

Defending THE FAITH



By Elder
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Of the Seventy

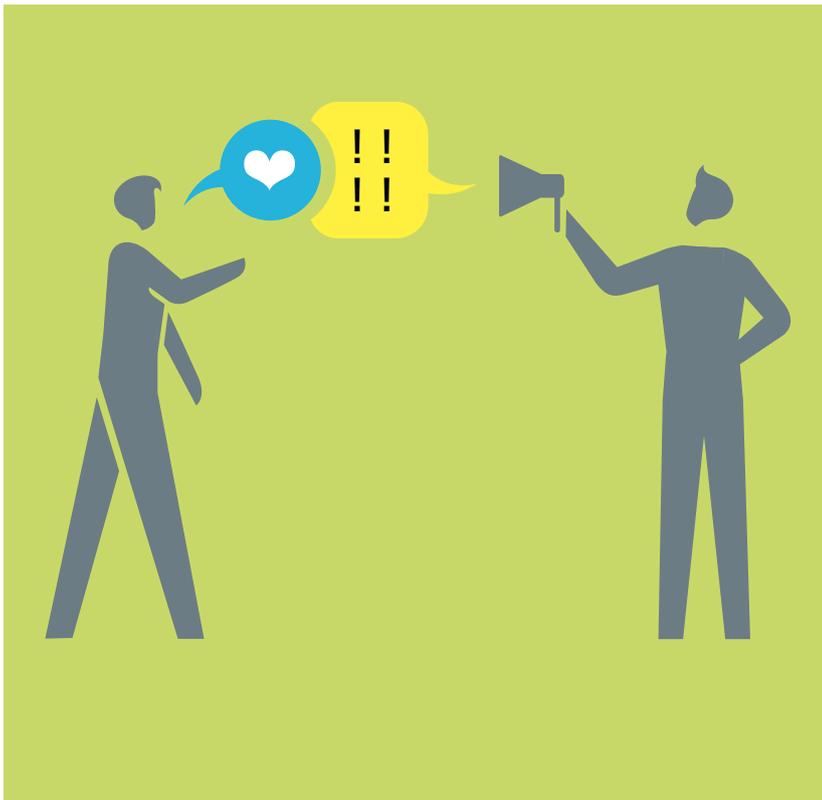
The Lord needs a people willing and able to humbly yet firmly defend Christ and the kingdom of God.

In the premortal existence we possessed agency, reasoning powers, and intelligence. There we were “called and prepared . . . according to the foreknowledge of God” and were initially “on the same standing” with our brothers and sisters (Alma 13:3, 5). Opportunities for growth and learning were widely available.

However, equal access to the teachings of a loving heavenly home did not produce a uniform desire among us—Heavenly Father’s spirit children—to listen, learn, and obey. Exercising our agency, as we do today, we listened with varying degrees of interest and intent. Some of us eagerly sought to learn and obey. With war in heaven on the horizon, we prepared for graduation from our premortal home. Truth was taught and challenged; testimonies were borne and ridiculed, with each premortal spirit making the choice to either defend or defect from the Father’s plan.

No Neutrality

Ultimately, retreating indecisively to neutral ground was not an option in this conflict. Nor is it today. Those of us armed with faith in the future Atonement of Jesus Christ, those energized by testimonies of His divine role, those possessing spiritual knowledge *and the courage to use it in defense of His sacred name* fought



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on the front lines of this war of words. John taught that those valiant spirits, and others, have overcome Lucifer “by the blood of the Lamb, and by *the word of their testimony*” (Revelation 12:11; emphasis added).

Yes, the promise of a Savior and of a bloodstained Gethsemane and Calvary won the premortal war. But our premortal *courage and testimony*, our willingness to explain, reason with, and persuade other spirits also helped stem the tide of falsehoods from spreading unopposed!

Having successfully completed a premortal tour of duty in His defense, we became witnesses of His holy name. Indeed, having proven us in battle and being thus assured of our hearts and courage, the Lord later said of us—members of the house of Israel—“Ye are my witnesses” (Isaiah 43:10). Let us ask ourselves: Is this declaration still true of us today?

Our Current Battle

A conflict for the minds, hearts, and souls of our Father’s children still rages today in

anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. While many in the world are sincerely curious about the teachings of the Church, an ever-widening gulf between the wicked and the righteous separates a world in moral free fall from restored gospel truths. When imperfect yet striving Saints who seek for light are accused of following darkness, when the sweetness of their intent and works is declared to be bitter (see Isaiah 5:20), is it any wonder that mocking fingers are pointed toward the Lord’s restored Church and His faithful servants? (see 1 Nephi 8:27).

