

By Elder Neil L. Andersen
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Faith Is Not by Chance, but by Choice

Faith in Jesus Christ is a gift from heaven that comes as we choose to believe and as we seek it and hold on to it.

The Savior perceived the strength or weakness in the faith of those around Him. To one, He said approvingly, “Great is thy faith.”¹ He lamented to another, “O ye of little faith.”² He questioned others, “Where is your faith?”³ And Jesus distinguished yet another with, “[In all Israel] I have not found so great faith.”⁴

I ask myself, “How does the Savior see my faith?” And tonight I ask you, “How does the Savior see your faith?”

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not something ethereal, floating loosely in the air. Faith does not fall upon us by chance or stay with us by birthright. It is, as the scriptures say, “substance . . . , the evidence of things not seen.”⁵ Faith emits a spiritual light, and that light is discernible.⁶ Faith in Jesus Christ is a gift from heaven that comes as we choose to believe⁷ and as we seek it and hold on to it. Your faith is either growing stronger or becoming weaker. Faith is a principle of power, important not only in this life but also in our progression beyond the veil.⁸ By the grace of Christ, we will one day be saved through faith on His name.⁹ The future of your faith is not by chance, but by choice.

The Faith of a Young Brazilian

A month ago in Brazil, I met Aroldo Cavalcante. He was baptized at age 21, the first member of the Church in his family. His faith burned brightly, and he immediately began preparing to serve a mission. Sadly, Aroldo’s mother was diagnosed with cancer. Three months later, only days before she died, she spoke to Aroldo of her greatest concern: There were no relatives to help. Aroldo would need to take full responsibility for his two younger

sisters and his younger brother. He solemnly made this promise to his dying mother.

By day he worked in a bank, and at night he attended the university. He continued to keep his baptismal covenants, but his hopes for a full-time mission were gone. His mission would be caring for his family.

Months later while preparing a sacrament meeting talk, Aroldo studied the words that Samuel reprovingly spoke to King Saul: “To obey,” he read, “is better than [to] sacrifice.”¹⁰ Aroldo received the seemingly impossible impression that he needed to obey the prophet’s call to serve a mission. Undaunted by the obstacles before him, he moved forward with enormous faith.

Aroldo saved every Brazilian *cruszeiro* he could. At age 23, he received his mission call. He told his brother how much to withdraw each month from his account for the family. Aroldo still did not have enough money to pay the full cost of his mission and the living expenses for his brother and sisters, but with faith he entered the MTC. A week later he received the first of many blessings. The bank that had employed



Elder Cavalcante unexpectedly doubled the money he was to receive as he concluded his work. This miracle, along with others, provided the needed income for his mission and his family during his absence.

Twenty years later, Brother Cavalcante is now serving as the president of the Recife Brazil Boa Viagem Stake. Looking back, he said of those days, “As I tried to live righteously, I felt the Savior’s love and guidance. My faith grew, allowing me to overcome many challenges.”¹¹ Aroldo’s faith did not come by chance, but by choice.

There are many Christian men and women with deep faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we honor and respect them.

No Longer on Neutral Ground

But brethren, we have been given something more: the priesthood of God, the power of God restored to earth by holy angels. This makes you



Aroldo Cavalcante (left) with his sisters and brother. Their mother’s portrait hangs on the wall.



different. You no longer stand on neutral ground. Your faith will grow not by chance, but by choice.

How we live our lives increases or diminishes our faith. Prayer, obedience, honesty, purity of thought and deed, and unselfishness increase faith. Without these, faith diminishes. Why did the Savior say to Peter, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not?”¹² Because there is an adversary who delights in destroying our faith! Be relentless in protecting your faith.

Honest Questions

Addressing honest questions is an important part of building faith, and we use both our intellect and our feelings. The Lord said, “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart.”¹³ Not all answers will come immediately, but most questions can be resolved through sincere study and seeking answers from God. Using our mind without our heart will not bring spiritual answers. “The things of God knoweth no man, but [through] the Spirit of God.”¹⁴ And to help us, Jesus promised us “another Comforter” and called Him “even the Spirit of truth.”¹⁵

Faith never demands an answer to every question but seeks the assurance and courage to move forward, sometimes acknowledging, “I don’t know everything, but I do know enough to continue on the path of discipleship.”¹⁶

