

32. Mormon 8:3.

33. See 2 Timothy 1:7; Doctrine and Covenants 68:6.

34. 1 Peter 2:9.

35. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:540.

36. "True to the Faith," *Hymns*, no. 254.

Elder Robert D. Hales

How to gain a testimony

As Church leaders we are often asked, "How do I receive a testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ?"

Gaining a testimony and becoming converted begins with study and prayer, then living the gospel with patience and persistence and inviting and waiting upon the Spirit. The life of Joseph Smith and the pattern of the Restoration are excellent examples of this process. As you listen to my message today of the events of the Restoration, look for the steps that lead to testimony: desiring to know the truth, pondering in our hearts, then feeling and obediently following the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

The Great Apostasy leads to confusion

Joseph Smith was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont. He came into a family that prayed and studied the Bible. In his youth he became interested in religion and discovered a "great confusion" over the doctrines of Christ, with "priest contending against priest, and convert against convert."¹

This confusion was not unique to his community. It began centuries earlier in what has been called the Great Apostasy. The day of Christ "shall not come," said the Apostle Paul, "except there come a falling away first."²

A few decades after Christ's Resurrection, His Apostles were killed, His teachings were corrupted, and the priesthood was taken from the earth. But Paul, seeing our day, prophesied "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times [God would]

gather together in one all things in Christ."³ He would restore Christ's true Church to the earth once more.

Over the centuries, the world was prepared for that restoration. The Bible was translated and published. A new land was discovered. The spirit of reformation swept through the Christian world, and a nation was founded on the principles of freedom.

Joseph prays to find the true church

Joseph Smith was born in that nation and, at the age of 14, found himself caught in a "tumult of [religious] opinions." Often he asked himself, "If any one of [these churches] be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?"⁴

Joseph turned to the Bible for answers. "If any of you lack wisdom," he read in the Epistle of James, "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."⁵

Following James's direction, Joseph went to a grove of trees near his home and prayed. As he called upon God, "a pillar of light . . . descended," brighter than the noonday sun, and "two Personages" appeared. "One of them spake . . . , calling [Joseph] by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*"⁶

God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, conversed with Joseph. They answered his question. They taught him that the true Church of Christ had been lost from the earth. Joseph learned that these members of the Godhead were separate and distinct beings, They knew him by name, and They were willing to answer his

prayers. The heavens were opened, the night of apostasy was over, and the light of the gospel began to shine forth.

Like Joseph, we must search and pray

Like Joseph, many of us find ourselves seeking the light of truth. Just as the world was prepared for the Restoration, each of us is prepared to receive the light of the gospel in our own lives. Sometimes that preparation comes through a change in our circumstances—through meeting a new friend, moving to a new community, a change of employment, the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, illness, misfortune, and even tragedy.

During these times of transition, we seek answers to the important questions of life: Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here on earth? And where are we going after we die? Joseph was not born with this knowledge, and neither were we. We must find it.

Like Joseph, we must search the scriptures and pray. For many, this means overcoming feelings of doubt and unworthiness, being humble, and learning to exercise faith.

Joseph's example of spiritual maturation

During the three years following his First Vision, Joseph felt very humble. Often, he said, "I . . . felt condemned for my weakness and imperfections."⁷ But he did not lose faith or forget the power of prayer.

Prayer in bringing forth the Book of Mormon

On September 21, 1823, at the age of 17, Joseph knelt to ask "for forgiveness of [his] sins and follies, and [to receive] a manifestation . . . of [his] state and standing before [God]."⁸ As he prayed, a light once again appeared, increasing "until the room was lighter than at noonday."⁹ In that light there stood a personage dressed in a robe of "exquisite whiteness."¹⁰ He

called Joseph by name and introduced himself as Moroni. He said "that God had a work for [Joseph] to do"¹¹ and told him of an ancient record written on gold plates, which, when translated, became the Book of Mormon. The book contained a record of the fulness of the gospel, as taught to Moroni's ancestors by Jesus Christ. Joseph was directed to obtain that record, buried near his family's home in a hill which is now called Cumorah.

