

able to use it in many different ways and it is strong.

“Families can be like ropes. When only one person is working hard and doing what is right, the family will not be as strong as when everyone is putting forth the effort to help each other.

“I know that when I do what is right, I am helping my family. When I am treating my sister, Isabelle, nicely, we both have fun and it makes my mom and dad happy. If my mom needs to do something, I can help her by playing with my little brother, Joey. I also can help my family by keeping my room clean and helping out whenever I can with a good attitude. Since I am the oldest child in my family, I know being a good example is important. I can try my best to choose the right and follow the commandments.

“I know that kids can help their families be strong like a strong rope. When everyone does their best and works together, families can be happy and strong.”

When parents preside over the family in love and righteousness and teach their children the gospel of Jesus Christ by word and *through* example, and when children love and support their parents by learning and practicing the principles

their parents teach, the result will be the establishment of a Christ-centered home.

Brothers and sisters, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we understand and believe in the eternal nature of the family. This understanding and belief should inspire us to do everything in our power to establish a Christ-centered home. I bear you my testimony that as we strive to do this, we will more fully practice the love and service that was exemplified through the life and Atonement of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and as a result, our homes can truly feel like heaven on earth. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Acts 17:27–28.
2. “I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 130:2; see also Robert D. Hales, in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 86; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 64.
4. Alma 42:8.
5. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
6. C. C. Miller, “The Echo,” in *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, ed. Jack M. Lyon and others (1996), 312–13.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25; italics added.

Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr.

Our testimonies

One of the great blessings of my life over many years has been the opportunity to be surrounded by and work with the young people of the Church. I consider these associations and friendships to be among the sweetest and most valuable of my life. They also are much of the basis for the optimism I have for the future of the Church, society, and the world.

During these interactions I have also had the privilege of conferring with some who have had various doubts or challenges

with their testimonies. While the specifics have been varied and occasionally unique, many of the questions and causes for confusion have been quite similar. Likewise, these are issues and concerns not restricted to any demographic or age-group. They may trouble those who are multigenerational Church members, relatively new Church members, and also those just becoming familiar with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their questions are usually the result of honest inquiry or curiosity. Because the implications are so significant and serious for

each of us, it seems appropriate to consider the matter of our testimonies. In our Latter-day Saint context, we refer to our testimonies as our sure witness of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is obtained by revelation through the Holy Ghost.

While a testimony is simple and clear in this defining declaration, arising from this declaration are several potential questions, such as: Who is entitled to have a testimony? How does one obtain the necessary revelation? What are the steps in obtaining a testimony? Is gaining a testimony an event or an ongoing process? Each of these queries and others have their own subsets, but the fundamentals of gaining and retaining a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ are straightforward, clear, and within the capacity of every person.

Responses to questions about testimony

Let me briefly respond to these possible uncertainties and then refer to some insights that have been shared recently by trusted young adult friends who have had personal experience in gaining their testimonies. They have also had opportunities to minister to others having challenges or difficulties with some aspects of their faith and beliefs.

First, who is entitled to have a testimony? Everyone who is willing to pay the price—meaning keeping the commandments—may have a testimony. “Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear” (D&C 1:11). A fundamental reason for the Restoration of the gospel is so “every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth” (D&C 1:20–21).

Second, how does one obtain the necessary revelation, and what are the fundamental steps to achieve it? The pattern has been clear and consistent throughout the ages. The promise given for obtaining

a testimony of the Book of Mormon also applies generally:

“And when ye shall receive these things”—meaning you have listened, read, studied, and pondered on the question at hand—“ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true”—meaning you will pray thoughtfully, specifically, and reverently with a firm commitment to follow the answer to your prayer—“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” (Moroni 10:4–5).

Third, is gaining a testimony an isolated event or an ongoing process? A testimony is similar to a living organism that grows and develops when treated properly. It needs constant nourishment, care, and protection to thrive and prosper. Likewise, neglect or deviance from the pattern of living that a testimony clarifies can lead to its loss or diminishment. The scriptures warn that transgressing or breaking the commandments of God can result in the loss of the Spirit and even to one denying the testimony he or she once possessed (see D&C 42:23).

Observations and suggestions

Let me now share 10 of the observations and suggestions of my valued and faithful young friends. The ideas they share have a commonality in their thinking and experience; thus, they likely will not be surprising to any of us. Unfortunately, and especially at times of our own struggle and distress, we may temporarily forget or discount their applicability to us personally.

First, everyone has worth because we are all children of God. He knows us, loves us, and wants us to succeed and return to Him. We must learn to trust in His love and in His timing rather than in our

own sometimes impatient and imperfect desires.

Second, while we believe fully in the mighty change of heart described in the scriptures (see Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:12–14, 26), we must understand it often occurs gradually, rather than instantaneously or globally, and in response to specific questions, experiences, and concerns as well as by our study and prayer.

