



Faith and Testimony

*“The supreme achievement of life is to find
God and to know that He lives.”*

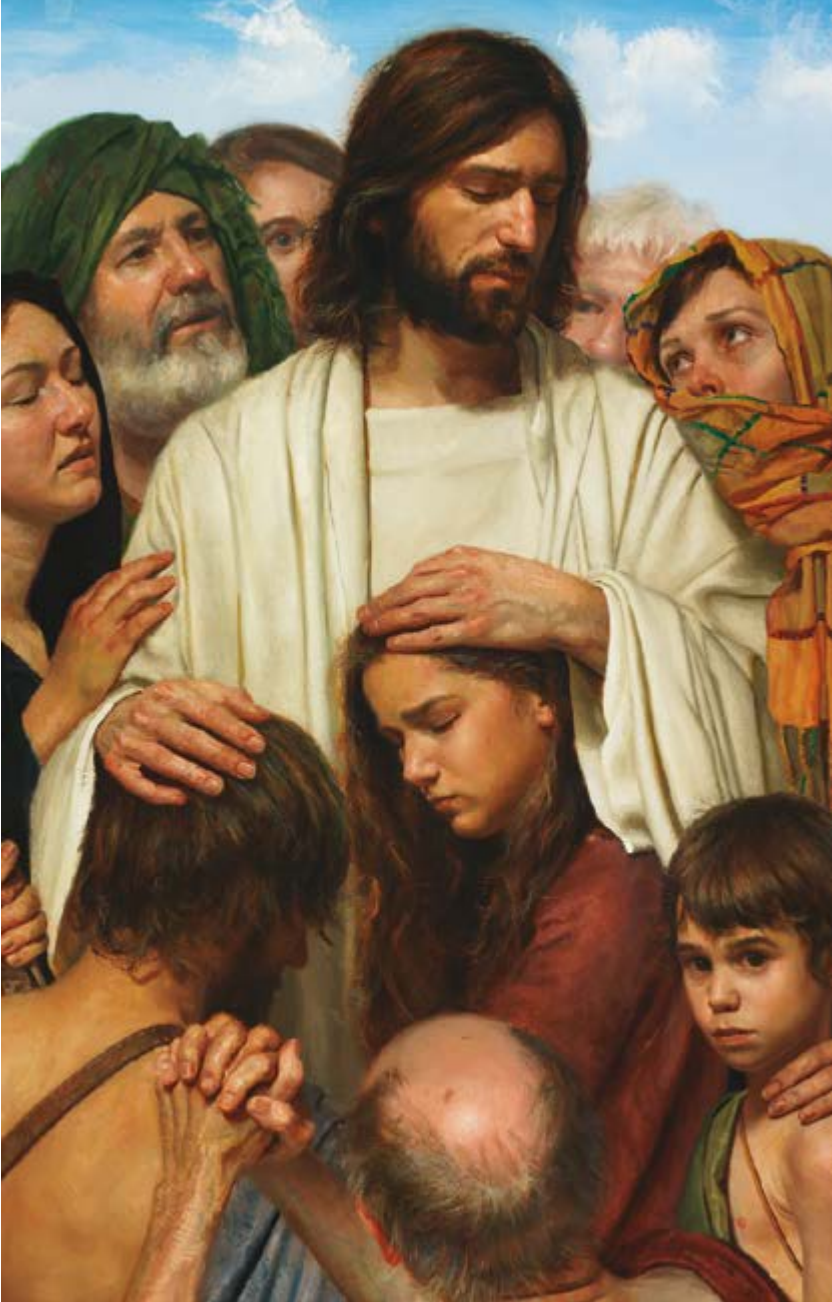
From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

Howard W. Hunter began to develop his testimony during his early childhood in Boise, Idaho. Although his father was not then a member of the Church, his mother raised him in the gospel. “It was at her knee that we learned to pray,” he recalled. “I received a testimony as a boy at my mother’s knee.”¹

Howard’s testimony grew over the years. When he was in his 20s and living in Los Angeles, California, he began to recognize the importance of serious gospel study. He wrote: “Although I had attended Church classes most of my life, my first real awakening to the gospel came in a Sunday School class in [the] Adams Ward taught by Brother Peter A. Clayton. He had a wealth of knowledge and the ability to inspire young people. I studied the lessons, read the outside assignments he gave us, and participated in speaking on assigned subjects. . . . I think of this period of my life as the time the truths of the gospel commenced to unfold. I always had a testimony of the gospel, but suddenly I commenced to understand.”²

Many years later, President Hunter explained: “There comes a time when we understand the principles of our creation and who we are. Suddenly these things are illuminated to us and the cords of our hearts do vibrate. This is the time when testimony enters into our very souls and we know beyond a question of a doubt that God is our father—that he lives, that he is a reality, that we are literally his children.”³

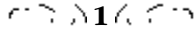
Concerning President Hunter’s faith and testimony, President Gordon B. Hinckley said:



“The greatest quest is a search for God—to determine his reality, his personal attributes, and to secure a knowledge of the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ.”

