerned with our public image and with what “they” think, being, instead, much more concerned with having Jesus’ image in our countenance. The one-upmanship we typically see connected with intellectual prowess and other forms of prowess is opposite to what discipleship calls for. Jesus’ aim is to lift us up, not to put us down.

Given all you and I yet lack in our spiritual symmetry and character formation, no wonder God must use so intensively the little time available to develop each of us in this brief, second estate. One’s life, therefore, is brevity compared to eternity—like being dropped off by a parent for a day at school. But what a day!

For the serious disciple the resulting urgency means there can be few extended reveries and recesses and certainly no sabbaticals—all this in order to hasten God’s relentless remodeling of each of us! Parenthetically, I don’t know how it is for you, but though the reveries, the special moments come, they are not extended. Soon the drumroll of events, even difficulties, resumes. There is so much to get done in the brief time we have in this mortal classroom.

Considering what we are, compared with what we have the power to become, should give us great spiritual hope. Think of it this way. There are some very serene, blue lakes on

this planet situated in cavities that once were red, belching volcanos. Likewise, there are beautiful, green, tropical mountains formed from ancient, hot extrusions. The parallel transformation of humans is much more remarkable than all of that—much more beautiful and much more everlasting!

So it is, amid the vastness of his creations, God’s shaping personalness is felt in the details of our lives—not only in the details of the galaxies and molecules but, much more importantly, in the details of our own lives. Somehow, brothers and sisters, God is providing these individual tutorials for us while, at the same time, he is overseeing cosmic funerals and births—as one earth passes away, so another is born (see Moses 1:38). It is marvelous that he would attend to us so personally in the midst of those cosmic duties.

Are we willing, however, to be significantly remodeled even by his loving hands? Enoch was. He marveled over God’s vast creations, but when deeply reassured, he fervently exclaimed, “Yet thou art there.” God is ever “there”! (See Moses 7:30.) Significantly, Enoch also exclaimed over three attributes of God’s character, declaring that God is just, merciful, and kind forever! You and I are counting on those attributes every day, aren’t we! And God’s using those qualities to bless us should stir us to develop them to operate in behalf of others.

God is very serious about the joy of his children! Why should we be surprised? God desires us to become more like him so we can go home to him. He is a perfect Father!

Where would we be, in fact, without God’s long-suffering? Given the divine sorrow each of us here has caused our God and our Savior, what a divine comfort to know that when we “get it all together,” it will be mercifully said, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42). No more

reassuring and important words could be said to any of us than these.

What ineffable love! What stunning patience! How wrenching it would be otherwise, having been resurrected, to be forever wincing over having displeased him. Oh, the marvel of his divine mercy and his plan of happiness!

One day, if we are like Enoch, we will, as the man or the woman of Christ, know that we, too, please God. Discipleship's enlarged capacity to serve will bring enlarged joys. No wonder we read lamentations from the Lord about those who do not accept his invitation to discipleship.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! [Matthew 23:37]

Or, from the Book of Mormon:

O ye fair ones, how could ye have departed from the ways of the Lord! O ye fair ones, how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you! [Mormon 6:17]

These lamentations measure the deep love Jesus has for us. They underscore the importance of our accepting his invitation to discipleship.

Even so, Jesus prayed for us and for all of his followers not to be taken "out of the world." But instead, he desires that we might be kept from evil (see John 17:15). We stay in the classroom until school is out, and there appears to be "none other way."

It is left to each of us to balance contentment with what God has allotted to us in life with some divine discontent as to what we are in comparison with what we have the power to become. Discipleship creates this balance on the straight and narrow path.

Only a few of you here will remember the old Popeye cartoons in which he proclaimed self-contentedly, "I yam what I yam, and that's all I yam. I'm Popeye, the sailor man." We are beckoned by a very different call—by the Master who asks us to become "even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27).

Though most of you are young, I continue to be heartened by how far along so many of you already are in your discipleship for your age. I mingle with you, hear about you, and sometimes counsel you. In these and other ways I become aware of your quiet, spiritual triumphs.

An example would be these next words that were spoken recently by the husband of just a little over one year of Jennifer Cracroft Lewis. Her funeral was held here in Provo several months ago. Though grieving over his wife of such a short season, Brother Lewis spoke at the funeral with composure as well as courage:

I have a testimony of this gospel. I know that the ordinances in the temple that I have partaken of with Jennifer are eternal. This gospel is so great that I will be with her again and I will hold her flesh again as she is resurrected. I have a testimony of this Church, and Jennifer has a testimony of this Church which she bore with me, that Jesus is the Christ. . . . He was resurrected as we will be.

