

WHAT IS FAITH?

By Mary B. Ferguson

This series highlights the lives of devoted women and their messages, excerpted from the book *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (2017). The book is available, along with seven bonus chapters, in the Gospel Library app and online at churchhistorianspress.org/at-the-pulpit.

As faith is the first principle of the gospel, it is necessary to inquire, What is faith? The scriptures tell us that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” [Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 11:1]. . . . Thus it is when we obey the gospel, certain blessings follow; but if we say we believe and do not obey, then is our faith vain. It is like the body without the spirit, dead. It was this living faith, my young sisters, which caused your fathers and mothers to obey the gospel in their native lands and homes; in the midst of scorn and persecution, through faith they left homes and kindred and all they held dear and embarked on the mighty ocean, . . . trusting in the arm of Jehovah to bring them safely to a haven of rest; and many of them had never known the trials and hardships of life. . . . Think of it, my

young sisters: your fathers and mothers traveling over a thousand miles (1,609 km) drawing a handcart, with their rations and bedding, cooking utensils, clothing and etc., many of them with little children; fording rivers up to their waists and toiling through miles of heavy sand, and yet by the campfire at night their songs of praise resounded to God, for the principles of faith were planted in their bosoms; they had an assurance of things not seen; by faith they arrived in these valleys; they were not then the rich fertile valleys you now see. By faith they subdued the sterile, barren soil and through the blessings of God succeeded in making the wilderness blossom as the rose. . . .

Time would fail me to tell you of the trials of our faith caused by crickets, grasshoppers, droughts, floods, and also by the persecution of our



ABOUT SISTER FERGUSON

Mary Tyndale Baxter Ferguson (1826–1909) was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and orphaned at a young age. After she was introduced to Mormon missionaries, Sister Ferguson was apprehensive, but the more she studied, the more she knew that the Church was true. She was baptized in October 1846 and recorded that as a result, “all my companions left me and I had my good name cast out as evil, for the gospel’s sake.”

At a Church conference in Scotland, Mary met John Baxter, whom she married in 1849. They emigrated to the United States in 1851. She nursed her husband through his poor health, the result of years of working in a coal mine. John died in 1869, leaving Mary to care for their seven children. Her obituary later noted her “hard struggle to rear and care for so large a family of small children, but the Lord heard her cry and blessed her and fitted her back for its heavy burden.”

Sister Ferguson supported her family as a nurse and midwife. She eventually remarried and moved to Spanish Fork, Utah, serving for several years as president of the Relief Society there. Her experiences revealed her commitment to God despite the challenges of her life. The talk excerpted here was given to young women in 1879.

enemies; but in all we are an exceedingly blessed and happy people; and through faith we intend to grow and increase and spread abroad till, like Abraham of old, of our increase there shall be no end.

Now, my dear young friends, you need not think that because we have

done so much there is nothing for you to do; you have got to spread abroad. You need not think that the territory of Utah is going to hold the children of Zion. You will have to build up new colonies. . . .

Therefore, contend earnestly for the faith delivered in these last days to

your fathers, that you may be enabled through faith to help bring to pass the purposes of Jehovah; and may the quickening influence of the Spirit of God rest upon the children of Zion, that it may be as a living fire within them, bringing forth much fruit unto righteousness. ■



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