My dear young students: I keenly feel my responsibility to testify of truths which will strengthen your growing faith. That desire has driven me to my knees many times in preparation of my message.

More than a year ago, half a world away in the city of Moscow, Russia, a young sister about your age spoke to me of her friendship with a troubled non-member boy. He had been raised in a Communist home. He frequently inquired of her, “Where is God?”

Especially during university years, that question will often be asked of young people by those whose wisdom is self-appointed. If faith in God’s existence and your relationship with Him is lost while you acquire an education, you will also lose your testimony that you are His child and have the potential to become like Him.

In moments of extremity, men and women of all generations have asked where God is. The Prophet Joseph did so from Liberty Jail in the familiar language of Section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:1)

God often had to counsel the suffering Saints, “Be still and know that I am God” (Doctrine and Covenants 101:16). Even Christ in the concluding hours of His atoning sacrifice cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

More than a century ago Robert G. Ingersoll, an American agnostic, pursued this question in the following words:

*Each nation has created a god, and the god has always resembled his creators. He hated and loved what they hated and loved. Each nation made its gods...* (The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll, Vol. 1 [1900], 7, 10, 23, 24)

In paraphrasing a famous quotation from Alexander Pope, Ingersoll irreverently concluded: “An honest god is the noblest work of man” (Ibid 7).

People of all ages have delighted in pitting the strength or wisdom of their gods against that of their neighbors’ gods. Two of the most interesting and consequential contests are recorded in the Old Testament.

One took place over 2500 years ago on Mount Carmel between the Lord God of Israel, represented by his prophet Elijah, and the Phoenician god Baal, represented in turn by his 450 prophets. How piercing was Elijah’s challenge, “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.”

The heavens silently ignored the incantations and pleading to Baal’s dumb and brazen idols. Elijah mocked, “Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened.” Man-made gods never fared well in the presence of real deity.

When it was Elijah’s turn he prayed openly: “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant...”
Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. The people fell on their faces and proclaimed: “The Lord, he is...God; the Lord, he is...God” (1 Kings 18:21, 27, 36, 38-39).

No less impressive in story or message was the contest between Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh. Moses pled: “Let my people go” (Exodus 5:1). But the heart of Ramses was as stone. Moses transformed a rod into a serpent. He smote the waters of Egypt that they turned to blood, and the fish died and the waters stank. He inflicted the land with frogs and with lice and swarms of flies, and a plague upon the cattle of Egypt, and boils, and blains, and hail, and fire, and locusts, and thick darkness. But the heart of Pharaoh would not soften. His magicians could duplicate some of the miracles, but not all – and even they pled for the release of Israel when Israel’s God smote their firstborn sons. Stubborn Pharaoh finally discovered life’s greatest truth when the message was brought to him of the destruction of his army by the crushing waters of the Red Sea.

As portrayed by Cecil B. DeMille on the motion picture screen, we can imagine Pharaoh upon his throne pondering, then muttering in eloquence: “Moses’ God is God” (Motion Picture: The Ten Commandments).

In their preoccupation to worship a powerful and respectable god, ancient civilizations often fashioned multiple deities as the objects of their reverence. It never occurred to them to have no god. That sin was left to our more sophisticated society.

William Jennings Bryan, eloquent speaker of a generation past, and once the United States Secretary of State, penned these words in response to Charles Darwin’s Origin of the Species:

[How does the evolutionist explain the eye when he leaves God out?]

The evolutionist guesses that there was a time when eyes were unknown. And since the eye is a universal possession among living things the evolutionist guesses that it came into being – not by design or by act of God – but just happened, and how did it happen? A piece of pigment, or, as some say, a freckle appeared upon the skin of an animal that had no eyes. This piece of pigment or freckle converged the rays of the sun upon that spot and when the little animal felt the heat on that spot it turned the spot to the sun to get more heat. The increased heat irritated the skin — so the evolutionists guess, and a nerve came there and out of the nerve came the eye! But this only accounts for one eye; there must have been another piece of pigment or freckle soon afterward and just in the right place in order to give the animal two eyes.

