



By Elder
Donald L.
Hallstrom

Of the Presidency
of the Seventy

JESUS CHRIST: OUR FIRM FOUNDATION

With the design and construction of every temple, significant work is expended on what cannot easily be seen when the project is finished—the foundation. For example, the Philadelphia Pennsylvania Temple, when completed, will be 82 feet (25 m) tall at its roofline and rise 195 feet (59 m) to the top of the angel Moroni.

As imposing and stately as this structure will be, however, it will still be subject to destructive winds and invasive groundwater. These harsh conditions, if left unchecked, could significantly damage and even destroy this noble edifice.

Knowing that these forces would relentlessly attack the temple, the engineers designed, and the contractor excavated, a hole 32 feet (10 m) deep under the entire footprint of the structure. The hole was dug into native Pennsylvania granite to provide an immovable foundation upon which to build. The concrete footings and foundations were then tied to the granite bedrock with rock anchors to resist even torrential wind and powerful groundwater. The anchors were drilled 50 to 175 feet (15 to 53 m) into the granite and tensioned at 250,000 pounds per square inch (17,577 kg per square cm). The anchors are spaced 15 feet (4.5 m) apart in both directions.

I give such detailed information to teach this point: unlike building a structure (which is temporary), in building our everlasting (and, we hope, eternal) lives, we sometimes pay woefully little attention to the engineering and construction of our foundations. Consequently, we are left highly exposed to, and are easily buffeted by, dangerous forces.

Our connection with God the Father and His eternal plan, and with Jesus Christ, His Son and our Rock, needs to be so firmly established that it truly becomes the cornerstone of our foundation.

B1
SB501

B3
SB502

PHOTOGRAPHS AT RIGHT: ERIC P. JOHNSON; JARED DOXEY; KATRIN TIMOFF/ISTOCK/THINKSTOCK; MATSILVAMISTOCK/THINKSTOCK; INGRAM PUBLISHING/THINKSTOCK; ZOOVAR RIZZOONAR/THINKSTOCK



CONCRETE FOUNDATION WALL

WATERSTOP SEE ARCH

5" CONC SLAB (BP-3) ON GRADE

1'-0"
UNO ON PLANS

CONCRETE MICRO PILE BY CONTRACTOR

Building and maintaining a spiritual foundation is not easy. The construction process is a significant undertaking, and maintenance is a lifetime effort.

The Importance of a Foundation

We live in a world that can be confusing—if we allow it, it can cause us to forget who we really are. President Thomas S. Monson has stated: “Mortality is a period of testing, a time to prove ourselves worthy to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father. In order for us to be tested, we must face challenges and difficulties. These can break us, and the surface of our souls may crack and crumble—that is, if our foundations of faith, our testimonies of truth are not deeply embedded within us.

“We can rely on the faith and testimony of others only so long. Eventually we must have our own strong and deeply placed foundation, or we will be unable to withstand the storms of life, which *will* come.”¹

Jesus Christ, speaking of a person who hears and follows Him, described it this way:

“He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

“But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:48–49).

Jesus Christ is the rock upon which we must build our foundation. The Lord referred to Himself as “the stone of Israel” and emphatically stated, “He that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall” (D&C 50:44).

Moses said: “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect” (Deuteronomy 32:3–4).

David stated, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, . . . my shield, . . . my high tower” (2 Samuel 22:2–3).

The Lord said to Enoch, “I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the Rock of Heaven” (Moses 7:53).

Nephi praised the Lord as “the rock of my salvation” and “the rock of my righteousness” (2 Nephi 4:30, 35).

In Isaiah, He is called “a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation” (Isaiah 28:16).

Paul spoke of apostles and prophets as the foundation of the Church, with “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20).²

This is not new doctrine. In one form or another, all of us understand it. Why, then, is it so difficult for many of us to live it?

Well, simply stated, it needs to get from our minds to our hearts and to our souls. It needs to be more than what we sometimes *think* or even what we sometimes *feel*—it must become who we *are*. Our connection with God the Father and His eternal plan, and with Jesus Christ, His Son and our Rock, needs to be so firmly established that it truly becomes the cornerstone of our foundation. Our identity then becomes first that of an eternal being—a son or a daughter of God—and of a grateful receiver of the blessings of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

We can then securely build other righteous identities upon that foundation because we will know which are eternal and which are temporary and how to prioritize them. We will even choose to discard other identities and their accompanying practices—some highly valued by the world.

Building a Spiritual Foundation

I love the cherished anthem “How Firm a Foundation.” Some time ago I was in a meeting in the Salt Lake Temple with the members of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and all other General Authorities assigned to Church headquarters. We sang the standard three verses of this beautiful hymn, concluding after verse three as we often do in sacrament services or other meetings. But on this occasion President Monson said, “Let’s sing the seventh verse.” With all the General Authorities we sang:

*The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, . . . no never forsake!*³



Does this describe who you are? Does it at least describe who you are working to become? The effort of building and maintaining a spiritual foundation is not easy. The construction process is a significant undertaking, and maintenance is a lifetime effort.

For you who are really trying, we sincerely commend you. If you have never had the foundation we speak of, or through neglect have let it crack or crumble, it is not too late to put on a hard hat and go to work. All the tools you need to build, repair, or strengthen your foundation are available to you. These are the same tools used to maintain an established foundation. You know what they are. They include consistent, quality prayer; daily gospel study through the scriptures; actively participating in the

meetings of the Church, especially by partaking of the sacrament with real intent; continual selfless service; and diligent covenant keeping.

