

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet," following which Bishop Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, will speak to us.

The choir and congregation sang "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet."

Bishop Henry B. Eyring spoke without further announcement.

Bishop Henry B. Eyring

God honors his promises

At the close of the last general conference, President Benson said this: "I bless you with increased *understanding* of the Book of Mormon. I promise you that from this moment forward, if we will daily sup from its pages and abide by its precepts, God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church a blessing hitherto unknown" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, p. 100; or *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 78).

I bear my testimony that I have been blessed as He promised, and I have seen new blessings come to people I love. I am grateful that God honors the promises he makes through his prophet.

Some people doubt God's promises

Even as I feel that gratitude, I think of those whose hearts ache over promises yet unfulfilled. Tonight, or tomorrow, many of us will pray with real intent, and perhaps with tears, over someone whose happiness would bring us happiness, who has been promised all the blessings of peace that come with baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and yet who counts the promises worthless. None of us is immune, because all of us have circles of love large enough to include such people. My heart is drawn especially to those asking the question we all have asked: "How can I be sure I have done all I can to help?"

The spark of faith never dies

Fifty years ago, in October conference, President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., of the First Presidency, gave this answer, which I carry copied on a card:

"It is my hope and my belief that the Lord never permits the light of faith wholly to be extinguished in any human heart, however faint the light may glow. The Lord has provided that there shall still be there a spark which, with teaching, with the spirit of righteousness, with love, with tenderness, with example, with living the Gospel, shall brighten and glow again, however darkened the mind may have been. And if we shall fail so to reach those among us of our own whose faith has dwindled low, we shall fail in one of the main things which the Lord expects at our hands" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1936, p. 114).

That lovely metaphor — of a spark, a spark of faith — gives me confidence. President Clark pictured the spark nearly hidden, almost smothered by the ashes of transgression. It may be so small that the person can't feel its warmth. The heart may be hardened. Even the Holy Spirit may have been forced to withdraw. But the spark still lives, and glows, and may be fanned to flame.

Teach faith and repentance to fan the spark

President Clark also suggested what we can do. He did not suggest a single approach to reach all people. But he described what every effort that succeeds in fanning the spark will include.

Teaching is first. But what should we teach? Suppose time and opportunity are scarce, as they generally are with people who don't think they need your teaching. If you had the gift, and the chance, to teach only one thing, what would it be?

For me the answer is illustrated in the success of a great man whose heart ached over someone he loved. His name was Alma, and his son, Alma, went about trying to destroy the true church. You remember that in response to the prayers of his father, and of faithful members of the Church, God sent an angel to rebuke the son.

The rebuke brought young Alma such remorse that he would have been destroyed had he not remembered his father's teaching. He described it this way:

"And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.

"And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

"Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death" (Alma 36:16-18).

Because his father had taught him that the Savior was his only source of hope, Alma began the process which took him to full repentance. If I had the chance to teach one thing, it would be what it means and how it feels to exercise faith in Jesus Christ unto repentance.

To do it I would try to take the person I loved on a journey from when we were with a loving Father in Heaven to when we can go home to him again. We would see the fall of Adam and Eve and feel its effects on us. We would go to Bethlehem and rejoice at the birth of

the Son of God, and to the Garden and to Golgotha as our hearts break at the transcendent gift of the Atonement. And we would go to the open tomb, and to Galilee, and to this hemisphere to feel hope in keeping the commandments of the risen Lord. Then we would go to a grove in New York to watch the boy Joseph Smith talk with God the Father and his resurrected Son, to begin the errand that restored the ordinances of the gospel, which can lead us home again.

Teach with love and tenderness

President Clark understood that a person in whom faith is an ember won't receive even great teaching unless his heart is softened. And so he said that we must touch the person with the spirit of righteousness, with love, and with tenderness. Now, you and I might rightly feel that what he asks is nearly superhuman. In our efforts to invite others back, we have felt rejection and even ridicule. We may feel fatigue, frustration, and sometimes guilt. How then can we keep reaching out in a spirit of righteousness, with love and tenderness?

The best answer I know comes from another wonderful father. His name was Mormon. He wrote a letter to his son Moroni in a time when they met not only rejection but unbridled hatred, and faced not only frustration but almost certain failure. Mormon wanted Moroni to meet even such a test with love and tenderness and the spirit of righteousness. He gave a formula, the same one given by true prophets in all ages. It has always worked. The promise is sure. Here it is, from Mormon's letter:

"And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

"And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation

of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God" (Moroni 8:25-26).

If you try to imagine the Savior restoring a lost sheep to the fold, won't you picture him cradling it in his arms? That tenderness and love, Mormon testified to his son, is the natural result of the atonement of Jesus Christ operating in our lives. Our faith leads us to repentance, to the gifts of the Spirit, and from that to the perfect love which the Master Shepherd has, and knows we must have to serve him.

Teach by example

The effects of the Atonement in our lives can also produce in us the example those we love will need. I learned again the other night the example we need to be.

I was chatting with my wife at the end of a long day. Three of our children were in the room, listening. I turned and noticed that one of them was watching me — and watching my face intently. And then he asked me, softly, "Why are you unhappy?" I tried to give a reason for my furrowed brow, but I realized later that he could well have been asking this deeper question: "Can I see in you the hope for peace in this life that Jesus promised?"

To turn my thoughts from what darkened my look to what would brighten it, I went to another letter from Mormon to his son. Both Mormon and Moroni were facing days of difficulty that make my challenges pale. Mormon knew his son might be overcome with gloom and foreboding, so he told him the perfect antidote. He told him that he could choose, by what he put in his mind, to become an example of hope. Here is what he wrote:

"My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto

death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever" (Moroni 9:25).

Center on the Savior and his atonement

What we can do to help — teaching, and doing it with the spirit of righteousness, with love, with tenderness, with example — centers on the Savior and his atonement. That is what we would teach. The Atonement working in our lives will produce in us the love and tenderness we need. And by remembering him and his gift, which we promise to do as we take the sacrament each week, we can put a light of hope in our faces which those we love need so much to see.

Live the gospel to ignite the spark of faith

President Clark reminded us, at the end of his suggestions, that there is, and always will be, free agency. The spark won't glow brighter until the person tries living the gospel. That is why we hope so much that those we love will be called and will fulfill some assignment, however small. After their choice to serve others, to sacrifice, to try the commandments with promise, the spark of faith ignites. Even after we have done all we can do, that choice — whether to act on what faith they have — must be theirs.

I bear my testimony that God lives, Jesus is the Christ, and in this dispensation, through prophets from Joseph Smith to Ezra Taft Benson, he has given the power to offer again the full blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray that we may never cease to offer the opportunity to choose those blessings to those in whom the spark of faith may yet be fanned to flame. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.