The next day, Joseph found the plates, but the time had not yet arrived to bring them forth. Moroni instructed Joseph to meet him there that same day each year for the next four years.¹²

Joseph obeyed. Each year he went to the hill, where Moroni gave him instruction concerning the restoration of Christ's Church.¹³ Much like the Savior's childhood described in the New Testament, Joseph "increased in wisdom and stature"¹⁴ and "waxed strong in spirit."¹⁵

So it is for us. Some newly baptized members become discouraged about their wisdom and stature in the gospel—about what they do not know. They forget the obedient effort, gospel tutoring, and spiritual maturation that were part of Joseph's early experiences. Those who are longtime members should also remember that regular spiritual instruction and learning are required if we are to wax strong in the Spirit.

After four years of continued obedience, Joseph received the plates on September 22, 1827, at the age of 21. He also received an ancient instrument for translating them, called the Urim and Thummim. Using this sacred interpreter, along with the Holy Ghost, Joseph began the work of translation in December of that year.¹⁶ In time he was joined by a schoolteacher named Oliver Cowdery, who acted as his scribe.¹⁷

Prayer leads to restoration of the priesthood

At the age of 23, Joseph was translating the plates when he and Oliver came

upon a passage about baptism for the remission of sins. Like new investigators, they wanted to know more. Joseph knew what to do.

On May 15, 1829, the two men went into the woods to inquire of the Lord. While they were praying, John the Baptist appeared “in a cloud of light.”¹⁸ He was the one who had baptized the Savior in life. He held the priesthood keys necessary to perform that ordinance by the authority of God.

As Joseph and Oliver knelt before John, he laid his hands on their heads and conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon them.¹⁹ From that point on, Joseph and Oliver possessed the authority to baptize and confer that priesthood on others.

Today all who want to know whether they should be baptized are invited to follow Joseph and Oliver’s example and pray. And all who are prepared and worthy for baptism may receive it from one whose authority has been passed unbroken from the hands of John the Baptist in this dispensation.

In late May or early June 1829, the Melchizedek, or higher, Priesthood was conferred on Joseph and Oliver by the Apostles Peter, James, and John.

The translation of the Book of Mormon was also completed that June, and the book was published less than a year later, on March 26, 1830.

Prayer leads to visions, restoration of keys

Twelve days after the Book of Mormon was published, on April 6, the Church was formally organized at the home of Peter Whitmer Sr. in Fayette, New York. As prophesied by Paul, the ancient Church of Christ was once again established on the earth.²⁰

But the work of the Restoration was not over. As in times of old, members of the Church were instructed to build a temple, which was dedicated in Kirtland, Ohio, on March 27, 1836. One week later,

on April 3, a meeting was held there. Following a solemn and silent prayer, Joseph and Oliver saw the Lord Jesus Christ standing before them. He who had said, “Foxes have holes, and the birds . . . have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head,”²¹ had come to His holy house. Moses, Elias, and Elijah also appeared there and committed the keys of the kingdom, the saving ordinances, to Joseph.²²

Pattern of prayer in the Restoration

Brothers and sisters, can we see the pattern? Every major event of the Restoration—the First Vision, the appearance of Moroni and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the priesthood, and the appearance of Jesus Christ following the dedication of His holy temple—was preceded by prayer.

Since that time, 116 temples have been dedicated. I have attended a number of these sacred meetings. Dedicatory prayers have been offered. The Holy Ghost has been present in abundance. During these times, among many others, I have felt the undeniable witness of the Spirit of God, like a fire burning in my heart, that the restored gospel is true.

How did I learn these things? Nephi gives a clear and compelling account of the process, which includes desiring, believing, having faith, pondering, and then following the Spirit. Let’s hear it as related by Nephi:

“For it came to pass after I had *desired* to know the things that my father had seen [in a vision of the tree of life], and *believing* that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat *pondering* in mine heart I was *caught away in the Spirit* of the Lord, yea, . . . and *the Spirit [spoke] unto me.*”²³

Once we receive a witness of the Spirit, our testimony is strengthened through study, prayer, and living the gospel. Our

growing testimony brings us increased faith in Jesus Christ and His plan of happiness. We are motivated to repent and obey the commandments, which, with a mighty change of heart, leads to our conversion. And our conversion brings divine forgiveness, healing, joy, and the desire to bear our witness to others.

How to begin the process

Now you may wonder, how does one begin this process? May I suggest accepting the invitation extended by Moroni in the Book of Mormon: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”²⁴ For some, this happens quickly. For others, it happens gradually over the years.

We are able to receive this spiritual manifestation because the Holy Ghost is “a personage of Spirit” who can “dwell in us.”²⁵ His mission is to witness of the Father and the Son, convey Their will to us, and teach us “all things what [we] should do.”²⁶ People everywhere may feel the influence of the Holy Ghost from time to time in their lives. But only those who have been baptized and confirmed can receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by one in authority, which makes His constant companionship possible.

