

How to Gain a Testimony

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I remember the times I thrilled as I listened to President Heber J. Grant bear his testimony ... “I know as I know that I live ...”

There are many types of testimonies, and testimonies to many things. The testimony I have in mind is an abiding, living, moving conviction of the truths revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. One aspect of such a testimony is a settled conviction that there is a personal God—“an exalted man” was the phrase the Prophet Joseph used in describing him—and that he is our Heavenly Father. A second aspect of such a testimony is a belief in God’s plan of salvation, with Jesus Christ as the central figure.

Another essential to such a testimony is a belief in the Prophet’s account of his first vision: that in it he saw God, our Eternal Father, and Jesus Christ, his Son; that they stood before him and conversed with him; and that he conversed with them.

Still another requisite is an acceptance of the fact that the Book of Mormon came forth in the manner the Prophet Joseph said it did, that Moroni delivered to him the plates of gold upon which the ancient record was inscribed; and that the Prophet made the translation by the gift and power of God. One must also be convinced that the Prophet received from heavenly beings all the principles, ordinances, and priesthood power required to enable men to gain exaltation in the celestial presence of God and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the repository of such principles, ordinances, and priesthood powers.

Testimony of the Living Prophets

One who has such a testimony accepts the truth that the keys to the kingdom of God have been held by every man who has presided over the Church, from the Prophet Joseph to and including our present prophet, Spencer W. Kimball. One of the most important things about such a testimony—and one of the most difficult to obtain—is a conviction that the living prophet is just as much a prophet as was Joseph Smith, Jr., the first prophet of this dispensation. For some people it is much easier to accept ancient prophets than to accept living prophets. That was true in the days of Jesus. You will remember he charged the scribes and Pharisees with being hypocrites because they built tombs for the dead prophets and killed the living prophets. (See [Matt. 23:29–34.](#))

Some people who claim to believe in the living prophets get confused over the statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith “that a prophet is a prophet only when he is acting as such.” (*The History of the Church*, 5:265.) Recently a young lady came seeking an interview. She wanted to know how she could tell when a prophet is speaking as a prophet. A few days later a perplexed young man came, questioning the recent restatement of the First Presidency of the Church concerning who can be given the priesthood.

This is not the place for me to repeat what I said to them. Suffice it to say that one with an informed testimony is never confused by such questions. He believes that everything said or done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit carries with it the “witness of its authenticity.” I would like to repeat that statement. (It is not mine; it is Brother Brigham Young’s.) Everything that is said or done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit carries with it the “witness of its authenticity.” (See *Journal of Discourses*, 9:149.)

When questions arise, one with a mature testimony of the gospel simply applies the test prescribed in section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants and finds out for himself. The Lord gave this test to Oliver Cowdery.

“But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

“But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought.” ([D&C 9:8–9](#).)

With that test you can determine anything, if you are humble enough to get the inspiration of the Lord. If you are in harmony, you can ask the Lord if your answer is right. And if it is right, he will give you that burning in your soul that he promised Oliver Cowdery. Then you will know that it is right.

The possession of a sure testimony is the most valuable possession a person can have. It gives him the knowledge, the hope, and the assurance that he himself can, through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, become a partaker of all the promised blessings.

It is always an uplift to me to hear a person bear his testimony. I remember the times I thrilled as I listened to President Heber J. Grant bear his testimony. When he used to close a conference, he would say, “I know as I know that I live that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Redeemer of the world, and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the true and the living God, and that Mormonism, so-called, is in very deed the plan of life and salvation.” (*Conference Report*, Oct. 1934, p. 132.)

I never heard him say these words without getting a tingling feeling up and down my spine.

Not by the Learning of Men

Such a testimony is not produced by the learning of the world. It does not come through philosophizing or from studying what men, who do not have a testimony, say. Here is an example of what happens when men, without the guidance of the Spirit, have tried to explain some of the great truths we have just been considering.

Concerning the nature of God, they have said, “There is but one living and true God, everlasting; without body, parts or passions; of infinite power, wisdom and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible; and in the unity of this Godhead there are three persons of one substance, power and eternity—the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost.” (Church of England, *Thirty-Nine Articles*.)

