

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Becoming converted to the gospel

My comments are directed particularly to young people, although I hope they may be helpful to everyone.

Years ago when I served as a stake president, a man came to confess a transgression. His confession surprised me. He had been an active member of the Church for years. I wondered how a person with his experience could have committed the sin that he did. After some pondering, it came to me that this brother had never become truly converted. Despite his Church activity, the gospel had not penetrated his heart. It was only an external influence in his life. When he was in wholesome environments, he kept the commandments, but in a different environment, other influences might control his actions.

How can you become converted? How can you make the gospel of Jesus Christ not just an influence in your life but the controlling influence and, indeed, the very core of what you are? The ancient prophet Jeremiah spoke of the law of God—the gospel—being written in our hearts. He quotes the Lord speaking about us, His people in the latter days: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”¹

Do you want this for yourself? I can tell you how that can happen, but it must be something you want. The gospel cannot be written in your heart unless your heart is open. Without a heartfelt desire, you can participate in sacrament meetings, classes, and Church activities and do the things I will tell you, but it won’t make much difference. But if your heart is open and willing, like the heart of a child,² let me tell you what you can do to be converted.

Lay aside pride and submit to God

As a first step, you must lay aside any feeling of pride that is so common in the world today. By this I mean the attitude that rejects the authority of God to rule in our lives. This attitude was described by the Lord to Joseph Smith when He said, “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god.”³ You hear it expressed today in phrases such as “Do your own thing” or “Right and wrong depend on what I feel is right for me.” That attitude is a rebellion against God, just as Lucifer rebelled against God in the premortal world. He rejected God’s right to declare the truth and establish the law.⁴ Satan wanted, and still wants, the power to declare arbitrarily what is right and wrong. Our beloved Creator does not force us to accept His authority, but willingly submitting to that authority is the first step in conversion.

Study the scriptures

Further, for the gospel to be written in your heart, you need to know what it is and grow to understand it more fully. That means you will study it.⁵ When I say *study*, I mean something more than reading. It is a good thing sometimes to read a book of scripture within a set period of time to get an overall sense of its message, but for conversion you should care more about the amount of time you spend in the scriptures than about the amount you read in that time. I see you sometimes reading a few verses, stopping to ponder them, carefully reading the verses again, and as you think about what they mean, praying for understanding, asking questions in your mind, waiting for spiritual impressions, and

writing down the impressions and insights that come so you can remember and learn more. Studying in this way, you may not read a lot of chapters or verses in a half hour, but you will be giving place in your heart for the word of God, and He will be speaking to you. Remember Alma's description of what it feels like: "It beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me."⁶ You will know that the gospel is being written in your heart, that your conversion is happening, as the word of the Lord from His prophets, past and present, feels more and more delicious to your soul.

Pray with your whole soul

I mentioned praying as you study to understand the scriptures, but your prayers must not be limited to that. In the Book of Mormon, Amulek tells us we should pray about everything in our lives. He says, "Pour out your souls [to God] in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness."⁷ Your Heavenly Father wants you to pray about your hopes and fears, your friends and family, your school and work, and the needs of those around you. Most of all, you should pray to be filled with the love of Christ. This love is given to those who are true followers of Jesus Christ, who ask for it with all the energy of their hearts.⁸ This love is the fruit of the tree of life,⁹ and tasting it is a major part of your conversion because once you have felt your Savior's love for you, even the smallest part, you will feel secure, and a love for Him and for your Heavenly Father will grow within you. In your heart you will want to do what these holy beings ask of you. Go often to your closet, your secret place, your wilderness. Thank God for your blessings; ask for His help; ask Him to bestow upon you the pure love of Christ. Sometimes fasting will help.

Serve others

After Amulek talked about prayer, he spoke about something else that is an important element of your conversion—serving others. Otherwise, he said, "your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing."¹⁰ In other words, to be converted, you must not only open your heart to a knowledge of the gospel and the love of God, you must practice the gospel law. You cannot fully understand or appreciate it unless you personally apply it in your life. Jesus said that He came to serve, not to be served.¹¹ So it must be with you. You must look outward and care about others. You can be compassionate; you can be friendly; you can share; you can help others in a hundred small ways. As you do, the gospel of Jesus Christ will become a part of you.

Have a repentant heart, a contrite spirit

Let me mention one other thing. In ancient times when people wanted to worship the Lord and seek His blessings, they often brought a gift. For example, when they went to the temple, they brought a sacrifice to place on the altar. After His Atonement and Resurrection, the Savior said He would no longer accept burnt offerings of animals. The gift or sacrifice He will accept now is "a broken heart and a contrite spirit."¹² As you seek the blessing of conversion, you can offer the Lord the gift of your broken, or repentant, heart and your contrite, or obedient, spirit. In reality, it is the gift of yourself—what you are and what you are becoming.

