

Elder Richard G. Scott

Faith and character

When faith is properly understood and used, it has dramatically far-reaching effects. Such faith can transform an individual's life from maudlin, common everyday activities to a symphony of joy and happiness. The exercise of faith is vital to Father in Heaven's plan of happiness. But true faith, faith unto salvation, is centered on the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in His doctrines and teachings, faith in the prophetic guidance of the Lord's anointed, faith in the capacity to discover hidden characteristics and traits that can transform life. Truly, faith in the Savior is a principle of action and power.

Faith is a foundation building block of creation. I am confident that the Savior Jesus Christ uses faith in His capacity to act under the direction of Father in Heaven. The Master used it to create the most remote galaxies as well as to compose quarks, the smallest elements of matter we know of today. Yet I have faith that there are yet smaller building blocks in the wonder of creation.

Faith in the future is demonstrated by a couple sealed in the temple. They understand that by obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the plan of happiness of our Father in Heaven, they can have a joyous life together. They recognize that when the challenges intended to be growth opportunities come, they will find ways, as prompted by the Holy Ghost, to overcome them in ways that are productive and character building.

Faith and character are intimately related. Faith in the power of obedience to the commandments of God will forge strength of character available to you in times of urgent need. Such character is not developed in moments of great challenge or temptation. That is when it is intended to be used. Your exercise of faith in true principles builds character; fortified

character expands your capacity to exercise more faith. As a result, your capacity and confidence to conquer the trials of life are enhanced. The more your character is fortified, the more enabled you are to benefit from exercising the power of faith. You will discover how faith and character interact to strengthen one another. Character is woven patiently from threads of applied principle, doctrine, and obedience.

President Hugh B. Brown said: "Wherever in life great spiritual values await man's appropriation, only faith can appropriate them. Man cannot live without faith, because in life's adventure the central problem is character-building—which is not a product of logic, but of faith in ideals and sacrificial devotion to them" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1969, 105). We exercise faith by doing. The *Lectures on Faith* state that "faith [is] the principle of action and of power" (*Lectures on Faith* [1985], 72).

We *become* what we want to *be* by consistently *being* what we want to *become* each day. Righteous character is a precious manifestation of what you are becoming. Righteous character is more valuable than any material object you own, any knowledge you have gained through study, or any goals you have attained, no matter how well lauded by mankind. In the next life your righteous character will be evaluated to assess how well you used the privilege of mortality.

Neither Satan nor any other power can destroy or undermine your growing character. Only you could do that through disobedience. A sterling character is converted into worthless ashes when eroded by deceit or transgression.

Strong moral character results from consistent correct choices in the trials and testing of life. Such choices are made with trust in things that are believed and when acted upon are confirmed.

Principles underlying faith

What are some of the empowering principles upon which faith is based?

- Trust in God and in His willingness to provide help when needed, no matter how challenging the circumstance.
- Obedience to His commandments and a life that demonstrates that He can trust you.
- Sensitivity to the quiet promptings of the Holy Spirit.
- Courageous implementation of that prompting.
- Patience and understanding when God lets you struggle to grow and when answers come a piece at a time over an extended period.

“Faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6). Thus, every time you try your faith—that is, act in worthiness on an impression—you will receive the confirming evidence of the Spirit. As you walk to the boundary of your understanding into the twilight of uncertainty, exercising faith, you will be led to find solutions you would not obtain otherwise. With even your strongest faith, God will not always reward you immediately according to your desires. Rather, God will respond with what in His eternal plan is best for you, when it will yield the greatest advantage. Be thankful that sometimes God lets you struggle for a long time before that answer comes. That causes your faith to increase and your character to grow.

The bedrock of character is integrity. Worthy character will strengthen your capacity to recognize the direction of the Spirit and to be obedient to it. Your consistent exercise of faith builds strong character. A secure foundation for your growing character is laid by making Jesus Christ and His teachings the center of your life.

Happiness requires righteous decisions

Your happiness on earth as well as your eternal salvation require many correct decisions, none of which is difficult to make. Together those decisions forge a character resistant to the eroding influences of sin and transgression. Noble character is like a treasured porcelain made of select raw materials, formed with faith, carefully crafted by consistent righteous acts, and fired in the furnace of uplifting experience. It is an object of great beauty and priceless worth. Yet it can be damaged in a moment through transgression, requiring painful, prolonged effort to be rebuilt. When protected by self-control, righteous character will endure for eternity.

Material things do not of themselves produce happiness and satisfaction and the joy of attainment on earth. Nor do they lead us to exaltation. It is nobility of character, that fabric of inner strength and conviction woven from countless righteous decisions, that gives life its direction. A consistent, righteous life produces an inner power and strength that can be permanently resistant to the eroding influence of sin and transgression. Your faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His commandments will strengthen your character. Your character is a measure of what you are becoming. It is the evidence of how well you are using your time on earth in this period of mortal probation.

An axiom we all understand is that you get what you pay for. That is true for spiritual matters as well. You get what you pay for in obedience, in faith in Jesus Christ, in diligent application of the truths you learn. What you get is the molding of character, the growth in capacity, and the successful completion of your mortal purpose to be proven and to have joy.

