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BUILDING FAITH IN Christ

There is much we can do to influence and expand the endowment of faith we receive through the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul provides perhaps the best-known definition of faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Alma adds that the things hoped for and not seen “are true” (Alma 32:21).

Faith in Jesus Christ is the conviction and assurance of (1) His status as the Only Begotten Son of God, (2) His infinite Atonement, and (3) His literal Resurrection—and all that these fundamental realities entail for us.

Paul includes faith in his list of spiritual gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12:9). Faith indeed comes by the Spirit, yet as the Bible Dictionary notes, “Although faith is a gift, it must be cultured and sought after until it grows from a tiny seed to a great tree.” There is much we can do to influence and expand the endowment of faith we receive through the Holy Spirit.

Faith Comes by Hearing the Word of God

The first intimations of faith in Jesus Christ come by hearing the word of God—the gospel of Jesus Christ. When that teaching is given

and received by the Holy Ghost, “the Spirit of truth” (see D&C 50:17–22), the seed of faith in Christ is planted. Paul taught this to the Romans when explaining that all may receive the gift of faith: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). In other words, faith cometh by hearing the message that is the word, or gospel, of Christ.

As he describes the ministry of angels, Mormon tells us that it has always been the pattern that faith comes by hearing the gospel:

“And the office of their [the angels’] ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him.

“And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the

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Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men” (Moroni 7:31–32).

Commissioned to “bear testimony of him,” missionaries are called, set apart, and empowered under apostolic keys and authority. They are therefore counted among “the chosen vessels of the Lord.” In other words, as the Lord’s authorized messengers, they, through their teaching and testifying by the power of the Holy Ghost, will introduce faith in Christ in the souls of those who hear them.

The word that we declare, the word that generates faith in Christ, is the gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ. Simply put, the good news is that death is not the end of existence and our separation from God is temporary. We have a Savior, Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, who by His Atonement has overcome death and hell so that all will be resurrected and all who will repent and be baptized in His name may have place in the heavenly kingdom of God forever.

Faith Comes by Repentance

Repentance plays a prominent role in building faith in Christ. Receiving the word of Christ generates the faith needed for repentance, and repentance, in turn, nourishes a growing faith. Mormon declares, “And [Christ] hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved” (Moroni 7:34).

For example, a wise missionary will counsel and pray with his or her companion, seeking inspiration regarding the course of repentance that each investigator should follow. The missionaries will plan their teaching accordingly. They will prayerfully determine what invitation or invitations to extend in each contact with the investigator. They will build their lessons around the invitation, identifying the doctrines that the investigator needs to understand in order to accept their invitation.

The missionaries will determine how to teach those doctrines to achieve the greatest clarity and conviction for that particular individual. They will plan ways and means for bringing to bear all resources available, including the assistance of members, in helping the investigator keep his or her commitment to act in harmony with the principle or commandment in question. This kind of missionary teaching and testifying is how we conduct an investigator through the process of repentance.

Faith Comes through Covenants

Another essential element of repentance is baptism by immersion, by which we begin to take upon us the name of Christ. Many verses in the scriptures refer to “baptism unto repentance” or “baptism of repentance” (see Acts 19:4; Alma 5:62; 7:14; Moroni 8:11; D&C 35:5–6). These phrases recognize the doctrine that the baptism of water

is the final or crowning step in the process of repentance. The renunciation of sin, coupled with our covenant of obedience, completes our repentance; indeed, repentance remains unfinished without that covenant. With it we qualify for a remission of sins by the grace of Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Spirit (see 2 Nephi 31:17). Further, the baptismal covenant applies prospectively as well as retrospectively: each time we truly repent, that covenant is reinvigorated and we once again qualify for a remission of sins.

What do these ordinances and their related covenants have to do with building faith? Faith in Christ is an essential prerequisite to entering into divine covenants, but covenants also add to one's faith in a way that cannot otherwise be attained. By covenant, the great God of heaven permits Himself to be bound to each of us individually (see D&C 82:10). So long as we abide by our covenants with Him, He is obligated to grant us a place in His kingdom and, with the higher covenants, exaltation within that kingdom. He is a God who has all power and who cannot lie. Thus, we can have unbounded faith that He will fulfill His pledges to us. By our covenants with God, we can enjoy a faith in Christ strong enough to see us through any challenge or trial, knowing that in the end our salvation is assured.

Faith Can Increase

What I have said about building faith in Christ among those taught by missionaries applies to all of us. Our faith in Christ is born of the Spirit as we hear the word of God taught by those who are His commissioned servants, both living and dead. As we build upon that foundation, our faith is strengthened by prayers of faith that have become a part of our daily life—and sometimes a part of our hourly life.

Continuing to feast upon the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon and other scripture adds to and deepens the faith that had its origins in the word. Repentance rooted in faith further nourishes our faith as obedience is perfected. Repentance invigorates our own baptism of water and of the Spirit to produce a remission of sins committed not only before baptism but also after baptism.

Christlike service to our neighbor is a critical part of the covenant keeping that nurtures faith in Christ. Over time we find that the blessings promised for obedience to God are in fact realized in our lives and that our faith is confirmed and strengthened.

Faith Is Also a Principle of Power

What I have been describing up to this point is a level of faith that consists of spiritual assurances and that produces good works, most especially obedience to the principles and commandments of the gospel. This is a true faith in Christ and the level at which our teaching of investigators should be focused.

There is, however, a level of faith that not only governs our behavior but also empowers us to change what is and to make things happen that otherwise would not happen. I am speaking of faith not only as a principle of action but also as a principle of power. Paul stated that this was the faith by which prophets “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, [and] women received their dead raised to life again” (Hebrews 11:33–35). These are grand things—but in a way no greater than conquering a powerful addiction or other comparable obstacle to conversion and baptism.

Key to our obtaining power through faith is learning, asking, and acting according to the will of God. “Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me” (Moroni 7:33).

He cautions, however, “If ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn unto your condemnation” (D&C 88:65).

Your own faith in Christ will grow wonderfully as you seek day by day to know and to do the will of God. Faith, already a principle of action in you, will then become also a principle of power. ■

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