



By Elder Dale G. Renlund  
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engaged in the Church of Jesus Christ. For a moment I would like to speak to each one of them. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has taught that “such individuals often stay proximate to—but do not participate fully in—the Church. They will not come inside the chapel, but neither do they leave its porch. These are they who need and are needed by the Church, but who, in part, ‘live without God in the world’ [Mosiah 27:31]” (“Why Not Now?,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 12).

I would echo the invitation of our beloved President Russell M. Nelson as he first spoke to the membership of the Church. He said: “Now, to each member of the Church I say, keep on the covenant path. Your commitment to follow the Savior by making covenants with Him and then keeping those covenants will open the door to every spiritual blessing and privilege available to men, women, and children everywhere.”

He then pleaded: “Now, if you have stepped off the path, may I invite you with all the hope in my heart to please come back. Whatever your concerns, whatever your challenges, there is a place for you in this, the Lord’s Church. You and generations yet unborn will be blessed by your actions *now* to return to the covenant path” (“As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2018, 7; emphasis added).

I bear witness of Him, even Jesus Christ, the Master Minister and Savior of us all. I invite each of us to seek out the “*pobrecitos*,” the “poor little ones” among us who are in need. This is my hope and prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

## Infuriating Unfairness

*Jesus Christ both understands unfairness and has the power to provide a remedy.*

In 1994, a genocide took place in the East African country of Rwanda that was partly due to deep-seated tribal tensions. Estimates are that more than half a million people were killed.<sup>1</sup> Remarkably, the Rwandan people have in large part reconciled,<sup>2</sup> but these events continue to reverberate.

A decade ago, while visiting Rwanda, my wife and I struck up a conversation with another passenger at the Kigali airport. He lamented the unfairness of the genocide and poignantly asked, “If there were a God,

wouldn’t He have done something about it?” For this man—and for many of us—suffering and brutal unfairness can seem incompatible with the reality of a kind, loving Heavenly Father. Yet He is real, He is kind, and He loves each of His children perfectly. This dichotomy is as old as mankind and cannot be explained in a simple sound bite or on a bumper sticker.

To begin to make some sense of it, let us explore various types of unfairness. Consider a family in which each child received a weekly monetary



South Africa

allowance for doing common household chores. One son, John, purchased candy; one daughter, Anna, saved her money. Eventually, Anna bought herself a bicycle. John thought it was totally unfair that Anna got a bike when he did not. But John's choices created the inequality, not parental actions. Anna's decision to forgo the immediate gratification of eating candy did not impose any unfairness on John, because he had the same opportunity as his sister.

Our decisions can likewise yield long-term advantages or disadvantages. As the Lord revealed, "If a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life *through his diligence and obedience* than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come."<sup>3</sup> When others receive benefits because of their diligent choices, we cannot rightly conclude that we have been treated unfairly when we have had the same opportunity.

Another example of unfairness stems from a situation my wife, Ruth,

encountered as a child. One day Ruth learned that her mother was taking a younger sister, Merla, to buy new shoes. Ruth complained, "Mom, it's so unfair! Merla got the last new pair of shoes."

Ruth's mother asked, "Ruth, do your shoes fit?"

Ruth replied, "Well, yes."

Ruth's mother then said, "Merla's shoes no longer fit."

Ruth agreed that every child in the family should have shoes that fit. Although Ruth would have liked new shoes, her perception of being treated unfairly dissipated when she saw the circumstances through her mother's eyes.

Some unfairness cannot be explained; inexplicable unfairness is infuriating. Unfairness comes from living with bodies that are imperfect, injured, or diseased. Mortal life is inherently unfair. Some people are born in affluence; others are not. Some have loving parents; others do not. Some live many years; others,

few. And on and on and on. Some individuals make injurious mistakes even when they are trying to do good. Some choose not to alleviate unfairness when they could. Distressingly, some individuals use their God-given agency to hurt others when they never should.

Different types of unfairness can merge, creating a tsunami of overwhelming unfairness. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects those who already are subject to multifactorial, underlying disadvantages. My heart aches for those who face such unfairness, but I declare with all my aching heart that Jesus Christ both understands unfairness and has the power to provide a remedy. Nothing



Tonga; inset: South Africa



compares to the unfairness He endured. It was not fair that He experienced all the pains and afflictions of mankind. It was not fair that He suffered for my sins and mistakes and for yours. But He chose to do so because of His love for us and for Heavenly Father. He understands perfectly what we are experiencing.<sup>4</sup>

Scripture records that ancient Israelites complained that God was treating them unfairly. In response, Jehovah asked, “For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?” As unlikely as it is that a loving mother would forget her infant child, Jehovah declared that His devotion was even more steadfast. He affirmed: “Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. . . . Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.”<sup>5</sup> Because Jesus Christ endured the infinite atoning sacrifice, He empathizes perfectly with us.<sup>6</sup> He is always aware of us and our circumstances.

