

Seeking Answers to Spiritual Questions

By Sister Tracy Y. Browning

Second Counselor in the Primary General Presidency

Oktubre 2024 sapasap a komperensia

Empty

Empty

October 2024 general conference

Our sincere gospel questions can provide Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ with opportunities to help us grow.

Empty

I know this may come as a surprise, but I'm old enough to remember when we were taught in school that there were nine planets in our solar system. One of those planets, Pluto, was given its name by 11-year-old Venetia Burney of Oxford, England, after its discovery in 1930. And up until 1992, Pluto was believed to be the most distant object in our solar system. During this time, it was common to find childhood papier mâché models of our planetary neighborhood in classrooms and science fairs, each one illustrating Pluto's position on the known border. Many scientists believed that beyond that edge, the outer solar system consisted of empty space.

Empty

However, a lingering question remained within the scientific community regarding the origin of a particular type of comet that astronomers regularly tracked. And that question persisted for decades before the discovery of another distant region of our solar system. With the limited knowledge they had, scientists used those intervening decades to produce significant technological advances that allowed for further study and exploration. Their eventual breakthrough reconfigured our planetary zone and resulted in Pluto being rehomed to this new region of space and our solar system consisting of eight planets.

One leading planetary scientist and principal investigator for the New Horizons space mission tasked with exploring Pluto up close had this to say about this experience: "We thought we understood the geography of our solar system. We didn't. We thought we understood the popula-

tion of planets in our solar system. And we were wrong.”

What is striking to me about this period of space exploration history are some parallels and key distinctions between the metaphorical pursuit of expanding scientific horizons and the journey that we, as children of God, undertake to seek answers to our spiritual questions. Specifically, how we can respond to the limits of our spiritual understanding and prepare ourselves for the next stage of personal growth—and where we can turn for help.

Line upon Line

Asking questions and searching for meaning are a natural and normal part of our mortal experience. At times, not readily having complete answers can bring us to the edge of our understanding, and those limitations can feel frustrating or overwhelming. Wondrously, Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness for all of us is designed to help us progress despite our limitations and accomplish what we cannot accomplish on our own, even without a complete knowledge of all things. God’s plan is merciful toward the limitations of our humanity; provides us with our Savior, Jesus Christ, to be our Good Shepherd; and inspires us to use our agency to choose Him.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf has taught that “asking questions isn’t a sign of weakness,” but rather “it’s a precursor of growth.” Speaking directly to our personal effort as seekers of truth, our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, has taught that we must have “a deep desire” and “ask with a sincere heart[and] real intent, having faith in [Jesus] Christ.” He has further taught that “‘real intent’ means that one really intends to follow the divine direction given.”

Our personal effort to grow in wisdom may lead us to examine our questions, complex or otherwise, through the lens of cause and effect, seeking out and recognizing patterns and then forming narratives to give shape to our understanding and fill in perceived gaps in knowledge. When we consider our pursuit of spiritual knowledge, however, these thoughtful processes may be helpful at times but on their own can be incomplete as we look to discern things pertaining to Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ, Their gospel, Their Church, and Their plan for all of us.

God the Father and His Son’s way of im-

parting Their wisdom to us prioritizes inviting the power of the Holy Ghost to be our personal teacher as we center Jesus Christ in our lives and in our faithful seeking for Their answers and Their meaning. They invite us to discover truth through devoted time spent studying holy scripture and to seek for latter-day revealed truth for our day and our time, imparted by modern-day prophets and apostles. They entreat us to spend regular, worshipful time in the house of the Lord and to take to our knees in prayer “to access information from heaven.” Jesus’s promise to those present to hear His Sermon on the Mount is as true for us in our day as it was during His earthly ministry: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Our Savior assures that “your Father which is in heaven give[s] good things to them that ask him.”

The Lord’s method of teaching is “line upon line, precept upon precept.” We may be required to “wait upon the Lord” in the space between our current line of understanding and the next yet to be delivered. This sacred space can be a place where our greatest spiritual conditioning can occur—the site where we can “bear with patience” our earnest seeking and renew our strength to continue to keep the sacred promises we have made to God through covenant.

Our covenant relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ signals our prevailing citizenship in God’s kingdom. And our residency therein requires aligning our life to divine principles and putting in the effort to grow spiritually.