Compare this babble with the Prophet Joseph Smith’s statement: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.” ([D&C 130:22](#).)

Here is another example of what happens when men revise the scriptures without the inspiration of the Spirit. Isaiah, in predicting the birth of Christ, said, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” ([Isa. 7:14](#).) When Isaiah used the word *virgin*, he was saying that a woman who had not known a man should bear a son. The modern translators put it this way: “Behold, a young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ([Isa. 7:14](#), Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, 1952.)

You see, they do not believe that Christ was divine, so it does not make any difference to them whether they say a young woman or a virgin.

A testimony comes through the power of the Holy Ghost. Every person who has ever had a testimony received it through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As the Prophet Joseph Smith said, the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit. He is a member of the Godhead. As such, one of his assignments is to bear witness to believers that Jesus is the Christ. Paul taught in his day “that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” ([1 Cor. 12:3](#); see *Teachings of the Prophet*, p. 223.)

Witness of the Spirit

President Grant used to tell about the experience of Senator Beveridge, a great senator from Indiana. (If you want something good to read, read the life of John Marshall, in several volumes, by this great senator.) Senator Beveridge spent a summer vacation interviewing eminent divines. One of his questions had to do with the personality of God:

“Do you believe in God the Father, God a person, God a definite and tangible intelligence—not a congeries of laws floating like a fog through the universe; but God, a person in whose image you were made? Don’t argue; don’t explain; but is your mind in a condition where you can answer yes or no?”

“Not a minister answered ‘Yes,’ but they all gave a lot of explanations to the effect that we could not be sure about such things. ...

“The next question was: ‘Yes or no: do you believe that Christ was the Son of the living God, sent by Him to save the world? I am not asking whether you believe that He was inspired in the sense that the great moral teachers are inspired—nobody has any difficulty about that. But do you believe that Christ was God’s very Son, with a divinely appointed and definite mission, dying on the cross, and raised from the dead—yes or no?’

“Again, not a single minister answered ‘Yes.’” (President Heber J. Grant, *Improvement Era*, July 1940, p. 394.)

They could not answer yes because they did not have a witness from the Holy Ghost.

If I should ask you how many of you know that Jesus is the Christ, many of you would answer yes, perhaps all of you. And how do you know? You know because the Holy Spirit has borne witness to you. Sometimes this knowledge comes to a person suddenly. He gets it at a certain time, and his conscience knows that he has received it.

Let me tell you an experience of the girl who later became my wife. At one time she was a member of a stake Sunday School board. As such, it was her responsibility to instruct teachers in a union meeting class. The lesson for a particular session was the Prophet’s vision of the Father and the Son. She was aware that in the class there would be a graduate from the University of Idaho who was not a Latter-day Saint and who did not believe the gospel. It occurred to her that the account of the Father and the Son’s coming to the Prophet Joseph Smith would not be accepted by this educated, refined, and lovely woman. Thinking about it, she became greatly disturbed. She was not sure that she herself knew it was true. She was so distraught that she sought out her mother. Weeping she said, “Mother, I can’t give that lesson. I don’t know that Joseph Smith had that vision. That woman will laugh at me and ridicule me.”

Her mother was not an educated woman, but she did have a testimony. She said to her daughter, “You know how the Prophet got the vision, don’t you?”

“Yes,” answered her daughter, “he got it by praying to God for wisdom.”

“Why don’t you try that?” said the mother to her daughter.

The daughter went to her room and tried it; she “wrestled” with God, as did Enos. The result was that she went to that union meeting and gave the lesson convincingly, with power beyond her natural abilities. How could she do it? Well, the Holy Spirit came to her in response to her inquiry. She received a burning within her soul. She knew that Joseph Smith had seen the vision, as well as he knew it. She had not seen exactly the same things with her eyes that the Prophet saw, but she had the same knowledge. She knew from Joseph Smith’s description what he had seen, and she had a witness from the Holy Ghost that his account was true.

