Content with the Things Allotted unto Us

Elder Neal A. Maxwell
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

SHARE

Neal A. Maxwell, "Content with the Things Allotted unto Us," *Ensign*, May 2000, 72

Life's necessary defining moments come within our allotments. ... Our responses are what matter. Sufficient unto each life are the tests thereof!



With all of you, brothers and sisters, I express appreciation to President Hinckley for his tireless shaping of the Church's future, of which this Conference Center is emblematic.

In just a few words, a major insight came to the conscientious and the converted through Alma: "For I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me" (Alma 29:3). However, just prior, Alma urgently desired to be the "trump of God" so that he might "shake the earth" (Alma 29:1). But not because of ego; in fact, Alma wanted to declare repentance and the plan of redemption to all mankind so that there might be no more human sorrow (see Alma 29:2). Yet Alma's contentment rested on the reality that God finally allots to us according to our wills (see Alma 29:4). What could be more fair?

Thus becoming content with his calling, Alma then meekly hoped to be an instrument to help save some soul (see Alma 29:9). A significant spiritual journey is thus reflected in but nine soliloquy-like verses.

The same contentment awaits us if our own desires can be worked through and aligned.

What some mortals are allotted includes, for instance, very reduced chances because of poverty: "And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches" (3 Ne. 6:12).

Furthermore, malevolent, human social structures have included, in the past, tragic constraints like slavery and concentration camps.

Nevertheless, we are to do what we can within our allotted "acreage," while still using whatever stretch there may be in any tethers. Within what is allotted to us, we can have spiritual contentment. Paul described it as "godliness with contentment," signifying the adequate presence of attributes such as love, hope, meekness, patience, and submissiveness (1 Tim. 6:6).

Yet there are other fixed limitations in life. For instance, some have allotments including physical, mental, or geographic constraints. There are those who are unmarried, through no fault of their own, or yearning but childless couples. Still others face persistent and unreconciled relationships within their circles of loved ones, including offspring who have "[become] for themselves," resistant to parental counsel (3 Ne. 1:29). In such and

similar situations, there are so many prickly and daily reminders.

Being content means acceptance without self-pity. Meekly borne, however, deprivations such as these can end up being like excavations that make room for greatly enlarged souls.

Some undergo searing developments that cut suddenly into mortality's status quo. Some have trials to *pass through,* while still others have allotments they are to *live with.* Paul lived with his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7).

Suffice it to say, such mortal allotments will be changed in the world to come. The exception is unrepented sin that shapes our status in the next world.

Thus, developing greater contentment within certain of our existing constraints and opportunities is one of our challenges. Otherwise we may feel underused, underwhelmed, and underappreciated—while, ironically, within our givens are unused opportunities for service all about us. Neither should we pine away, therefore, for certain things outside God's givens, such as for the powerful voice of an angel, because there is so much to do within what has been allotted to us (see Alma 29:3–4). Furthermore, varied as our allotted circumstances may be, we can still keep the commandments of God!

Meanwhile, we serve as each other's clinical material in the particular sample of humanity constituting "what is allotted unto [us]." The sample may shrink or swell, but most important is *what we are and what we do* within those varied allocations and in the particular "work to which [we] have been called" (Alma 29:6).

Thus "the holy present" contains the allotted acres for our discipleship. We need not be situated in prime time with prime visibility in order to work out our own salvation!

In contrast, however, as to improving our behavior, there are no borders that we cannot cross and no shortage of visas for those willing to venture!

Incremental improvement is, therefore, the order of the day, and it clearly requires the accompaniment of the Lord's long-suffering as we struggle to learn the necessary lessons.

Mary, having been told some wondrous things about herself and what lay ahead, nevertheless "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Pondering often precedes contentment.

Performance is what matters, not the size of the stage. The Sea of Galilee, only 13 miles by 7, was nevertheless large enough to provide the disciples with a vital experience involving faith and walking on the water (see Matt. 14:22–33). The wind was boisterous and frightening! Even so, compare the size of those Galilean swells and the length of that storm with what Nephi and party had to endure on the vast ocean! (see 1 Ne. 18:13–21). Yet both episodes provided the needed learning experiences. Of course, I should be careful about comparisons involving excesses of water, realizing Noah is in the historical audience!

Thus, less spectacular episodes, just as good individuals with lower profiles, are "no less serviceable" in order to get the job done (Alma 48:19).

On a larger scale, for instance, the prophet Mormon at first thought his people were sorrowing unto repentance (see Morm. 2:12–13). Yet he soon discerned that theirs was not actually the sorrowing unto repentance but the "sorrowing of the damned," stranding them in a "no-man's-land." Compare that episode to the prodigal son's solitary working through of his own repentance; since his sorrow was real, he truly "came to himself" (Luke 15:17). Sometimes we learn "by sad experience," but sometimes not! (D&C 121:39).

Life's necessary defining moments come within our allotments, and we make "on the record" choices within these allotments. Our responses are what matter. Sufficient unto each life are the tests thereof! (see Matt. 6:34).

Meanwhile, people regularly sell their souls for much less than the whole world. In Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons,* Sir Thomas More is soon to be martyred, partly because his friend Rich, having been bought off by a local office, has betrayed him. More, "looking into Rich's face, with pain and amusement," speaks: "For Wales? Why, Richard, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world … But for Wales!" (*A Man for All Seasons* [1960], 92). Let this same rebuke hold for any preoccupation which preempts us from spiritual things!

Ponder how Jesus was and is the Lord of the universe (see D&C 45:1; D&C 76:24; Moses 1:33; Moses 2:1). Yet His ministry, as we all know, was accomplished in a very tiny geographical space. His ministerial travels were very limited. Yet therein the Savior accomplished the Atonement for all of mankind! There were certainly much more prominent hills than Golgotha and much more resplendent gardens than Gethsemane. No matter; these were sufficient to host the central act of all human history!

We can draw upon that glorious Atonement by repenting. We can learn to serve and to forgive within our sample

E-mail to a Friend

Official Web site of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
© 2010 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.