Retaining that companionship requires an earnest effort by Church members. If we are not obedient to the laws, principles, and ordinances of the gospel, the Holy Ghost will withdraw. He cannot be with us if we are angry in our hearts, contentious with our companions, or critical of the Lord’s anointed. He departs whenever we are rebellious, are immoral,

dress or act immodestly, are unclean or profane in mind or body, are slothful in priesthood callings and duties, or commit other sins, for “the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples.”²⁷

Therefore, we must continually repent, partake of the sacrament, be worthy of a temple recommend, and serve the Lord with all our “heart, might, mind and strength.”²⁸

Strengthen testimony by sharing it

With the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, we feel a love for God and all His children. This love casts out fear and fills us with the desire to open our mouths. There is no greater gift we can give others than to bear our testimony to them. There is no greater joy we can have than to bring even one soul unto Christ.²⁹ And there is no greater way to strengthen our own testimony than to share our witness of Him with the world. As we do, our families will be strengthened. Our wards, stakes, and communities will be filled with peace and love, and ultimately the earth will be prepared for the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I know the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is true. I know The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is His Church on the earth today. I know Joseph Smith is a prophet of God and Gordon B. Hinckley is his successor, the prophet and President of the Church today.

I exhort you, I pray for you—if you do not know these things for yourself, follow the example of Joseph Smith and the pattern of the Restoration. Turn to the scriptures. Kneel in prayer. Ask in faith. Listen to the Holy Ghost. Learn that your name and needs are known by our Heavenly Father, just as Joseph’s were. Live the gospel with patience and persistence. And in the name of Jesus Christ, I promise, “If ye will . . . ask [Heavenly Father] in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence

in keeping [the Lord's] commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you."³⁰

Jesus Christ lives. This is His work. Of this I bear my special witness, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith—History 1:6.
2. 2 Thessalonians 2:3.
3. Ephesians 1:10.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:10.
5. James 1:5; see Joseph Smith—History 1:11.
6. Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17.
7. Joseph Smith—History 1:29.
8. Joseph Smith—History 1:29.
9. Joseph Smith—History 1:30.
10. Joseph Smith—History 1:31.
11. Joseph Smith—History 1:33.
12. See Joseph Smith—History 1:52–53.
13. See Joseph Smith—History 1:54.
14. Luke 2:52.
15. Luke 2:40.
16. See Joseph Smith—History 1:59, 62.
17. See Joseph Smith—History 1:66–67.
18. Joseph Smith—History 1:68.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 13; Joseph Smith—History 1:68–69.
20. See Ephesians 1:10.
21. Matthew 8:20.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 110.
23. 1 Nephi 11:1–2; italics added.
24. Moroni 10:4–5.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
26. 2 Nephi 32:5.
27. Helaman 4:24.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 4:2.
29. See Doctrine and Covenants 18:15.
30. 1 Nephi 15:11.

Elder Shirley D. Christensen

United in our love for God

As I look out over this vast congregation, in my mind's eye I see not only those present in the Conference Center but those of you who are participating in this conference in meetinghouses and homes throughout the world. Although you may be near or far away, you are so vital to the work of the Lord and the establishment of the Church where you live.

We are united in our love for God, our Eternal Father. We honor His name and that of His Only Begotten Son, the Savior of the world, even Jesus Christ. In this conference there will be communicated to us—through the power of the Holy Ghost—feelings that will increase our faith in the Father and the Son and our love for the principles of the restored gospel. In turn, those feelings will draw us nearer to Them as we feel Their presence in our lives and desire with all our hearts to know Their will and to become like Them.

Prophets are called of God

My message and testimony to you is that prophets and apostles stand at the head of this work today as it goes forth to all the world. They have been called of God by revelation. They are indeed prophets, seers, and revelators. The Lord loves them, and as members of the Church, we honor them and look to them as servants of the living God. The clarion call of the prophets is as clear today as it ever was in the past, and the testimony of the prophets will continue to the very moment that the Lord Jesus Christ returns to reign in glory.

We live in wonderful but perilous times. Throughout the earth, the fabric of nations and the collective world appears to be deteriorating. We see discord and enmity between leaders and nations, conflicts between communities, and contention within families. The solution to the ills of the world is found in understanding the doctrines and teachings of the Lord Jesus