He continued, saying,

One of our favorite songs, which we will now sing as a congregation, was "Called to Serve." I believe, as the scriptures have pointed out, that Jennifer, one of the best missionaries I ever had a chance to witness, is called to further service. She has been called home to preach the gospel to those who have not yet received it. I ask that this song be sung with meaning.

Then, as invited, we all sang "Called to Serve." Weeping and singing were several of Jennifer's

missionary companions and her mission president and his wife. I always love to hear that song sung, but I've never heard it sung like that before! Not far from here, on a new headstone, are these words: "Jennifer Cracroft Lewis, September 13, 1968–January 26, 1994, Called to Serve."

This is emblematic of the strength I see and feel in so many of you. God's work here does proceed—here and on the other side of the veil, where those like Jennifer continue to "build up" the kingdom.

Discipleship turns on our spiritual sensitivities. It increases the "aliveness" in each of us. These sensitivities are enhanced, not diminished, with discipleship. It is part of what the scriptures call becoming "alive in Christ because of our faith" (2 Nephi 25:25). In contrast, there's a dullness and a sameness about sin. With discipleship we learn to "act for ourselves," rather than merely letting ourselves be "acted upon" by circumstances.

One of the dangers we face in discipleship is drifting. This can occur when we become "weary and faint in [our] minds," to use Paul's phrase (Hebrews 12:3). This is one of the tragedies of failing to be serious disciples—not that we become necessarily wicked, but, rather, that those who drift merely exist; they are not truly alive.

No wonder the doctrines must be kept pure. No wonder they must be taught again and again! Furthermore, some doctrines, like faith and repentance, are both principles and also vital processes. Other important doctrines, like dispensationalism, for instance, inform and instruct us, but these do not necessarily develop us personally.

Paul warns those of us on the path of discipleship to be diligent, "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you" (Hebrews 12:15). Travel on the straight and narrow path occurs in company with other disciples, imperfect as we all are. Side by side, as we all are, means that there are ways in which we can

become offended or even embittered. Given the imperfections of all of us in the Church, offenses will come and disappointments will occur. How we handle these is so crucial. We must be quick to prune any personal sprig of bitterness so that our wills can be truly swallowed up in the will of the Father. When we put off the natural man and the natural woman, we put off jealousy, resentment, and self-pity.

Now, may I close on a personal note to illustrate a dimension of discipleship. Regarding you as graduate students, not as lower-division students, in discipleship, I will speak to you about something we don't usually speak about in the Church.

We sometimes speak of defining moments. These defining moments in our lives usually focus on single episodes that can sometimes be outwardly, as well as inwardly, quite traumatic. Yet these defining moments are usually preceded by small, subtle preparatory moments. Moreover, the defining moments are also followed by many smaller moments that are shaped by the preceding and defining moments.

Here's an illustration. In a long ago May, in 1945, there was such a moment for me on the island of Okinawa at age eighteen. There was certainly no heroism on my part, but, rather, a blessing for me and others during the shelling of our position by Japanese artillery. After repeated shellings that overshot our position, their artillery finally zeroed in. They should have then fired for effect, but there was a divine response to at least one frightened, self-ish prayer. The shelling halted. The prayer was accompanied by my pledge of a lifetime of service—a pledge that, though imperfectly, I've tried to keep. With this blessing and pledge, I was nudged toward discipleship without realizing what service would be required. I knew I had been blessed, and I knew that God knew that I knew. I remembered the pledge after the war when my overseas savings gladly went to

finance a mission. This mission, of course, was yet another step in the direction of discipleship.

Now, having described for you that defining moment, I want to certify to many subsequent and subtle moments that are at least as important. Unlike the roar and crash of artillery, followed by a delivering silence, these smaller moments involve the Lord's periodic whisperings to my mind. Over the years, and even on this very day, these guide me. They reassure me. They give me, from time to time, in the words of the Prophet Joseph, "sudden strokes of ideas" and, occasionally, the pure flow of intelligence (see *Teachings*, p. 151). These moments are as real for me as what happened on Okinawa. These are inward things, often taking the form of a directing phrase or even a one-liner. I have found with experience what I think you will find: The Lord gives more instructions than he gives explanations.