Third, we need to remember that a fundamental purpose of life is to be tested and stretched, and thus we must learn to grow from our challenges and be grateful for the lessons learned that we cannot gain in an easier way.

Fourth, we must learn to trust the things that we believe in or know to sustain us in times of uncertainty or with issues where we struggle.

Fifth, as Alma taught, gaining a testimony is usually a progression along the continuum of hoping, believing, and finally knowing the truth of a specific principle, doctrine, or the gospel itself (see Alma 32).

Sixth, teaching someone else what we know strengthens our own testimony as we build that of another. When you give someone money or food, you will have less. However, when you share your testimony, it strengthens and increases for both the bearer and the hearer.

Seventh, we must do the little but necessary things daily and regularly. Prayers, scripture and gospel study, attendance at Church meetings, temple worship, fulfilling visiting teaching, home teaching, and other assignments all strengthen our faith and invite the Spirit into our lives. When we neglect any of these privileges, we place our testimonies in jeopardy.

Eighth, we should not have higher standards for others than we do for ourselves. Too often we may let the mistakes or failures of others, especially leaders or Church members, influence how we feel about ourselves or our testimonies. Other

people's difficulties are not an excuse for our own deficiencies.

Ninth, it is good to remember that being too hard on yourself when you make a mistake can be as negative as being too casual when real repentance is needed.

And tenth, we must always be clear that the Atonement of Christ is fully and continuously operative for each of us when we allow it to be so. Then everything else fits into place, even when we continue to struggle with certain details, habits, or seemingly missing parts in the mosaic of our faith.

“If any man will do his will . . .”

I am grateful for the insights, strengths, and testimonies of so many of my exemplary young friends and associates. When I am with them, I am strengthened, and when I know that they are with others, I am encouraged with the knowledge of the good that they are doing and the service that they are rendering in behalf of the Master they worship and strive to obey.

People do good and important things because they have testimonies. While this is true, we also gain testimonies because of what we do. Jesus 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 7:16–17).

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Like Nephi and Mormon of old, “I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17; see also Words of Mormon 1:7), but let me tell you what I do know.

I know God our Heavenly Father lives and loves us. I know His uniquely special Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer and the head of the Church, which bears His name. I know Joseph Smith experienced all that he has reported and taught with respect to the Restoration of the gospel in our day. I know we are

led by apostles and prophets today and President Thomas S. Monson holds all of the keys of the priesthood necessary to bless our lives and advance the work of the Lord. I know we are all entitled to this knowledge, and if you are struggling, you

can rely on the truthfulness of the testimonies you hear from this pulpit at this conference. These things I know and bear testimony of in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

I have chosen to talk about the importance of *desire*. I hope each of us will search our hearts to determine what we really desire and how we rank our most important desires.

Desires dictate our priorities, priorities shape our choices, and choices determine our actions. The desires we act on determine our changing, our achieving, and our becoming.

The power of an overriding desire

First I speak of some common desires. As mortal beings we have some basic physical needs. Desires to satisfy these needs compel our choices and determine our actions. Three examples will demonstrate how we sometimes override these desires with other desires that we consider more important.

First, food. We have a basic need for food, but for a time that desire can be overridden by a stronger desire to fast.

Second, shelter. As a 12-year-old boy I resisted a desire for shelter because of my greater desire to fulfill a Boy Scout requirement to spend a night in the woods. I was one of several boys who left comfortable tents and found a way to construct a shelter and make a primitive bed from the natural materials we could find.

Third, sleep. Even this basic desire can be temporarily overridden by an even more important desire. As a young soldier in the Utah National Guard, I learned an example of this from a combat-seasoned officer.

In the early months of the Korean War, a Richfield Utah National Guard field artillery battery was called into active service. This battery, commanded by Captain Ray Cox, consisted of about 40 Mormon men. After additional training and reinforcement by reservists from elsewhere, they were sent to Korea, where they experienced some of the fiercest combat of that war. In one battle they had to repel a direct assault by hundreds of enemy infantry, the kind of attack that overran and destroyed other field artillery batteries.

What does this have to do with overcoming the desire for sleep? During one critical night, when enemy infantry had poured through the front lines and into the rear areas occupied by the artillery, the captain had the field telephone lines wired into his tent and ordered his numerous perimeter guards to phone him personally each hour on the hour all night long. This kept the guards awake, but it also meant that Captain Cox had scores of interruptions to his sleep. “How could you do that?” I asked him. His answer shows the power of an overriding desire.

“I knew that if we ever got home, I would be meeting the parents of those boys on the streets in our small town, and I didn’t want to face any of them if their son didn’t make it home because of anything I failed to do as his commander.”¹

What an example of the power of an overriding desire on priorities and on actions! What a powerful example for all of us who are responsible for the welfare of others—parents, Church leaders, and teachers!