Immersing oneself in persistent doubt, fueled by answers from the

faithless and the unfaithful, weakens one’s faith in Jesus Christ and the Restoration.¹⁷ “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him.”¹⁸

For example, questions concerning the Prophet Joseph Smith are not new. They have been hurled by his critics since this work began. To those of faith who, looking through the colored glasses of the 21st century, honestly question events or statements of the Prophet Joseph from nearly 200 years ago, may I share some friendly advice: For now, give Brother Joseph a break! In a future day, you will have 100 times more information than from all of today’s search engines combined, and it will come from our all-knowing Father in Heaven.¹⁹ Consider the totality of Joseph’s life—born in poverty and given little formal education, he translated the Book of Mormon in less than 90 days.²⁰ Tens of thousands of honest, devoted men and women embraced the cause of the Restoration. At age 38, Joseph sealed his witness with his blood. I testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. Settle this in your mind, and move forward!

Gifts That Enlarge Our Faith

Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon give us the beautiful assurance that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. I hold in my hand a copy of the first edition of the Book of Mormon in

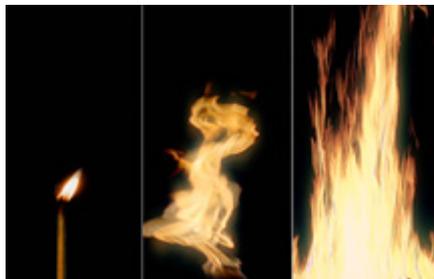
French, published by John Taylor as he began the work in France in 1852. Some or all of the Book of Mormon is now in 110 languages across the world. It provides a spiritual and tangible witness of the truthfulness of the Restoration. When was the last time that you read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover? Read it again. It will increase your faith.²¹

Another gift from God that enlarges our faith is the guidance of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. Today we sustained three new members of the Twelve, and I welcome Elder Rasband, Elder Stevenson, and Elder Renlund to the sacred circle of the Quorum of the Twelve. Paul said:

“He [called] apostles; and . . . prophets; . . .
 “For the perfecting of the saints . . . :
 “Till we all come in . . . unity of . . . faith, and . . . the knowledge of the Son of God . . . :
 “. . . No more . . . tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the . . . cunning craftiness [of those who] lie in wait to deceive.”²²

The guidance of the First Presidency and the Twelve help protect our faith.

Although your beginning fire of faith may be small, righteous choices bring greater confidence in God, and your faith grows. The difficulties of mortality



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blow against you, and evil forces lurk in the darkness, hoping to extinguish your faith. But as you continue to make good choices, trust in God, and follow His Son, the Lord sends increased light and knowledge, and your faith becomes settled and unwavering. President Thomas S. Monson said: “Fear not. . . . The future is as bright as your faith.”²³

Porter, Zane, and Max Openshaw

The faith of the young men of this Church is remarkable!

On June 12 of this year, I received an email telling me that the bishop from a Utah ward, his wife, and two of their children had been killed in an airplane accident. Bishop Mark Openshaw had been piloting the plane as it left a small airfield, when it suddenly fell from the sky and crashed to the earth. Bishop Openshaw, his wife, Amy, and their children Tanner and Ellie were killed in the accident. Miraculously their five-year-old son, Max, thrown out of the airplane in his airplane seat, escaped with only broken bones.

I learned that their son Elder Porter Openshaw was serving in the Marshall Islands Majuro Mission and that their 17-year-old son, Zane, was on a school cultural exchange in Germany.

I called Elder Openshaw on Christmas Island. Although heartbroken by the unexpected death of his mother, father, brother, and sister, Elder Openshaw immediately turned his concern to his two younger brothers.

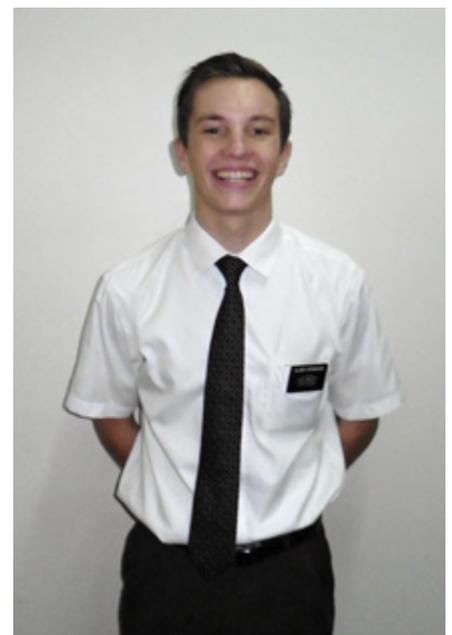
Ultimately it was Elder Openshaw and his brother Zane who decided that others could help at home and that Porter should stay on his mission. They knew it was what their parents would want.