In mortality, we can “come boldly” to the Savior and receive compassion, healing, and help.<sup>7</sup> Even while we suffer inexplicably, God can bless us in simple, ordinary, and significant ways. As we learn to recognize these blessings, our trust in God will increase. In the eternities, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ will resolve all unfairness. We understandably want to know *how* and *when*. *How* are They going to do that? *When* are They going to do it? To my knowledge, They have not revealed *how* or *when*.<sup>8</sup> What I do know is that They *will*.

In unfair situations, one of our tasks is to trust that “all that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup>



Zambia

Jesus Christ overcame the world and “absorbed” all unfairness. Because of Him, we can have peace in this world and be of good cheer.<sup>10</sup> If we let Him, Jesus Christ will consecrate the unfairness for our gain.<sup>11</sup> He will not just console us and restore what was lost;<sup>12</sup> He will use the unfairness for our benefit. When it comes to *how* and *when*, we need to recognize and accept, as did Alma, that “it mattereth not; for God knoweth all these things; and it sufficeth me to know that this is the case.”<sup>13</sup>

We can try to hold our questions about *how* and *when* for later and focus on developing faith in Jesus Christ, that He has both the power to make everything right and yearns to do so.<sup>14</sup> For us to insist on knowing *how* or *when* is unproductive and, after all, myopic.<sup>15</sup>

As we develop faith in Jesus Christ, we should also strive to become like Him. We then approach others with compassion and try to alleviate unfairness where we find it;<sup>16</sup> we can try to make things right within our sphere of influence. Indeed, the Savior directed that we “should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things

of [our] own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness.”<sup>17</sup>

Someone who has been anxiously engaged in combating unfairness is attorney Bryan Stevenson. His legal practice in the United States is dedicated to defending the wrongly accused, ending excessive punishment, and protecting basic human rights. Some years ago, Mr. Stevenson defended a man who had been falsely accused of murder and was condemned to die. Mr. Stevenson asked the man’s local Christian church for support, even though the man was not active in his church and was disparaged in the community due to a widely known extramarital affair.

To focus the congregation on what really mattered, Mr. Stevenson spoke to them about the woman accused of adultery who was brought to Jesus. The accusers wanted to stone her to death, but Jesus said, “He that is without sin . . . , let him first cast a stone at her.”<sup>18</sup> The woman’s accusers withdrew. Jesus did not condemn the woman but charged her to sin no more.<sup>19</sup>

After recounting this episode, Mr. Stevenson observed that self-righteousness, fear, and anger have caused even Christians to hurl stones at people who stumble. He then said, “We can’t simply watch that happen,” and he encouraged the congregants to become “stonecatchers.”<sup>20</sup> Brothers and sisters, not throwing stones is the first step in treating others with compassion. The second step is to try to catch stones thrown by others.

How we deal with advantages and disadvantages is part of life’s test. We will be judged not so much by what we say but by how we treat the vulnerable and disadvantaged.<sup>21</sup> As Latter-day Saints, we seek to follow

the Savior's example, to go about doing good.<sup>22</sup> We demonstrate our love for our neighbor by working to ensure the dignity of all Heavenly Father's children.

With our own advantages and disadvantages in mind, reflection is healthy. For John to understand why Anna got the bike was revealing. For Ruth to view Merla's need for shoes through her mother's eyes was enlightening. To try to see things with an eternal perspective can be clarifying. As we become more like the Savior, we develop more empathy, understanding, and charity.

I return to the question posed by our fellow passenger in Kigali when he lamented the unfairness of the Rwandan genocide and asked, "If there were a God, wouldn't He have done something about it?"

Without minimizing the suffering caused by the genocide, and after acknowledging our inability to comprehend such suffering, we replied that Jesus Christ has done something about infuriating unfairness.<sup>23</sup> We explained many gospel precepts concerning Jesus Christ and the Restoration of His Church.<sup>24</sup>

Afterward, our acquaintance asked, with tears in his eyes, "You mean there is something I can do for my dead parents and uncle?"

We said, "Oh, yes!" We then testified that all that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ and that by His authority families can be joined together forever.

When faced with unfairness, we can push ourselves away from God or we can be drawn toward Him for help and support. For example, the prolonged warfare between the Nephites and the Lamanites affected people differently. Mormon observed that "many



Germany

had become hardened" while others "were softened because of their afflictions, insomuch that they did humble themselves before God."<sup>25</sup>

Do not let unfairness harden you or corrode your faith in God. Instead, ask God for help. Increase your appreciation for and reliance on the Savior. Rather than becoming bitter, let Him help you become better.<sup>26</sup> Allow Him to help you persevere, to let your afflictions be "swallowed up in the joy of Christ."<sup>27</sup> Join Him in His mission "to heal the brokenhearted,"<sup>28</sup> strive to mitigate unfairness, and become a stonecatcher.<sup>29</sup>

