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Keeping the Faith

IN A WORLD OF CONFUSION

I was born in southwestern France “of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1) who, from the time I was young, helped me develop faith in Jesus Christ and a testimony of the restored gospel. At school, on the other hand, many of my professors expressed doubts about and even hostility toward any religious belief. On many occasions I heard the teachings of Korihor from those who were belittling my beliefs:

“Behold, they are foolish traditions of your fathers. How do ye know of their surety?”

“. . . Behold, ye cannot know of things which ye do not see” (Alma 30:14–15).

When I was 17, I began taking philosophy classes in high school. One day the teacher said to the class, “Surely there isn’t anyone here who believes that Adam really existed!” Then he scanned the room with the look of an inquisitor, ready to pounce on whoever dared to admit to such

belief. I was petrified! However, my desire to be loyal to my faith was even stronger. I glanced around to see that I was the only one of those 40 students to raise a hand. The teacher, taken by surprise, changed the subject.

All members of the Church at some time in their lives face moments that test the sincerity and strength of their testimonies. Braving these trials of our faith helps us stand firm in a world that is falling more and more into the depths of confusion. This confusion is evident in the barrage of messages that surround us. With the advent of the Internet, for example, an uninterrupted avalanche of contradictory

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opinions and information invades our everyday lives. These contradictions can become disconcerting and paralyzing.

How can we distinguish between truth and error? How can we avoid becoming like those who are “kept from the truth because they know not where to find it”? (D&C 123:12).

It is up to us whether we remain firm in our testimonies. When I think about my past, I realize that the success of my personal journey depended on a few simple principles that kept me on course. These principles allowed me to develop myself spiritually despite the “mists of



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darkness” (1 Nephi 12:17) and snares that surround all of us.

Seek the Truth Continually

To those who claim that “ye cannot know” (Alma 30:15), the Lord has answered, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). That is a marvelous promise.

Disciples of Christ hunger and thirst every day after spiritual knowledge. This personal practice is founded on study, contemplation, and daily prayer. It allows us to follow the example of Joseph Smith, who “came to the conclusion that [he] must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else . . . ask of God” (Joseph Smith—History 1:13).

Studying the word of God protects us from the influence of false doctrines. The Lord said, “For unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have

enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have” (2 Nephi 28:30).

Accept Unanswered Questions

In our search for truth, we can be tempted to want to understand everything right away. However, the intelligence of God is so infinite that “it is impossible that man should find out all his ways” (Jacob 4:8). We must accept living for a time without answers to all of our questions. Like Nephi, we faithfully acknowledge that God “loveth his children; nevertheless, [we] do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

The Lord, nevertheless, supplies us with the knowledge necessary for our salvation and exaltation. He promises, “Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you” (D&C 88:64). We receive these answers progressively, “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30), depending on our needs and our capacity to comprehend.

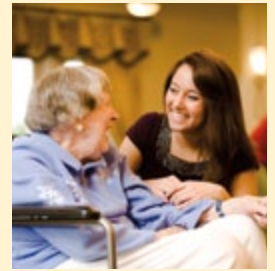
It is up to us to distinguish between questions that are truly essential to our eternal progress and those that result from intellectual curiosity, need for proof, or desire for personal satisfaction.

Seek the Testimony of the Spirit

Each of us may experience moments of personal doubt. These



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doubts are rarely alleviated by the search for rational explanations. For example, some scientific or archaeological discoveries may reinforce our testimonies of scripture, but spiritual knowledge cannot be proven by logic or physical evidence.

Knowledge of the truth is based on the testimony of the Spirit. As the Apostle Paul said, “The things of God knoweth no man, but [by] the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11).

We have the assurance that “the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not” (Jacob 4:13). The Spirit can have an even more powerful effect on us than our physiological senses. To the Apostle Peter, who had just declared his faith, Jesus replied, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). After all, how many of Christ’s contemporaries did not recognize Him despite seeing Him with their own eyes!

Seek the Words of Prophets and Apostles

I recently had a discussion with a dignitary of another church. Desirous to determine if we were a Christian church, he suggested organizing a debate between the doctrinal experts of our two religions.

The strength and truth of the doctrine of Christ, however, rest not upon the debate of experts but upon the sacred testimonies of His chosen

disciples. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven.”¹

For the many long centuries of the Apostasy, the world did not lack experts, but it *had* lost the witnesses of Christ. As a result, human reason replaced the strength of divine revelation.

When we are troubled, our first reflex must be to search the scriptures and the words of the living prophets. Their writings are beacons that cannot deceive us: “Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken” (Jacob 4:6).

Nourish Your Faith

We do not receive a “witness until after the trial of [our] faith” (Ether 12:6). Faith has the power to unlock knowledge of eternal truths. Pushed to its fulness, knowledge becomes an absolute and perfect certitude. Of the brother of Jared, Moroni wrote that “because of the knowledge of this man he could not be kept from beholding within the veil; . . . and he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting” (Ether 3:19).

To strengthen our testimonies and protect ourselves from error, we must

therefore constantly nourish and fortify our faith. To begin with, we need to have pure hearts and great humility. Jacob warned the people of Nephi about the pride of those who “when they are learned . . . think they are wise, and . . . hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves” (2 Nephi 9:28).

Next, we must exercise works. The Apostle James taught that “faith [was] wrought with . . . works, and by works was faith made perfect” (James 2:22). We cannot hope to receive personal revelation unless we conduct ourselves like faithful disciples of Christ. Respecting the covenants we have made with God qualifies us to receive the companionship of the Holy Ghost, who enlightens our intelligence and causes our spirits to blossom.

I testify of the truthfulness of these principles. I know by experience that when we apply them in our lives, they ensure our protection in a confused and disoriented world. They harbor a marvelous promise: “And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, . . . and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (Alma 32:42). ■

NOTE

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 49.