And, according to the evolutionist, there was a time when animals had no legs, and so the leg came by accident. How? Well, the guess is that a little animal without legs was wiggling along on its belly one day when it discovered a wart, and it was in the right place to be used to aid it in locomotion; so, it came to depend upon the wart, and use finally developed it into a leg. And then another wart and another leg, at the proper time – by accident – and accidentally in the proper place.

How long did the “light waves” have to play on the skin before the eyes came out? The evolutionist is very deliberate; he is long on time. He would certainly give the eye thousands of years, if not millions, in which to develop; but how could he be sure that the light waves played all the time in one place or played in the same place generation after generation until the development was complete? And why did the light waves quit playing when two eyes were perfected? Why did they not keep on playing until there were eyes all over the body? Why do they not play today, so that we may see eyes in process of development? And if the light waves created the eyes, why did they not create them strong enough to bear the light? Why did the light waves make eyes and then make eyelids to keep the light out of the eyes? (William Jennings Bryan, In His Image. [1922] 97-100).

Naturalism’s explanations often appear convoluted and grotesque when placed side-by-side with the simple, yet beautiful truths of the revealed word and divine scripture. Joseph Smith said: “A man never has half so much fuss to unlock a door, if he has a key, as though he had not, and had to cut it open with his jackknife” (Joseph Fielding Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, [1972], 308).

With its 107 million cells, connected to the brain by over one million neurons, the eye is more perfect than any camera ever invented. It caused Charles Darwin to humbly confess “that the eye with all its inimitable controversies... could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree” (Quoted in Bert Thompson, The Case for the Existence of God [2003]).
In 1860 Darwin wrote a botanist friend: “To this day the eye makes me shudder” (Francis Hitching, Was Darwin Wrong? Quoted in The Neck of the Giraffe). It is small wonder that a much wiser race than Darwin’s, that of the ancient Egyptians, chose the eye as their symbol of perfection.

The psalmist wrote: “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” (Psalms 53:1). Such a foolish disbeliever ought use those precious eyes to look at his hands. Seventy muscles contribute to hand movements. Much of the rest of the body is devoted to optimizing the complex function of the hand. There are no muscles in the fingers.

The sole purpose of the forearm, its muscles and bones, is to move and optimally position the hand.

If you wish to observe a miracle, look at a baby’s creasy hand. Its initial movements are uncontrolled. Shortly after birth it will be able to grasp, curl, push, lift, sense hot and cold, respond to pain by withdrawal, heal itself, display great strength or extraordinary sensitivity. These hands will be used thousands of times each day without a forethought.

Your miraculous thumb is controlled by 9 individual muscles and 3 major hand nerves. Sir Isaac Newton said: “In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God’s existence” (Paul Brand and Phillip Yancey, “The Scars of Easter,” Christianity Today [April 5, 1985]. Paul Brand, renowned orthopedic hand surgeon, wrote:

*We use our hands for the most wonderful activities: art, music, writing, healing, touching. Some people go to concerts and athletic events to watch the performance; I go to watch hands. For me, a piano performance is a ballet of fingers – a glorious flourish of ligaments and joints, tendons, nerves and muscles (Ibid).*

Once the infant Son of Man possessed tiny hands. His hands, too, grew to accomplish their intended purposes. He used them to touch and heal the blind and infirm. His hands threw the money-changers out of the temple. His hands reached upward in prayer; outward in blessing; and downward from the cross, penetrated by cruel nails, driven through the palms, then the wrists, by the heavy blow of the mallet.

The fool proclaims in his heart that there is no god, but our eyes and our hands and our hearts and souls unhesitatingly testify to the contrary. The psalmist wrote: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made…” (Psalms 139:14).