I testify that the Savior lives. He understands unfairness. The marks in the palms of His hands continually remind Him of you and your circumstances. He ministers to you in all your distress. For those who come unto Him, a crown of beauty will replace the ashes of mourning; joy and gladness will replace grief and sorrow; appreciation and celebration will replace discouragement and despair.<sup>30</sup> Your faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ will be rewarded more than you can imagine. All unfairness—especially infuriating unfairness—will be consecrated for your gain. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. See John Reader, *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (1999), 635–36, 673–79.
2. Though hopeful, the Rwandan reconciliation is complex. Some question its depth and durability. See, for example, "The Great Rwanda Debate: Paragon or Prison?" *Economist*, Mar. 27, 2021, 41–43.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 130:19; emphasis added.
4. See Hebrews 4:15.
5. 1 Nephi 21:15–16.
6. See Alma 7:11–13.
7. See Hebrews 4:16; see also Isaiah 41:10; 43:2; 46:4; 61:1–3.
8. A word of caution: We should resist the temptation to create our own theories as to *how* and *when*, regardless of how well reasoned or plausible. We cannot justifiably fill the void for what God has not yet revealed.
9. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2018), 52; see also Isaiah 61:2–3; Revelation 21:4. "All that is unfair about life can be made right" likely means that the consequences of unfairness to us will be resolved, mitigated, or lifted. In his final general conference talk, "Come What May, and Love It," Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin said: "Every tear today will eventually be returned a hundredfold with tears of rejoicing and gratitude. . . . A principle of compensation prevails" (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 28).
10. See John 16:33.
11. See 2 Nephi 2:2.
12. See Job 42:10, 12–13; Jacob 3:1.
13. Alma 40:5.
14. See Mosiah 4:9.
15. See Russell M. Nelson, "Let God Prevail," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 93. *Myopic* means nearsighted.
16. For example, Captain Moroni affirmed that it is wrong for individuals to stand by and "do nothing" when they can assist





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# The Personal Journey of a Child of God

*As covenant children of God, we love, honor, nurture, safeguard, and welcome those spirits who are coming from the premortal world.*

- others (see Alma 60:9–11; see also 2 Corinthians 1:3–4).
17. Doctrine and Covenants 58:27; see also verses 26, 28–29.
  18. John 8:7.
  19. See John 8:10–11; the Joseph Smith Translation of verse 11 includes, “And the woman glorified God from that hour, and believed on his name,” suggesting that the Savior’s lack of condemnation and His commandment to “sin no more” impacted the rest of the woman’s life.
  20. Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (2015), 308–9.
  21. See Matthew 25:31–46.
  22. See Acts 10:38; see also Russell M. Nelson, “The Second Great Commandment,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 96–100.
  23. See Doctrine and Covenants 1:17, 22–23.
  24. These precepts are clearly articulated in “The Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: A Bicentennial Proclamation to the World,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
  25. Alma 62:41.
  26. See Amos C. Brown, in Boyd Matheson, “‘It Can Be Well with This Nation’ If We Lock Arms as Children of God,” *Church News*, July 25, 2019, thechurchnews.com.
  27. Alma 31:38.
  28. See Luke 4:16–19. To heal the broken-hearted is to restore those whose mind, will, intellect, or inner self has been shattered or crushed (see James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* [2010], Hebrew dictionary section, 139 and 271).
  29. See, for instance, Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 94; Dallin H. Oaks, “Love Your Enemies,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2020, 26–29. President Nelson exhorted: “Today I call upon our members everywhere to lead out in abandoning attitudes and actions of prejudice. I plead with you to promote respect for all of God’s children.” This is more than just being opposed to attitudes and actions of prejudice. President Oaks quoted the Reverend Theresa A. Dear: “Racism thrives on hatred, oppression, collusion, passivity, indifference and silence.” Then he said, “As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we must do better to help root out racism.”
  30. See Isaiah 61:3. Receiving a crown of beauty means that we become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in the kingdom of God. See also Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah* (1998), 541–43.

Each of us has been affected by the worldwide pandemic, as family and friends have unexpectedly moved beyond mortality. Let me acknowledge three we dearly miss, representing all those we love so much.

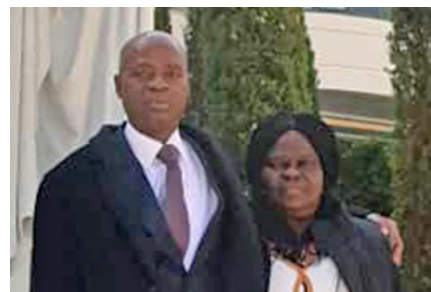
This is Brother Philippe and Sister Germaine Nsondi. Brother Nsondi was serving as the patriarch of the Brazzaville Republic of Congo Stake when he passed away. He was a medical doctor who shared his talents generously with others.<sup>1</sup>

This is Sister Clara Elisa Ruano de Villareal from Tulcán, Ecuador. She embraced the restored gospel at age 34 and was a beloved leader. Her family said goodbye singing her favorite hymn, “I Know That My Redeemer Lives.”<sup>2</sup>

This is Brother Ray Tuineau from Utah, with his beautiful family. His wife, Juliet, said, “I want [my boys] to [remember that their dad] always tried to put God first.”<sup>3</sup>

The Lord has said, “Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die.”<sup>4</sup>

While we weep, we also rejoice in the glorious Resurrection of our



Philippe and Germaine Nsondi



Clara Elisa Ruano de Villareal



Ray Tuineau and family