Probably ten years ago I received a letter from a sensitive and thoughtful missionary in the MTC, asking if I would write his companion a letter of encouragement because his companion was determined to quit and go home, having trouble with the language. Because my secretary was absent, I put the letter down on my desk and thought to myself, "I'll send a letter down in a couple of days."

The Spirit said, "Write the letter now."

I borrowed a secretary, who kindly typed as I dictated. I signed the letter, and I said, "I don't know what's going on, but please go mail this letter right now."

Several days later, another letter came from the MTC from the same earnest companion who had written me before, saying in effect,

Dear Brother Maxwell:

I think you ought to know what happened today. My companion had his bags packed. He was having his exit interview. I went to sit in the outer office and said, "Please, Heavenly Father, let that letter come today," and then I ran down to where the

missionaries get the mail, and there it was. I ran back up and knocked on the door and dropped the letter in his lap and said, "I think you ought to read this before you go home." Dear Brother Maxwell, my companion stayed.

Now, what if I had waited a day? Too late. Promptings often come in short, crisp phrases, impressing upon us a certain duty. They come in other ways to each of us. We know what's happening to us, but we don't know all the implications of it. But God knows. It's a sacred process. We know more than we can tell other people—not only for reasons of confidentiality but for what I will call "contextuality." Those who are not a part of the process are not likely to value and understand its significance. They're not apt to appreciate fully.

The whole process of subtle inspiration and revelation is like this metaphor: An inspired painter working on a large canvas does not report to or ask patrons or friends to react to each brushstroke. Nor does he exclaim after each stroke of his paintbrush well before the canvas reflects any emerging pattern. Yet each stroke the painter registers on the canvas is a part of an inspired whole. Without those cumulative, individual strokes, there would be no painting. But each stroke, if examined by itself, is not likely to be appreciated by itself, least of all by those who stand outside the process, outside of the contextuality.

Our personal spiritual experiences are much like this. They are personal. They are spiritual. Often they are not sharable. Some may be, but it takes inspiration to know when to share them. I recall hearing President Marion G. Romney, who combined wit and wisdom, say, "We'd have more spiritual experiences if we didn't talk so much about them."

So we ponder discipleship tonight. Be assured that God is "in the details" and in the subtleties of the defining moments and the preparatory moments. He will reassure you. He will remind you. Sometimes, if you're like

me, he will sometimes reprove you in a highly personal process not understood or appreciated by those outside the context.

In the revelations the Lord speaks of how the voice of his spirit will be felt in our minds. For me, the message is not a whole discourse, but a phrase or a sentence. The Lord says also if we read his words, meaning the scriptures, we will hear his voice. Many here have had private moments of pondering and reading the scriptures when the words “come through” in a clear, clarion way. We know Who it is speaking to us! We’ve all had the experience of going over a scripture many times without having it register. Then, all of a sudden, we’re ready to receive it! We hear the voice of the Lord through his words.

So it is in the process of discipleship. There are more meaningful moments than we use profitably, just as in terms of Christian service there are more opportunities around us than we now use. God is ever ready, if only we were always ready.

Brigham Young taught, “There is not a single condition of life that is entirely unnecessary; there is not one hour’s experience but what is beneficial to all those who make it their study, and aim to improve upon the experience they gain” (*JD* 9:292). I hope we realize that. We may fritter away our time, but life is always

drenched with more opportunities for discipleship than we use. Therefore, all the minutes and the hours and the moments can be, at least incrementally, defining moments.

As one wisely considers the reality of the years, the days, and the moments available to each of us, instead of discipleship being a hectic, anxious thing, it actually causes us to be more calm, more meek and trusting, and more open to God’s tutoring of each of us.

He is “in the details” of your lives. He knows you perfectly, just as Jesus knew the woman of Samaria whom he quizzed as to her belief in the Messiah. She said, “I know that Messias cometh . . . : when he is come, he will tell us all things.”

And Jesus said, “I that speak unto thee am he.”

And she went back to her village all excited and said she’d found the Messiah, and then, significantly, she said to the villagers, “He told me all that ever I did.” (See John 4:25–26, 39–42.)

God knows you perfectly. He loves you perfectly. His Only Begotten Son, Jesus, has asked you, “Come, follow me.” Thus, in a real and majestic sense, each of us here tonight has been “called to serve”! Of this I testify, in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen!