

Fourth Floor, Last Door

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Sisters, don’t give up. Seek God with all your heart.

My dear sisters, dear friends, how blessed we are to assemble again in this worldwide conference under the direction and leadership of our dear prophet and President, Thomas S. Monson. President, we love you and we sustain you! We know you love the sisters of the Church.

I love attending this wonderful session of general conference devoted to the sisters of the Church.

Sisters, when I see you, I cannot help but think of the women who have been so influential in my life: my grandmother and mother, who were the first to accept the invitation to come and see what the Church is all about.¹ There is my beloved wife, Harriet, with whom I fell in love the first time I saw her. There is Harriet’s mother, who joined the Church not long after losing her husband to cancer. Then my sister, my daughter, my granddaughter, and my great-granddaughter—all of these individuals have been refining influences for me. They truly bring sunshine into my life. They inspire me to become a better man and a more sensitive Church leader. How different my life would be without them!

Perhaps what humbles me most is to know that the same influence is replicated millions of times throughout the Church through the abilities, talents, intelligence, and testimony of women of faith like you.

Now, some of you might not feel worthy of such high praise. You might think you are too insignificant to have a meaningful influence on others. Perhaps you don’t even consider yourself a “woman of faith” because you sometimes struggle with doubt or fear.

Today, I wish to speak to anyone who has ever felt this way—and that probably includes all of us at one time or another. I wish to speak of faith—what it is, what it can and cannot do, and what we must do to activate the power of faith in our lives.

What Faith Is

Faith is a strong conviction about something we believe—a conviction so strong that it moves us to do things that we otherwise might not do. “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”²

While this makes sense to believing people, it is often confusing to nonbelievers. They shake their heads and ask, “How can anyone be certain of what they cannot see?” To them, this is evidence of the irrationality of religion.

What they fail to understand is that there are more ways to see than with our eyes, more ways to feel than with our hands, more ways to hear than with our ears.

It’s something like the experience of a young girl who was walking with her grandmother. The song of the birds was glorious to the little girl, and she pointed out every sound to her grandmother.

“Do you hear that?” the little girl asked again and again. But her grandmother was hard of hearing and could not make out the sounds.

Finally, the grandmother knelt down and said, “I’m sorry, dear. Grandma doesn’t hear so well.”

Exasperated, the little girl took her grandmother’s face in her hands, looked intently into her eyes, and said, “Grandma, listen harder!”

There are lessons in this story for both the nonbeliever and the believer. Just because we can’t hear something doesn’t mean there is nothing to hear. Two people can listen to the same message or read the same scripture, and one might feel the witness of the Spirit while the other doesn’t.

On the other hand, in our efforts to help our loved ones experience the voice of the Spirit and the vast, eternal, and profound beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ, telling them to “listen harder” may not be the most helpful way.

Perhaps better advice—for anyone who wants to increase faith—is to listen *differently*. The Apostle Paul encourages us to seek the voice that speaks to our spirit, not just to our ears. He taught, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”³ Or perhaps we should consider the words of Saint-Exupéry’s Little Prince, who said: “One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.”⁴

The Power and Limits of Faith

Sometimes it’s not easy to develop faith in spiritual things while living in a physical world. But it is worth the effort because the power of faith in our lives can be profound. The scriptures teach us that through faith the worlds were framed, waters

were parted, dead were raised, and rivers and mountains were moved from their course.⁵

Yet some might ask, "If faith is so powerful, why can't I receive an answer to a heartfelt prayer? I don't need a sea to part or a mountain to move. I just need my illness to go away or my parents to forgive each other or an eternal companion to appear on my doorstep with a bouquet of flowers in one hand and an engagement ring in the other. Why can't my faith accomplish *that*?"

Faith *is* powerful, and often it does result in miracles. But no matter how much faith we have, there are two things faith cannot do. For one, it cannot violate another person's agency.

One woman prayed for years that her wayward daughter would return to the fold of Christ and felt discouraged that her prayers had seemingly gone unanswered. This was especially painful when she heard stories of other prodigal children who had repented of their ways.

The problem was not a lack of prayers or a shortage of faith. She needed only to understand that, as painful as it might be for our Father in Heaven, He will not force anyone to choose the path of righteousness. God did not force His own children to follow Him in the premortal world. How much less will He force us now as we journey through this mortal life?

God will invite, persuade. God will reach out tirelessly with love and inspiration and encouragement. But God will never compel—that would undermine His great plan for our eternal growth.

The second thing faith cannot do is force our will upon God. We cannot force God to comply with our desires—no matter how right we think we are or how sincerely we pray. Consider the experience of Paul, who pleaded with the Lord multiple times for relief from a personal trial—what he called "a thorn in the flesh." But that was not God's will. Eventually, Paul realized that his trial was a blessing, and he thanked God for not answering his prayers the way he had hoped.⁶

Trust and Faith

No, the purpose of faith is not to *change* God's will but to empower us to *act on* God's will. Faith is trust—trust that God sees what we cannot and that He knows what we do not.⁷ Sometimes, trusting our own vision and judgment is not enough.