“For President Hunter . . . there was the mighty power of faith. There was the certitude of knowledge of things divine and of things eternal. . . . [He] had a sure and certain testimony of the living reality of God, our Eternal Father. He voiced with great conviction his witness of the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind.”⁴

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter



Through faith, we can find God and know that He lives.

The supreme achievement of life is to find God and to know that He lives. Like any other worthy accomplishment, this can only be obtained by those who will believe and have faith in that which at first may not be apparent.⁵

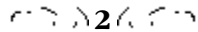
As man’s thoughts turn to God and the things that pertain to God, man undergoes a spiritual transformation. It lifts him from the commonplace and gives to him a noble and Godlike character. If we have faith in God, we are using one of the great laws of life. The most powerful force in human nature is the spiritual power of faith.⁶

The greatest quest is a search for God—to determine his reality, his personal attributes, and to secure a knowledge of the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ. It is not easy to find a perfect understanding of God. The search requires persistent effort, and there are some who never move themselves to pursue this knowledge. . . .

Whether seeking for knowledge of scientific truths or to discover God, one must have faith. This becomes the starting point. Faith has been defined in many ways, but the most classic definition was given by the author of the letter to the Hebrews in these meaningful words: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1.) In other words, faith makes us confident of what we hope for and convinced of what we do not see. . . . Those who earnestly seek for God do not see him, but they know of his reality by faith. It is more than hope. Faith makes it a conviction—an evidence of things not seen.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews [the Apostle Paul] continues: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." (Heb. 11:3.) Faith is here described as believing or having the conviction that the world was created by the word of God. Witnesses cannot be produced to prove this fact, but faith gives the knowledge that what we see in the wonders of the earth and in all nature was created by God. . . .

I have a positive conviction that God is a reality—that he lives. He is our Heavenly Father, and we are his spiritual children. He created the heaven and the earth and all things upon the earth and is the author of the eternal laws by which the universe is governed. These laws are discovered bit by bit as man continues his search, but they have existed always and will remain unchanged forever.⁷



To obtain knowledge of the reality of God, we must make a faithful effort, do His will, and pray for understanding.

In order to find God as a reality, we must follow the course which he pointed out for the quest. The path is one that leads upward; it takes faith and effort, and is not the easy course. For this reason many men will not devote themselves to the arduous task of proving to themselves the reality of God. On the contrary, some take the easy path and deny his existence or merely follow the doubter's course of uncertainty. . . .

. . . Sometimes faith means believing a thing to be true where the evidence is not sufficient to establish knowledge. We must continue the probe and follow the admonition: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Matt. 7:7-8.) . . .

It is the general rule that we do not get things of value unless we are willing to pay a price. The scholar does not become learned unless he puts forth the work and effort to succeed. If he is not willing to do so, can he say there is no such thing as scholarship? . . . It is

just as foolish for man to say there is no God simply because he has not had the inclination to seek him.

. . . In order for an individual to obtain unwavering knowledge of the reality of God, he must live the commandments and the doctrines announced by the Savior during his personal ministry. . . . Those who are willing to make the search, apply themselves, and do God's will, will have the knowledge come to them of the reality of God.

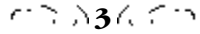
When a man has found God and understands his ways, he learns that nothing in the universe came by chance, but all things resulted from a divinely prearranged plan. What a rich meaning comes into his life! Understanding which surpasses worldly learning is his. The beauties of the world become more beautiful, the order of the universe becomes more meaningful, and all of God's creations are more understandable as he witnesses God's days come and go and the seasons follow each in their order.⁸

Christ, during his ministry, explained the manner in which one could know the truth about God. He said, "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 7:17.) The Master also explained the will of the Father and the great commandment in this manner: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." (Matt. 22:37.) Those who will strive to do God's will and keep his commandments will receive personal revelation as to the divinity of the Lord's work in bearing testimony of the Father.

To those who desire understanding, the words of James explain how it may be obtained: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5.) It doesn't appear that James was referring to factual knowledge in the sense of science, but rather to the revelation that comes from on high which answers men's questions as the result of following this admonition to pray. . . .