Another essential tool is the counsel of living prophets. There are 15 men on earth who are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators. They hold the keys of the priesthood of God. We are taught by them often. We raise our hands to sustain them several times a year. We pray for them every day. However, today's extraordinary blessing of accessibility to their message can lead to a lack of appreciation for its importance.

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, warned: "Looking for the path to safety in the counsel of prophets makes sense to those with strong faith.

Jesus Christ is the rock upon which we must build our foundation. The Lord referred to Himself as “the stone of Israel,” stating, “He that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall.”

When a prophet speaks, those with little faith may think that they hear only a wise man giving good advice. Then if his counsel seems comfortable and reasonable, squaring with what they want to do, they take it. If it does not, they consider it either faulty advice or they see their circumstances as justifying their being an exception to the counsel.”

President Eyring added: “Another fallacy is to believe that the choice to accept or not accept the counsel of prophets is no more than deciding whether to accept good advice and gain its benefits or to stay where we are. But the choice not to take prophetic counsel changes the very ground upon which we stand. It becomes more dangerous.”⁴

Principles of Building a Foundation

To build and maintain a foundation, remember three principles: vision, commitment, and self-discipline.

Vision is the ability to see. In a gospel context, we sometimes call this “eternal perspective.” Jacob described it as seeing “things as they really are, and . . . things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13).

Commitment is the willingness to make a promise. We often call these promises *covenants*. Formally, we make covenants with God through priesthood ordinances. Remember, “in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest” (D&C 84:20). In addition to making covenants with God, we should be willing to make commitments to ourselves, to spouses (or to become a spouse), to friends, and to those with whom we serve.

Self-discipline can be defined as the ability to live consistently with our vision and commitments. Developing self-discipline is essential to progress because it seamlessly connects learning and doing. Ultimately, the strength of our spiritual foundation is shown by how we live our lives, especially in times of disappointment and challenge.

Possessing a firm foundation is the ultimate protection from the buffeting of the world. We should earnestly seek to build the foundation obtained by the Lamanites who believed the preaching of Ammon and his brethren: they “were converted unto the Lord, [and] never did fall away” (Alma 23:6).

Mary Ann Pratt married Parley P. Pratt in 1837. Upon moving to Missouri, USA, along with other Saints, they endured horrific persecution. When Elder Pratt was taken, along with the Prophet Joseph Smith, by a mob in Far West, Missouri, and imprisoned, Mary Ann was confined to bed, gravely ill, while caring for two small children.

Later, Mary Ann visited her husband in jail and stayed with him for a time. She wrote, “I shared his dungeon, which was a damp, dark, filthy place, without ventilation, merely having a small grating on one side. In this we were obliged to sleep.”

After Parley’s release from jail, Mary Ann and her husband served missions to New York, USA, and to England and were among those who made “the final weary gathering to Utah,” as she described it. Elder Pratt ultimately died a martyr’s death while serving another mission.

Despite this tumultuous life, Mary Ann Pratt stayed true. She powerfully stated, “I was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . . , being convinced of the truthfulness of its doctrines by the first sermon I heard; and I said in my heart, if there are only three who hold firm to the faith, I will be one of that number; and through all the persecution I have had to endure I have ever felt the same; my heart has never swerved from that resolve.”⁵

Building on the Rock

We can be taught by others. We can observe others. We can learn from the mistakes and the successes of others. But no one can build our spiritual foundation. In this matter we are our own contractor.

As Helaman powerfully taught, “And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation



whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

You likely have experienced much joy and much pain. You may deeply feel the weight of life’s heavy burdens. Perhaps matters in your family are not as you would wish. Maybe you are struggling with your faith. Possibly you are dealing with something in your past—either something you have done or something that was unfairly done to you. Some of you may have physical or mental or emotional challenges that seem too much to endure.

Whatever your circumstance, having a firm foundation will lessen your load. With the message of the oft-sung hymn “I Am a Child of God”⁶ in your heart and soul and not simply on your lips, and with a continual reliance on the Atonement of the Savior Jesus Christ, you can find peace and comfort even in the most difficult of times.

Today can be a pivotal, even historic, day in our life. It can be the day we decide to take disciplined efforts to build or to reinforce our foundation. For some of us, it may mean giving up some addictive habit or repugnant practice

that offends God. For others, it may mean reprioritizing their life and making their love for God supreme. It is worth any price. Indeed, it is the essence of our life’s work.

I proclaim my witness of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of the Church and the Rock of our lives. I testify of His holy name. I witness of His authority and of His mission and, most important, of His Atonement, which makes it possible for each of us, no matter our past or our present circumstance, to come unto Him (see Moroni 10:32). ■

From a Church Educational System devotional address, “How Firm a Foundation,” delivered at the Ogden Tabernacle in Ogden, Utah, on November 2, 2014. For the full address, visit broadcast.lds.org.

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “How Firm a Foundation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 62.
2. This scripture list is adapted from Robert J. Matthews, “I Have a Question: What Is the Symbolic Meaning of the Term *Rock* in the Scriptures?” *Ensign*, Jan. 1984, 52.
3. “How Firm a Foundation,” *Hymns*, no. 85.
4. Henry B. Eyring, “Finding Safety in Counsel,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 25.
5. Mary Ann Pratt, in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormonism* (1877), 406–7; see also Sheri Dew, *Women and the Priesthood: What One Mormon Woman Believes* (2013), 94–95.
6. “I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301.