I learned this as an airline pilot on days when I had to fly into thick fog or clouds and could see only a few feet ahead. I had to rely on the instruments that told me where I was and where I was headed. I had to listen to the voice of air traffic control. I had to follow the guidance of someone with more accurate information than I had. Someone

whom I could not see but whom I had learned to trust. Someone who could see what I could not. I had to trust and act accordingly to arrive safely at my destination.

Faith means that we trust not only in God's wisdom but that we trust also in His love. It means trusting that God loves us perfectly, that everything He does—every blessing He gives and every blessing He, for a time, withholds—is for our eternal happiness.⁸

With this kind of faith, though we may not understand why certain things happen or why certain prayers go unanswered, we can know that in the end everything will make sense. "All things [will] work together for good to them that love God."⁹

All will be made right. All will be well.

We can be certain that answers will come, and we may be confident that we will not only be content with the answers but we will also be overwhelmed by the grace, mercy, generosity, and love of our Heavenly Father for us, His children.

Just Keep Knocking

Until then, we walk by whatever faith we have,¹⁰ seeking always to increase our faith. Sometimes this is not an easy quest. Those who are impatient, uncommitted, or careless may find faith to be elusive. Those who are easily discouraged or distracted may hardly experience it. Faith comes to the humble, the diligent, the enduring.

It comes to those who pay the price of faithfulness.

This truth is illustrated in the experience of two young missionaries serving in Europe, in an area where there were few convert baptisms. I suppose it would have been understandable for them to think that what they did wouldn't make much of a difference.

But these two missionaries had *faith*, and they were committed. They had the attitude that if no one listened to their message, it would not be because they had not given their best effort.

One day they had the feeling to approach the residents of a well-kept four-story apartment building. They started on the first floor and knocked on each door, presenting their saving message of Jesus Christ and the Restoration of His Church.

No one on the first floor would listen to them.

How easy it would have been to say, "We tried. Let's stop right here. Let's go and try another building."

But these two missionaries had *faith* and they were willing to *work*, and so they knocked on every door on the second floor.

Again, no one would listen.

The third floor was the same. And so was the fourth—that is, until they knocked on the last door of the fourth floor.

When that door opened, a young girl smiled at them and asked them to wait while she spoke with her mother.

Her mother was only 36 years old, had recently lost her husband, and was in no mood to talk with Mormon missionaries. So she told her daughter to send them away.

But the daughter pleaded with her. These young men were so nice, she said. And it would take only a few minutes.

So, reluctantly, the mother agreed. The missionaries delivered their message and handed a book to the mother to read—the Book of Mormon.

After they left, the mother decided she would read at least a few pages.

She finished the entire book within a few days.

Not long after, this wonderful single-parent family entered the waters of baptism.

When the small family attended their local branch in Frankfurt, Germany, a young deacon noticed the beauty of one of the daughters and thought to himself, “These missionaries are doing a great job!”

That young deacon’s name was Dieter Uchtdorf. And the charming young woman—the one who had pleaded with her mother to listen to the missionaries—has the beautiful name of Harriet. She is loved by all who meet her as she accompanies me in my travels. She has blessed the lives of many people through her love for the gospel and her sparkling personality. She truly is the sunshine of my life.

How often have I lifted my heart in gratitude for the two missionaries who did not stop at the first floor! How often my heart reaches out in appreciation for their *faith* and *work*. How often have I given thanks that they kept going—even to the fourth floor, last door.

It Shall Be Opened unto You

In our search for enduring faith, in our quest to connect with God and His purposes, let us remember the Lord’s promise: “Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”¹¹

Will we give up after knocking on a door or two? A floor or two?

Or will we keep seeking until we have reached the fourth floor, last door?

God “rewards those who earnestly seek him,”¹² but that reward is not usually behind the first door. So we need to keep knocking. Sisters, don’t give up. Seek God with all your heart. Exercise faith. Walk in righteousness.

I promise that if you will do this—even until the fourth floor, last door—you will receive the answers you seek. You will find faith. And one day you will be filled with light that grows “brighter and brighter until the perfect day.”¹³

My beloved sisters in Christ, God is real.

He lives.

He loves you.

He knows you.

He understands you.

He knows the silent pleadings of your heart. He has not abandoned you. He will not forsake you.

It is my testimony and apostolic blessing to each one of you that you will feel in your heart and mind this sublime truth for yourselves. Live in faith, dear friends, dear sisters, and “the Lord [our] God [will] increase you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised!”¹⁴

I leave you my faith, my conviction, and my certain and unshakable witness that this is the work of God. In the sacred name of our beloved Savior, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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