Obedience

One key principle taught throughout the Book of Mormon is when God’s children choose to demonstrate obedience and keep their covenants, they receive continual spiritual guidance and direction. The Lord has told us that through our obedience and diligence, we may gain knowledge and intelligence. God’s laws and commandments are not designed to be an obstacle in our life but a powerful gateway to personal revelation and spiritual education. President Nelson has taught the crucial truth that “revelation from God is always compatible with His eternal law” and further that “it never contradicts His doctrine.” Your willing obedience to God’s commands, despite not having a complete knowledge of His reasons, places you in the company of His

prophets. Moses 5 teaches us about a particular interaction between Adam and an angel of the Lord.

After the Lord gave Adam and Eve “commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord,” the scriptures say that “Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.” We go on to read that “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.”

Adam’s obedience preceded his understanding and prepared him to receive the sacred knowledge that he was participating in a sacred symbol of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Our humble obedience will, likewise, pave the way for our spiritual discernment of God’s ways and His divine purpose for each of us. Reaching to elevate our obedience brings us closer to our Savior, Jesus Christ, because obedience to His laws and commandments is effectually reaching out to Him.

Additionally, our fidelity to the knowledge and wisdom we have already inherited through our faithful adherence to gospel principles and sacred covenants is crucial preparation for our readiness to receive and be stewards of communications from the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are the source of all truth and share Their wisdom liberally. Also, understanding that we do not possess any personal knowledge independent of God can help us know who to turn to and where to place our primary trust.

Profound Trust

The Old Testament account of Naaman, the military leader who was healed of leprosy by the prophet Elisha, is a particular favorite of mine. The story illustrates how the firm faith of a “little maid” altered the course of one man’s life and, for all believers, revealed the reach of God’s mercy to those who place their trust in Him and His prophet. Though nameless, this young girl also helped to push our understanding forward. And Naaman’s belief on her testimony inspired him to take his petition for healing to God’s chosen servant.

Naaman’s response to the prophet Elisha’s instructions to wash in the river Jordan was at first

skeptical and indignant. But an invitation for him to be obedient to the prophet's counsel made way for his healing and his dramatic understanding that God was real.

We may find that some of our spiritual petitions have reasonably discernible answers and may not create significant discomfort for us. Or, like Naaman, we may find that other needs are more challenging and may create difficult and complex feelings within us. Or, similar to the description of the astronomers' early conclusions about our solar system, in our search for spiritual truth, we may reach less accurate interpretations if we rely exclusively on our own limited understanding, a sorrowful and unintended consequence of which may lead us away from the covenant path. And moreover, some questions may persist until God, who "has all power" and "all wisdom, and all understanding," who "comprehendeth all things" in His mercy, provides enlightenment through our belief on His name.

One significant caution from Naaman's account is that resisting obedience to God's laws and commandments may prolong or delay our growth. We are blessed to have Jesus Christ as our Master Healer. Our obedience to God's laws and commandments can open the way for our Savior to provide the understanding and healing He knows we need, according to His prescribed treatment plan for us.

Elder Richard G. Scott taught that "this life is an experience in profound trust—trust in Jesus Christ, trust in His teachings, trust in our capacity as led by the Holy Spirit to obey those teachings for happiness now and for a purposeful, supremely happy eternal existence. To trust means to obey willingly without knowing the end from the beginning (see Prov. 3:5–7). To produce fruit, your trust in the Lord must be more powerful and enduring than your confidence in your own personal feelings and experience."

Elder Scott continues: "To exercise faith is to trust that the Lord knows what He is doing with you and that He can accomplish it for your eternal good even though you cannot understand how He can possibly do it."

Closing Testimony

Dear friends, I testify that our sincere gospel questions can provide Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ with opportunities to help us grow. My personal effort to seek answers from the Lord to

my own spiritual questions—past and present—
has allowed me to use the space between the
lines of my understanding and God's to practice
obedience to Him and fidelity to the spiritual
knowledge that I currently possess.

I testify that placing your trust in Heavenly
Father and in His prophets, whom He has sent,
will help you to spiritually elevate and push you
forward toward God's expanded horizon. Your
vantage will change because you will change.
God knows that the higher you are, the farther
you can see. Our Savior invites you to make that
climb. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.