You cannot be passive in life, or in time the natural man will undermine your efforts to live worthily. You become what you do and what you think about. Lack of character leads one under pressure to

satisfy appetite or seek personal gain. You cannot successfully bolster a weak character with the cloak of pretense.

In time, one who makes decisions based upon circumstance is virtually assured to commit serious transgressions. There is no iron rod of truth to keep that person in the right way. He or she will continually be faced with many subtle temptations to make deviations from the commandments. Those choices are justified by arguing that they are not that bad, that they are more socially acceptable and provide a broader base of friends. A clever individual without foundation principles can at times acquire, temporarily, impressive accomplishments. Yet that attainment is like a sand castle. When the test of character comes, it crumbles, often taking others with it. Despite how carefully a transgressor seeks to keep the violation of commandments hidden, in time they nearly always become publicly known. Satan himself sees to that. He and his minions are determined to cause the greatest possible harm to each of Father in Heaven's children. One serious act of disobedience or violation of trust invariably raises questions of whether or not there are others. The faith and confidence of others in that individual's character is undermined.

This mortal life is a proving ground. How well you meet its challenges determines how strong your character will be. Your faith in Jesus Christ and His teachings fortifies your character.

Growth and nurturing of testimony

I have personally verified that concepts like faith, prayer, love, and humility hold no great significance and produce no miracles until they become a living part of us through our own experience, aided by the sweet prompting of the Holy Spirit. In early life I found that I could learn gospel teachings intellectually and, through the power of reason and analysis, recognize that they were of significant value. But their enormous power and ability to

stretch me beyond the limits of my imagination and capacity did not become reality until patient, consistent practice allowed the Holy Spirit to distill and expand their meaning in my heart. I found that while I was sincerely serving others, God forged my personal character. He engendered a growing capacity to recognize the direction of the Spirit. The genius of the gospel plan is that by doing those things the Lord counsels us to do, we are given every understanding and every capacity necessary to provide peace and rich fulfillment in this life. Likewise, we gain the preparation necessary for eternal happiness in the presence of the Lord.

A testimony is fortified by spiritual impressions that confirm the validity of a teaching, of a righteous act. Often such guidance is accompanied by powerful emotions that bring tears to the eyes and make it difficult to speak. But a testimony is not emotion. It is the very essence of character woven from threads born of countless correct decisions. These choices are made with trusting faith in things that are believed and, at least initially, are not seen. A strong testimony gives peace, comfort, and assurance. It generates the conviction that as the teachings of the Savior are consistently obeyed, life will be beautiful, the future will be secure, and there will be capacity to overcome the challenges that cross our path. A testimony grows from understanding truth distilled from prayer and the pondering of scriptural doctrine. It is nurtured by living those truths with faith anchored in the secure confidence that the promised results will be obtained.

Your testimony will be made strong through willing obedience to the law of tithing and by giving fast offerings, and the Lord will bless you richly for it. As your testimony is fortified, Satan will try harder to tempt you. Resist his efforts. You will become stronger and his influence on you weaker.

Satan's increasing influence in the world is allowed to provide an atmosphere

in which to prove ourselves. While he causes havoc today, Satan's final destiny was fixed by Jesus Christ through His Atonement and the Resurrection. The devil will not triumph. Even now he must operate within the bounds set by the Lord. He cannot take away any blessing that has been earned. He cannot alter character that has been woven from righteous decisions. He has no power to destroy the eternal bonds forged in a holy temple between a husband, wife, and children. He cannot quench true faith. He cannot take away your testimony. Yes, these things can be lost by succumbing to his temptations. But he has no power in and of himself to destroy them.

To summarize:

- God uses your faith to mold your character.
- Character is the manifestation of what you are becoming.
- Strong character results from consistent correct choices.
- The bedrock of character is integrity.
- The more your character is fortified, the more enabled you are to exercise the power of faith.

Principles that strengthen character

Humility is that quality that permits us to be taught from on high through the Spirit or to be taught from sources whose origin was inspiration from the Lord, such as the scriptures and the comments of the prophets. Humility is the precious fertile soil of righteous character. In it the seeds of personal growth germinate. When cultivated through the exercise of faith, pruned by repentance, and fortified by obedience and good works, such seeds produce the cherished fruit of spiritual direction. Divine inspiration and power then result—inspiration to know the will

of the Lord, power to provide the ability to accomplish that inspired will.

May I share four principles which have brought the deepest feelings of peace and happiness into my own life? The Lord has established these cornerstones in His eternal plan, and each one is essential. All work together in harmony and reinforce one another. When they are applied with diligence and consistency, they produce strength of character, increasing ability to convert the challenges of life into stepping-stones of happiness now and forever. They are:

- Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His program to acquire the power to achieve.
- Repentance to rectify the consequences of mistakes of omission or commission.
- Obedience to the commandments of the Lord to provide strength and direction in our lives.
- Selfless service to enrich the lives of others.

If you have determined to live righteously, don't become discouraged. Life may seem difficult now, but hold on tightly to that iron rod of truth. You are making better progress than you realize. Your struggles are defining character, discipline, and confidence in the promises of your Father in Heaven and the Savior as you consistently obey Their commandments. May the Holy Ghost prompt you to always make decisions that fortify your character and yield much joy and happiness. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Home."

Elder Jorge F. Zeballos offered the benediction.