Thus we have the formula for the search for God and the tools to accomplish the quest—faith, love, and prayer. Science has done

marvelous things for man, but it cannot accomplish the things he must do for himself, the greatest of which is to find the reality of God. The task is not easy; the labor is not light; but as stated by the Master, "Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory." (D&C 76:6.)⁹



We must believe in order to see.

Thomas wanted to see before he would believe.

On the evening of the day of the resurrection, Jesus appeared and stood in the midst of his disciples in the closed room. He showed them his hands through which had been driven the nails and his side which had been pierced by the spear. Thomas, one of the twelve, was not present when this happened, but the others told him they had seen the Lord and that he had spoken to them. . . . Thomas was skeptical, and he said to the disciples:

" . . . Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." (John 20:25.)

. . . In a sense, Thomas represents the spirit of our age. He would not be satisfied with anything he could not see, even though he had been with the Master and knew his teachings concerning faith and doubt. . . . Faith does not take precedence over doubt when one must feel or see in order to believe.

Thomas was not willing to stand on faith. He wanted positive evidence of the facts. He wanted knowledge, not faith. Knowledge is related to the past because our experiences of the past are those things which give us knowledge, but faith is related to the future—to the unknown where we have not yet walked.

We think of Thomas as one who had traveled and talked with the Master, and who had been chosen by him. Inwardly we wish that Thomas could have turned toward the future with confidence in the things which were not then visible, instead of saying in effect, "To see is to believe." . . .

Faith gives us confidence in things that are not visible.

A week later, the disciples were again together in the same house in Jerusalem. This time Thomas was with them. The door was closed, but Jesus came and stood in the midst of them and said, "Peace be unto you.

"Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." (John 20:26–27.) . . .

"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." ([John] 20:29.)

This occurrence stands as one of the great lessons of all times. Thomas had said, "To see is to believe," but Christ answered: "To believe is to see." . . .

The classic example of faith is ascribed to the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1.)

This statement does not presuppose a perfect knowledge, but describes faith as that which gives to one an assurance or a confidence in things which are yet in the future. These things may be in existence, but it is through faith they are realized. Faith gives a feeling of confidence in that which is not visible or susceptible of positive proof.

It would appear that Thomas had lost his confidence in the future. He looked to the past. He wanted proof of that which was not then visible. Those who lose or lack faith, live in the past—there is loss of hope for the future. What a great change comes into the life of one who finds an abiding faith to give assurance and confidence.

The man born blind did not doubt; he believed in the Savior.

If we turn back to the ninth chapter of John, we read of another incident that took place in Jerusalem in which a man who had been born blind received his sight. It was the Sabbath day, and Jesus was apparently in the vicinity of the temple when he saw the blind man, and his disciples asked him:

“. . . Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

“Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John 9:2-5.)

Jesus then spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle mixed with the dust of the earth. He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. If this had been Thomas, would he have gone as he had been commanded or would he have asked the question: “What good can come from washing in the stagnant waters of that dirty pool?” or “What medicinal properties are there in saliva mixed with the dust of the earth?” These would seem to be reasonable questions, but if the blind man had doubted and questioned, he would still be blind. Having faith, he believed and did as he was directed. He went and washed in the pool and came back seeing. To believe is to see. . . .

“Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

The blind man believed and was permitted to see. Thomas refused to believe until after he could see. The world is full of Thomases, but there are many like the blind man of Jerusalem. Missionaries of the Church meet both of these every day as they carry their message to the world, the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Some believe, have faith, and are baptized. Some will not accept because they cannot see or feel.

There is no positive, concrete, tangible evidence that God lives, yet millions have a knowledge that he does through that faith which constitutes the evidence of things unseen. Many say to the missionaries, “I would accept baptism if I could believe that Joseph Smith was visited by the Father and the Son.” For this fact there is no positive, concrete, tangible evidence, but to those who are touched



“The blind man believed and was permitted to see.”

by the Spirit, faith will stand in the place of such evidence of things unseen. Remember the words of the crucified Master as he stood before Thomas:

“Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”
 ([John] 20:29.)

Those who believe through faith will see.

I add my witness to the testimonies of the thousands of missionaries that God does live, that Jesus is the Savior of the world, that those who will believe through faith will be caused to see.¹⁰

Acting on our faith leads to personal testimony.