One of my brothers is a physician. During earlier years in medical school he was assigned to study anatomy in companionship with an agnostic. Their education eventually required that the two of them carefully examine and dissect a cadaver. They studied the incredibly complex, yet harmonious systems of the body: the lymphatic, skeletal, circulatory, waste elimination, reproductive, neurological and immune systems. They noted the body’s power to correct its own deficiencies, and to send healing antibodies to the place of injury or infection. They learned of over 150 trillion cells within the body. If set end-to-end, they would encircle the earth over 200 times. Today they would learn of over one billion miles of DNA in one human body. They learned of a brain bathed in fluid which continually receives signals from 130 million light receptors in the eyes, 24,000 hearing receptors in the ears, 10,000 taste buds, and hundreds of thousands of receptors in the skin, with specialized commission to recognize touch, vibration, cold, heat and pain. My brother and his friend became silent as they contemplated the miracle they were examining. Sensing the moment was right, my brother challenged: “Coincidence is a marvelous thing, isn’t it?” The agnostic responded, “You win.”

This earth departs from its straight line orbit of the sun by only 1/9 of an inch every 18 miles. If, instead, it changed by 1/10 of an inch every 18 miles we would all freeze to death. If it changed by 1/8 of an inch we would all be incinerated? (Bert Thompson, The Case for the Existence of God [2003]) Did this all happen by accident?

There are, perhaps, 25,000 billion billion (25 sextillion) stars in the one billion galaxies or Milky Ways of which we have knowledge. Our own Milky Way has, perhaps, 100 billion stars. We literally could not tally the stars of one galaxy within the span of a single life. In section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants the Prophet Joseph was taught the perfect order of this vast universe. “And there are many kingdoms;...And unto every kingdom is given a law;...and any man who hath seen any or the least of these hath seen God moving in his majesty and power” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:37-38, 47).

Alma spoke to us, as well as to Korihor, in testifying: “[Y]ea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44).
The doubter requires too much of us when he asks us to believe that the miracles of eyes and hands and DNA and order in the universe all happened by chance. The passage of time, even long intervals of time, is not a “cause” and provides no answers without an intelligent designer.

President Ronald Reagan, speaking in Moscow, Russia, during the Soviet period, extemporaneously added to his remarks, “Sometimes when I’m faced with an unbeliever, an atheist, I am tempted to invite him to the greatest gourmet dinner one could ever serve and, when finished eating that magnificent dinner, to ask him if he believes there’s a cook” (Paul Kengor, God and Ronald Reagan [2004], 302).

You may be too young to remember the famous American trial of Alger Hiss, tried for treason against the United States. The principal witness against him was Whitaker Chambers, a longtime atheistic Communist, who finally could not escape the reality of God. He speaks of his conversion in these words:

“My daughter was in her high chair. I was watching her eat. She was the most miraculous thing that had ever happened in my life. …my eye came to rest on the delicate convolutions of her ear — those intricate, perfect ears. The thought passed through my mind: “No, those ears were not created by any chance coming together of atoms in nature (the communist view). They could have been created only by immense design.” The thought was involuntary and unwanted. I crowded it out of my mind. But I never wholly forgot it or the occasion. I had to crowd it out of my mind. If I had completed it, I should have had to say: Design presupposes God. I did not then know that, at that moment, the finger of God was first laid upon my forehead (Whitaker Chambers, Witness, [1952] 16).

The evidence of God’s existence is everywhere: in every newborn babe, in every system, part and parcel of the unending, and orderly universe, including our own bodies. He is evidenced in every sunset, work of art and passage of music, all of which He has provided to gladden the heart and bring beauty to our lives. Richard Swinburne said, “God paints with a big brush from a large paint box and he has no need to be stingy with the paint he uses to paint a beautiful universe” (Richard Swinburne, Is There A God? [1996] 63).

It is not possible to contemplate the immeasurable vacuum and purposelessness that would exist in our lives if God were “not there.” A cloud or pallor of gloom would settle upon us of indescribable proportion. We would regret the passing of every day, and the passing of every loved one, knowing that neither time nor relationships could be extended. We would approach the autumn, and then the winter years of life with crescendoing fear. Every day of our lives we should thank God that He “is there” and that this life is not “all there is.” We call this the gift of immortality. In the words of another, we are grateful that death is the “spreading of pinions to soar,” not a “folding forever of wings” (Ingersoll’s Lectures [1877] 356). Because God exists we rejoice in the unendingness of time.