As I spoke with Elder Openshaw, I felt his sadness but also his unquenchable fire of faith. “I have the confidence,”

he told me, “and I know without a shadow of a doubt that I will see my family again. . . . Strength in our trials is always found in . . . our Lord, Jesus Christ. . . . God’s omnipotent hand has been so apparent in helping [me] and my brothers throughout [this] very difficult challenge.”²⁴

I met Zane for the first time at the funeral. As I looked at the four caskets before us in the chapel, I marveled at the faith of this 17-year-old as he addressed the congregation. “Today,” he said, “we have gathered with humble hearts and weary souls to remember the lives of my mom, dad, Tanner, and Ellie. . . . We have talked together, cried together, remembered together, and felt the hand of God together. . . .

“The day after I heard the news of the accident, I found a letter in my bag from my mom. In the letter she wrote: ‘Zane, remember who you are and where you come from. We will



Elder Porter Openshaw is currently serving in the Marshall Islands Majuro Mission.



be praying for you and missing you.’” Zane continued: “There could not be more fitting last words from my mother. I know that she, along with Tanner, Ellie, and my dad are . . . praying for [my brothers and] me. I know that . . . they pray that I remember who I am . . . because I, like you, am a child of God, and He has sent



Ultimately it was Elder Openshaw and his brother Zane (pictured with younger brother Max) who decided that others could help at home and that Porter should stay on his mission. They knew it was what their parents would want.

me here. I testify [that] . . . no matter how alone we feel, God will not forsake us.”²⁵

My dear friends, your faith did not begin at birth, and it will not end at death. Faith is a choice. Strengthen your faith, and live to be deserving of the Savior’s approving words: “Great is thy faith.” As you do, I promise you that your faith, through the grace of Jesus Christ, will one day allow you to stand with those you love, clean and pure in the presence of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Matthew 15:28.
2. Matthew 6:30.
3. Luke 8:25.
4. Matthew 8:10.
5. Hebrews 11:1.
6. See Alma 32:35.
7. See L. Whitney Clayton, “Choose to Believe,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2015, 36–39.
8. See *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 3.
9. See Ephesians 2:8.
10. 1 Samuel 15:22.
11. Personal discussion with Aroldo Cavalcante, Aug. 29, 2015, Salvador, Brazil, as well as an email dated Aug. 31, 2015. There is much more to the story of Aroldo Cavalcante’s commitment to his mother to care for his sisters and brother. During the years following his mother’s death, he would openly refer to his brother and sisters as his “children.” During his mission, his letters and calls on Christmas and Mother’s Day often addressed the individual challenges of each family member. Through great sacrifice after his mission, Aroldo took financial

responsibility for their education and the mission of his brother. Aroldo waited until his sisters and brother were married before marrying at age 32. They remain a very close family.

12. Luke 22:32.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 8:2.
14. 1 Corinthians 2:11.
15. John 14:16–17.
16. See Adam Kotter, “When Doubts and Questions Arise,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2015, 37–39; *Liahona*, Mar. 2015, 39–41.
17. Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said: “Some insist upon studying the Church only through the eyes of its defectors—like interviewing Judas to understand Jesus. Defectors always tell us more about themselves than about that from which they have departed” (“All Hell Is Moved” [Brigham Young University devotional, Nov. 8, 1977], 3, speeches.byu.edu).
18. 1 Corinthians 2:14.
19. “I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 522).
20. See John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information” (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1986).
21. A spiritual witness of the Book of Mormon is central to the conversion of Latter-day Saints. It is a witness that needs to be renewed over and over again. If not, the spiritual feelings fade and one no longer remembers the power he or she once felt. “And the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a . . . wonder from heaven, insomuch that they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen . . . and [began] to believe that the doctrine of Christ was a foolish and a vain thing” (3 Nephi 2:1–2).
22. Ephesians 4:11–14.
23. Thomas S. Monson, “Be of Good Cheer,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2009, 92.
24. Personal email received from Elder Porter Openshaw, Aug. 23, 2015.
25. Comments by Zane Openshaw at the funeral for his family members, June 22, 2015.



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