Is there something in you or in your life that is impure or unworthy? When you get rid of it, that is a gift to the Savior. Is there a good habit or quality that is lacking in your life? When you adopt it and make it part of your character, you are giving a gift to the Lord.¹³ Sometimes this is hard to do, but would your gifts of repentance and obedience be worthy gifts if

they cost you nothing?¹⁴ Don't be afraid of the effort required. And remember, you don't have to do it alone. Jesus Christ will help you make of yourself a worthy gift. His grace will make you clean, even holy. Eventually you will become like Him, "perfect in Christ."¹⁵

Conversion brings protection

With conversion you will wear a protective armor—"the whole armour of God"¹⁶—and the words of Christ, which come by the Holy Spirit, "will tell you all things" you should do.¹⁷

In 1992, two sister missionaries in Zagreb, Croatia, were returning to their apartment one evening. Their last teaching appointment had been some distance away, and it was getting dark. Several men on the trolley made crude comments and became rather menacing. Feeling threatened, the sisters got off the trolley at the next stop just as the doors closed so no one could follow them. Having avoided that problem, they realized they were in a place unknown to either of them. As they turned to look for help, they saw a woman. The missionaries explained that they were lost and asked the woman if she could direct them. She knew where they could find another trolley to take them home and invited them to follow her. On the way they had to pass a bar with patrons sitting along the sidewalk in the gathering darkness. These men also appeared threatening. Nevertheless, the two young women had the distinct impression that the men could not see them. They walked by, apparently invisible to those who might have had a mind to harm them. When the sisters and their guide reached the stop, the trolley they needed was just arriving. They turned to thank the woman, but she was nowhere to be seen.¹⁸

These missionaries were furnished a guide and other blessings to protect them physically. As you become converted, you

will have comparable protections to keep you from temptation and deliver you from evil.¹⁹ Sometimes evil will not find you. Sometimes you will be protected when evil is made invisible to you. Even when you must confront it directly, you will do so with faith, not fear.

Gospel written in your mind and heart

We have talked of desire, submissiveness to God, study, prayer, service, repentance, and obedience. From these, coupled with your worship and activity in Church, will come testimony and conversion. The gospel won't be just an influence in your life—it will be what you are. Plead with God in the name of Christ to write the gospel in your mind that you may have understanding and in your heart that you may love to do His will.²⁰ Pursue this blessing diligently and patiently, and you will receive it, for God "is gracious and merciful, . . . and of great kindness."²¹ I so bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Jeremiah 31:33. Ezekiel said conversion is like the Lord taking away our "stony heart" and giving us a heart that loves Him and His gospel (see Ezekiel 11:19–20). Surely this is what happened to the people of King Benjamin when they said their hearts had been changed and they didn't even want to do evil anymore "but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2).
2. See Matthew 18:3–4.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 1:16; see also Helaman 12:6.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:25–29.
5. We are exceptionally fortunate to have so much of the recorded word of God at our fingertips. In prior ages of the world's history, very few people had copies of the scriptures in their possession. They had to try to remember what they could whenever they heard scriptures read in sermons. What an incomparable blessing that you can have your own copy to read whenever

you want. You can see how the gospel works in the lives of people who were converted, from Adam's time down to our own time.

6. Alma 32:28.
7. Alma 34:26.
8. See Moroni 7:47–48.
9. See 1 Nephi 11:21–23.
10. Alma 34:28.
11. See Mark 10:45. The Lord told Peter that when he was converted, he should strengthen his brethren (see Luke 22:32).
12. 3 Nephi 9:20.
13. Along with the scriptures, the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* (2001) can guide you.
14. Once when King David prepared to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, a loyal subject said he would give the king the place, the animals, and the firewood to make the sacrifice. But David declined, saying, "I

will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

15. See Moroni 10:32–33.
16. See Ephesians 6:13–17.
17. 2 Nephi 32:3.
18. As related by Sister Nicole Christoffer-son Miller.
19. See Matthew 6:13.
20. See Hebrews 8:10; 10:16.
21. Joel 2:13. "Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (D&C 88:63).

The choir and congregation sang
"Now Let Us Rejoice."

Sister Gayle M. Clegg

The finished story

Some time ago I found a large white envelope in my mailbox. Inside was a story written by a boy I had taught years before when he was in sixth grade. I remembered the student and the assignment his class had worked on for months. I also remembered that he loved to write and would sit and think and think. Sometimes only a word or two found their way to the page. At times he worked during recess, but when the due date arrived, his story still had a chapter to go. I told him just to turn it in as it was, but Jimmy had a different vision and wanted to turn in a finished story. The last day of class he asked if he could finish during the summer break. Again I told him just to turn it in. He pleaded for more time, and finally I sent him on his way with a stack of wrinkled and smudged papers, complimenting him on his determination and assuring him of my confidence in his ability to complete a great story.

I thought about him that summer, but the assignment left my mind until years later when I found his completed project in the mailbox. I was amazed and wondered what made Jimmy finish his story. What kind of vision, determination, and effort had been required in this task? Why do any of us finish a hard task, especially if no one demands its completion?

A pioneer who kept the faith

My husband's great-grandfather Henry Clegg Jr. was a finisher. He joined the Church with his family when the first LDS missionaries went to Preston, England. Henry had a view of his destination in his mind as he and his wife, Hannah, and their two young boys immigrated to Utah. Henry left his older parents, who were too feeble to make such a long and arduous journey, knowing he would never see them again.

While crossing the plains, Hannah contracted cholera and died. She was laid