Yet, some ask where God is because there is pain on this earth and God does not hasten to intervene. This is known as the philosophical problem of evil. One flippantly approached this issue by sophomorically suggesting that God ought to have made “good health catching rather than disease” (The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll, Vol. 1 [1900] 11). However, such thinking misses the whole point of our mortal existence, which is probationary rather than paradisiacal in nature.

During my years in law practice I became acquainted with a fine Jewish client. As a teenager he lived as a Hasidic Jew in German-occupied France during the Second World War. He was apprehended by the Gestapo. Tattooed numbers were placed on his arm labeling him as undesirable and he was sent to a German concentration camp. He lived only because he was young and strong, able to help with the required daily chores. As a result of his suffering he said in his heart “there is no god.”

One day I asked him, for conversation sake, to imagine there is a god. “Would you have had this god intervene and prevent the death of six million Jews during the Second World War?” I inquired. He answered, “Most certainly.”

I then referred to others over the centuries, not necessarily of Jewish ancestry, who had also lost their lives through barbarous acts. “Should God have intervened and stopped this?” “Yes,” he affirmed.

I then spoke of yet others of ages past and present who died through cruel diseases, not the inhumanity of man. “Should God have precluded this, also?” His avowal was consistent.

Then I spoke of yet others who, short of death, had suffered much from physical — or emotional — or familial — or financial woes. My friend could not turn from his chosen course. He would have God intervene and eliminate every burden of man. He was uncomfortable in his answer but did not know where to draw the line once his imaginary god hastened to remove the very challenges that are the purpose and necessity of our probationary
In his marvelous message entitled “Tragedy or Destiny?” President Spencer W. Kimball rhetorically inquires what disservice we would offer to God’s plan, if we had uncontrolled power, yet limited vision. He wrote:

With such uncontrolled power, I surely would have felt to protect Christ from the agony in Gethsemane, the insults, the thorny crown, the indignities in the court, the physical injuries. I would have administered to his wounds and healed them, giving him cooling water instead of vinegar. I might have saved him from suffering and death, and lost to the world his atoning sacrifice (Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, [1972] 99).

If little babies could talk, and could remember their pre-earthly estate, their first utterances might express, “You came here to be tested. You agreed to that. The tests will be hard, in part because they are seldom the tests you anticipated. This is a closed book test in that you will not remember your pre-mortal estate. God will not intervene and remove the tests until the close of the examination or probationary period.” That God does not hasten to intervene does not mean He is not there or does not love us. He has infinite respect for our agency and the purposes of earth life.

Elder Melvin J. Ballard stirs us with this example:

“I remember a good sister out in the Northwest whose husband was stricken with paralysis until he was unable to move, and lay day after day in the hospital. She said, “He can’t die. He must not die or my faith will be broken.” God knows how much we can stand and He recognizes this. I said to that woman, “God will not take your husband until you ask Him to.” She said, “I will never ask Him.”

The man became so weak he could only speak in the slightest whisper. One day, months having passed, the woman came to the mission office and said, “I never thought I would live to reach the place I am today. You told me he would never be taken until the Lord was asked to take him. I come now seeking his death. Please come and ask the Lord to take him. I surrender him and give him up. I can’t endure his suffering longer.” We went to the hospital and asked the Lord for that blessing, and in one hour he was gone (Melvin R. Ballard, *Melvin J. Ballard, Crusader of Righteousness* [1966] 278).

Agency [free will] is not just the right to select among good alternatives. When God granted agency, He necessarily contemplated the possibility of wrong choices. Because God knows best and esteems so highly our precious agency, He does not answer every prayer just as it is uttered, nor does He always punish transgressors before there has been an opportunity or a space for repentance. The Divine hesitancy is to our advantage.