Changes Wrought by Testimony

Sometimes a testimony comes to a person slowly, over an extended period of time. I do not remember a testimony coming to me suddenly as it did to my wife. I cannot remember when I

did not have a testimony. It has, of course, been strengthened through the years, but I can never remember when I did not believe. But whether a testimony comes suddenly or by degrees, it does something to a person. One is different after he receives a testimony. Good men, great men, are different. Peter was different. When Jesus spoke of his approaching crucifixion, Peter said that he would die with him. In response, Jesus said to Peter, “Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.” ([Mark 14:30.](#))

When Christ was taken into custody, Peter—following a distance behind—went to the place where Jesus was being indicted. As he sat among the spectators, “a certain maid beheld him ... and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him.

“And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.

“And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.

“And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean.

“And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

“And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” ([Luke 22:56–62.](#))

That was not the end for Peter, however. When the Holy Ghost fell on him and the rest of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, they received testimonies. Thereafter Peter and John went up to the temple and healed the lame man—that is, in the name of Jesus they exercised the power of the priesthood, and God healed the man at their request. The people gathered around and marveled at the miracle. The Jewish leaders became concerned lest they should lose their following. They therefore took Peter and John into custody and told them not to preach and teach anymore in the name of Christ. These rulers had the power to put Peter and John to death, as they had put Christ to death. But Peter was different now. When they told him and John not to preach any more, Peter said, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” ([Acts 4:19–20.](#))

He had a testimony then.

The experiences of Alma and Paul are also examples of how testimonies change men. My father used to tell me that the difference between a man when he has a testimony and when he does not have one is the difference between a living, growing tree and a dry stump. I am sure that he was right.

How do you get a testimony? I think that Jesus gave the answer as well or better than it has ever been given. As he taught in the temple at the Jewish Feast of the Tabernacles, the Jews—although they were even then plotting his death—marveled at his teachings and said, “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” ([John 7:15–17](#).) This statement points the way so clearly and simply that even “wayfaring men, though fools,” need “not err therein.” ([Isa. 35:8](#).)

Acquisition of a Testimony

It is obvious that the first step toward getting a testimony is to learn the will of the Father. This can be done by studying the word of God and by obeying his commandments as they are learned. Study the scriptures. Study the teachings of the prophets. Study the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Bible. Read the teachings of the modern prophets, the life of the Prophet Joseph. Learn and obey the will of God.

There is no shortcut to a testimony. There are not two ways; there is only one way. The Lord revealed that sure and certain way when he said to Oliver Cowdery, “Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive a knowledge. . . .

“Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

“Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation.” ([D&C 8:1–3](#).)

Everyone who sincerely prays with real desire to know the truth concerning what he has learned about the gospel will receive a witness in his mind and in his heart, by the Holy Ghost, as the Lord promised to Oliver. And, as the Lord said, this witness shall dwell in his heart. It shall dwell in his heart forever if he retains his faith by repenting of his sins, by being baptized, by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and by continuing to obey the principles of the gospel to the end of his mortal life.

I have a witness in my soul as to the truth of all the principles I enumerated at the beginning of this article. I know that God lives and that Jesus Christ lives. I shall not be more certain when I stand before them to be judged of my deeds in the flesh. The Holy Ghost has revealed these truths to me. I know that God can hear prayers; he has heard mine on numerous occasions. I have received direct revelation from him. I have had problems that did not seem to have a solution, and I have suffered in facing them until it seemed that I could not go further if I did not have an answer to them. After much praying, and on many occasions fasting for a day, a week, over long periods of time, I have had answers revealed to my mind in finished sentences. I have heard the voice of God in my mind, and I know his words.

May God bless you, brothers and sisters, that you may all enjoy the great gift of a testimony of the gospel. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that man could not be saved in ignorance. (See [D&C](#)

[131:6](#).) He did not have in mind, however, that a man could not be saved in ignorance of some foreign language or in ignorance of some field of science. I would not cast any reflection upon learning; learning is good. I urge you to get just as much as you can. It is all important. But none of it will give you a knowledge of those things that the Prophet had in mind when he said that man could not be saved in ignorance.

The knowledge one must have to be saved is that which comes with a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, including all the principles that it teaches. It can be had; I know many of you have it. God bless you that you may all get it and that you will continue faithful in it to the end of your lives, for unto those who get it and continue faithful to the end, all the promises are given.

Illustrated by Dale Kilbourn