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Becoming Better Stewards OF THE EARTH GOD CREATED FOR US

The better we care for this world and all in it, the better it will sustain, inspire, strengthen, enliven, and gladden our hearts and spirits.

From an address given at the 18th annual Stegner Center Symposium at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City on April 12, 2013. For the full text, go to newsroom. ChurchofJesusChrist.org/article/elder-nash-stegner-symposium.

My avocation is to be in nature, whether hiking, skiing, sea kayaking, cycling, or even going on safari. As a child, I loved to be in the woods and to feel the silent, eloquent witness that the towering evergreen trees bore of the Creator. As I've grown to adulthood, I have learned by study and faith that if we understand who we are, the purpose of life, and the reason the earth was created—and keep these things in mind—we will treat this earth, and all in it, in a higher, nobler way.

God's Purpose in Creating the Earth

The Lord, through His prophets both ancient and modern, has tried to help us understand and appreciate the gift of living on this beautiful earth. In the Old Testament, David considered the majestic creations of God and wondered aloud why—amongst such wonders—God is mindful of man (see Psalm 8:4). David concluded that humankind is special, “a little lower than the angels” (Psalm 8:5).

Moses also saw in vision worlds without number¹ and declared, “Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed” (Moses 1:10).

In Moses's humility before the magnificence of God's creations, he failed to comprehend a great truth. So the Lord showed him again His limitless creation and pointedly declared that He—God—made these creations “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). This earth—indeed all creation—is designed to help us gain immortality and eternal life.

Speaking again of the purpose of the earth, the Lord said, “We will make an earth whereon these [meaning us] may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:24–25; see also verse 26). Life on this earth, coupled with the gift of moral agency, provides us the opportunity to choose to seek and someday receive all that God offers.²

When the creation of the earth was completed, God was pleased because He saw that it would serve His purpose for us, His children.³ The sons and daughters of God and the families they form are not mere interlopers on this earth; rather, they are central to its purpose.⁴

We Are to Be Good Stewards

Life on this earth is both a blessing and a responsibility. The Lord declares, “Behold, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance” (Doctrine and Covenants 49:19). However, because the earth and all on it are the “workmanship of [His] hand” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:25), it all belongs to Him.⁵ As temporary inhabitants of this earth, we are stewards—not owners. As such, we are accountable to God—the owner—for what we do with His creation: “For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures” (Doctrine and Covenants 104:13).

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How we care for the earth, how we utilize and share in its bounty, and how we treat all that has been provided for us is part of our test in mortality. We are to gratefully make use of that which the Lord has provided, avoid wasting life and resources, and use the bounty of the earth to care for the poor.⁶ The Lord cares deeply for all life and especially for His children, and will hold us accountable for what we choose to do (or not do) with the bounties of His creation.

The Lord promises us that if we follow Him and judiciously use the resources of the earth with thanksgiving and respect, “the fulness of the earth is [ours], the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air. . . . And it pleaseth God that he hath given



all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:16, 20).

We are to use these resources with judgment and gratitude, with the intent to help others—present, past, and future generations—receive the blessings that our Heavenly Father desires for His children.

Seeing beyond Ourselves

Sadly, today we live in a world where individuals may choose to reject God and treat His creation with disdain. When this occurs, God and creation are pained.

Enoch records that God wept on account of the poor choices and suffocating selfishness of His children.⁷ Moroni prophesied that in the latter days there would be “fires, and tempests, and vapors of smoke . . . [and] great pollutions upon the face of the earth,” and that such conditions



would be coupled with “all manner of abominations; when there shall be many who will say, Do this, or do that, and it mattereth not” (Mormon 8:29, 31). When man pollutes this world spiritually or temporally, not only God but nature also suffers!⁸

Importantly, the blessings and power available through the Lord’s restored Church and gospel have the capacity to stretch and change the human soul beyond self, to inspire love of God and His creations, and to help us think of others’ welfare and consider the needs of future generations.

Nature Brings Us Closer to God

The earth and all life are more than items to be consumed and/or conserved; some parts and portions thereof are also to be preserved! Unspoiled nature and “all things which come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit . . . of man, . . . to please the eye and to gladden the heart . . .

and to enliven the soul” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:18–19).

Nature in its pristine state brings us closer to God, clears the mind and heart of the noise and distractions of materialism, lifts us to a higher, more exalted sphere, and helps us to better know our God: “The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light. . . . Any[one] who hath seen any or the least of these hath seen God moving in his majesty and power” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:45, 47).

I still love to hike high in the mountains among the magnificent granite rocks and peaks. Although silent, they speak of the power and majesty of God—and of His matchless genius for beauty. As Alma testified, “All things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, . . . do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44).

I love stargazing at night, trying to wrap my mind around the eternity of time and space within my gaze. I always marvel at the knowledge that comes in those quiet moments that, despite the vastness of the cosmos, the Lord of the universe knows puny me. And He knows each of us. The creation witnesses of the Creator, and if we preserve these special, unspoiled places, they will eloquently and profoundly witness of our God and inspire us onward.

The better we care for this world and all in it, the better it will sustain, inspire, strengthen, enliven, and gladden our hearts and spirits—and prepare us to dwell with our Heavenly Father with our families in a celestial sphere, which will be the very earth upon which we stand today, but in a glorified state.⁹

May we gratefully care for this earth—our present and potential future home. ■

NOTES

1. See Hebrews 1:2.
2. See 2 Nephi 2:16.
3. See Moses 2:31.
4. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.
5. See also Doctrine and Covenants 38:16–17.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 104:17–18.
7. See Moses 7:28.
8. See Moses 7:48–49.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:18–20.