The same God who brings such order to the universe, and inspired the prophets, designated the time, place and circumstances of your birth. He chose your ancestors and your posterity. To the Prophet Joseph the Lord said, “Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less…” (Doctrine and Covenants 122:9). God’s love for you and awareness of your circumstances is of equal measure. He foreordained you to perform a mission.

Nothing will bring you greater sorrow than to have Father say when you return home: “You didn’t complete your work. I had to give part of your mission to someone else.”

You satisfy only part of your obligation to God by acknowledging the order of His universe. You must do more than confess His existence. Our relationship with God is not that of Creator and created-thing. It is of personal Father and child.

In March of 1997, I had the privilege of being present when President Hinckley was interviewed by the 17 senior editors of the Los Angeles Times. An editor inquired as to the rapid growth of the Church. President Hinckley chose to respond, instead, by emphasizing the miraculous transformation in life of each individual who joins the Church. He spoke of a girl in Australia who was employed serving ice cream. She seemed inattentive to the message of the missionaries until one of them said, “Do you know that you are a child of God?” She replied, “Nobody has ever said that to me before. I had no idea that I might be a child of God.” Thereafter she went to her room, got down on her knees, and inquired, “Are you there? Am I your child? Please let me know.” Then she said, “There came into me a surge of feeling that brought me the conviction that was the case.” She joined the Church.

Two weeks later she was asked to give a talk in a Church meeting. Her first impulse was to run from it. Then she thought, “If I am a child of God I can do anything.” With this enlarged vision of who she was she became a stalwart member of the Church.
Our entire perspective of ourselves, our worth and what we can make of our lives is altered for good when we
come to understand that we are God’s children, and we can become like Him. Everything we know and understand
about God and our relationship with Him is a result of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Restoration.

Someday, when memory is refreshed and all things are drawn “to [our] remembrance” (John 14:26) we will recall
what we did and knew in the glorious pre-mortal estate. Undoubtedly we understood there the foundation
principles of the gospel. President Joseph F. Smith said:

Can we know anything here that we did not know before we came? [Christ] no doubt possessed a
foreknowledge of all the vicissitudes through which he would have to pass in the mortal tabernacle...He is our
example. If Christ knew beforehand, so did we. But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be
free indeed, to choose good or evil (Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrine [1970] 13).

We may have prayed countless times that when we found the truth on this earth — or it found us — we would not
be casual in living our religion. We must have urged that we would, in the fullest measure, complete the mission to
which we were foreordained, that our work would not be given to others. Perhaps we prayed a thousand times ten
thousand times that on this earth we would never lose our faith or virtue, or our ability to remain as living tools in
the hands of the Lord in accomplishing His work. It would serve us well if our present prayers included the same
supplications. Every morning and night we should plead with the Lord on our knees that we never lose our faith or
virtue.

The Book of Daniel includes the remarkable story of the three princes of Judah: Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-
nego. They were cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace, heated seven times more than it was wont to be
heated, because they would only worship the true and living God.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king, then said to his counselors:

Did not we cast three men, bound into the midst of the fire?

[L]o, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is
like the Son of God.

The king’s counselors [then] saw these men, ...upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of
their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who hath
sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded
their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

...there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. (Daniel 3:24-25, 27-29)

Thereby all learned that our God is God.

This is the true answer to the query of the young lad in Moscow, who asked: “Where is God?”

Many of the promises of God resting upon you are conditional. They are dependent upon individual covenant-
keeping and fulfillment of your appointed mission as a child of God in the exercise of your agency.

But the promises of God resting upon this Church, and its appointed destiny are unconditional. When Peter and
John stood before the Sanhedrin and boldly testified in the name of Christ, Gamaliel said to his fellow Sanhedrists
in reference to the missions of Peter and John: “Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or
this work be of men, it will come to naught: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even
to fight against God” (Acts 5:38-39).

I have a testimony that this is true. I know that our God is God, and that He lives. I know He is our personal Father
with an appointed mission for each of us to perform. I pray that we will never lose our faith, testimonies or virtue,
that we may be worthy to receive the blessings of immortality and eternal life, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.