As children we accepted as fact the things which were told to us by our parents or our teachers because of the confidence that we had in them. A little boy will jump from a high place without fear if his father tells him that he will catch him. The little fellow has faith that his father will not let him fall. As children grow older, they commence to think for themselves, to question and have doubts about those things which are not subject to tangible proof. I have sympathy for young men and young women when honest doubts enter their minds and they engage in the great conflict of resolving doubts. These doubts can be resolved, if they have an honest desire to know the truth, by exercising moral, spiritual, and mental effort. They will emerge from the conflict into a firmer, stronger, larger faith because of the struggle. They have gone from a simple, trusting faith, through doubt and conflict, into a solid substantial faith which ripens into testimony.¹¹

Students spend hours in scientific laboratories experimenting to find the truth. If they will do the same thing with faith, prayer, forgiveness, humility and love, they will find a testimony of Jesus Christ, the giver of these principles.¹²

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just a gospel of belief; it is a plan of action. . . . He did not say “observe” my gospel; he said “live” it! He did not say, “Note its beautiful structure and imagery”; he said, “Go, do, see, feel, give, believe!” . . .

Action is one of the chief foundations of personal testimony. The surest witness is that which comes firsthand out of personal experience. When the Jews challenged the doctrine Jesus taught in the temple, he answered, “. . . my doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.” Then he added the key to personal testimony, “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.)

Do we hear the imperative in this declaration of the Savior? “If any man will *do* . . . he shall *know!*” John caught the significance of this imperative and emphasized its meaning in his [epistle]. He

said, “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” (1 John 2:6.)

Merely saying, accepting, believing are not enough. They are incomplete until that which they imply is translated into the dynamic action of daily living. This, then, is the finest source of personal testimony. One knows because he has experienced. He does not have to say, “Brother Jones says it is true, and I believe him.” He can say, “I have lived this principle in my own life, and I know through personal experience that it works. I have felt its influence, tested its practical usefulness, and know that it is good. I can testify of my own knowledge that it is a true principle.”

Many people carry such a testimony in their own lives and do not recognize its worth. Recently a young lady said, “I do not have a testimony of the gospel. I wish I did. I accept its teachings. I know they work in my life. I see them working in the lives of others. If only the Lord would answer my prayers and give me a testimony, I would be one of the happiest persons alive!” What this young lady wanted was a miraculous intervention; yet she had already seen the miracle of the gospel enlarging and uplifting her own life. The Lord *had* answered her prayers. She *did* have a testimony, but she did not recognize it for what it was.¹³

As an ordained Apostle and special witness of Christ, I give to you my solemn witness that Jesus Christ is in fact the Son of God. . . . It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that I bear my witness. I know of Christ’s reality as if I had seen with my eyes and heard with my ears. I know also that the Holy Spirit will confirm the truthfulness of my witness in the hearts of all those who listen with an ear of faith.¹⁴

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- President Hunter teaches that “the supreme achievement of life is to find God and to know that He lives” (section 1). What is the role of faith in accomplishing that quest? What experiences have helped you come to find God and know that He lives?

- President Hunter says “the task is not easy” and “the labor is not light” in gaining a knowledge of the reality of God. Why do you think devoted effort is necessary for us to gain that knowledge? Why is keeping the commandments important in coming to know God?
- In section 3, President Hunter uses the contrast between Thomas and the man born blind to teach that if we believe, we will be able to see. How might President Hunter’s insights into these stories have application in your life? How has exercising faith made it possible for you to see?
- Review President Hunter’s teachings that acting on our faith is the key to gaining a testimony (see section 4). What are some ways you can act on your faith? How can faith overcome doubt? How has acting on your faith helped your testimony become stronger?

Related Scriptures

John 17:3; Hebrews 11:1–6; Alma 5:45–48; 30:40–41; 32:26–43; Ether 12:4, 6–22; Moroni 10:4–5; D&C 42:61

Teaching Help

“Ask questions that require learners to find answers in the scriptures and the teachings of latter-day prophets” (*Teaching, No Greater Call* [1999], 62).

Notes

1. In J M. Heslop, “He Found Pleasure in Work,” *Church News*, Nov. 16, 1974, 4, 12.
2. In Eleanor Knowles, *Howard W. Hunter* (1994), 70–71.
3. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 48.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Prophet Polished and Refined,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1995, 35.
5. “Faith as the Foundation of Accomplishment,” *Instructor*, Feb. 1960, 43.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1960, 124–25.
7. “To Know God,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 96–97.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 7–10.
9. “To Know God,” 97.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1962, 22–24.
11. “Secretly a Disciple?” *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1960, 948.
12. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 48.
13. In Conference Report, Apr. 1967, 115–16.
14. “An Apostle’s Witness of Christ,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1984, 70.