President Thomas S. Monson has taught: “We live in a time when we are surrounded by much that is intended to entice us into paths which may lead to our destruction. To avoid such paths requires determination and courage.”

Passive, casual membership is not enough in this latter-day conflict! President Monson continued: “As we go about living from day to day, it is almost inevitable that our faith will be challenged. . . . Do we have the moral courage to stand firm for our beliefs, even if by so doing we must stand alone?”¹

Despite the permanent background noise emanating from the great and spacious building (see 1 Nephi 8:26–27), are we determined to walk steadfastly along the road less traveled by?² Are we both willing and able to engage in polite discussion with those who have honest questions? Without resorting to contention, are we able and willing to clarify and defend the teachings of the restored Church of Jesus Christ?

Counseling us to be able to disagree without being disagreeable, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “Even as we seek to be meek . . . ,

we must not compromise or dilute our commitment to the truths we understand.”³

Become Valiant

Let us consider carefully President Monson’s invitation: “Once we have a testimony, it is incumbent upon us to share that testimony with others. . . . May we ever be courageous and prepared to stand for what we believe, and if we must stand alone in the process, may we do so courageously, strengthened by the knowledge that in reality we are never alone when we stand with our Father in Heaven.”⁴

Church membership alone does not automatically make one a valiant witness of Christ and His restored Church. The Lord taught us to let our light shine through gospel living, yet a few members keep their membership a secret by putting their light under a bushel. Some will answer occasional gospel questions but hesitate to testify and invite. Yet others actually look for opportunities to share the gospel and do so willingly. How many of us are proactive, valiant *defenders* of the faith?

To hold and regain ground in today’s war of words, the Lord needs a people both willing and able to humbly yet firmly defend Christ, His living oracles, the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the standards of the Church. He needs a people “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh . . . a reason of the hope that is in [them]” (1 Peter 3:15). He needs a host of true Latter-day Saints willing, in a spirit of meekness and love, to testify of truth when any aspect of the restored gospel is challenged!

The Example of Captain Moroni

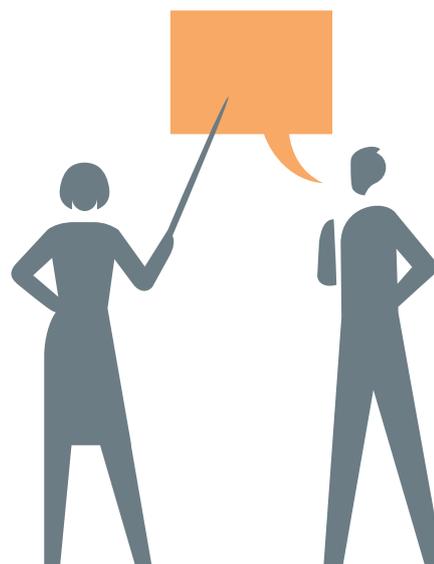
If you feel inadequate as a valiant defender of truth in our day, you are not alone. Most of us feel that way to some degree. Yet there are simple things we can do to gain both ability and confidence.

In the Book of Mormon, we learn that Captain Moroni “prepar[ed] the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God” (Alma 48:7). He realized that the first line of defense was a life built on a foundation of personal

obedience. Furthermore, he “erect[ed] small forts, . . . throwing up banks of earth . . . , and also building walls of stone to encircle them about” (verse 8). Not only did he take some obvious defensive precautions, but he also strategically strengthened “their weakest fortifications” (verse 9). His precautionary strategies were so successful that his enemies were “astonished exceedingly” (Alma 49:5) and unable to execute their evil designs.

You may ask, “Can someone as weak as I am be a valiant defender of Christ and His restored gospel?” Your perceived weakness can be made strong as you accept that all the Lord initially requires is “[your] heart and a willing mind” (D&C 64:34). Endowed with a courageous spirit, the “small and simple” of the world are His favorite recruits. Remember that by “very small means,” He delights to “confound the wise” (see Alma 37:6, 7). If you are willing to share and defend the restored gospel and its leaders and doctrines, you may consider the following suggestions.

1. Know whom and what to defend. A solid defensive strategy is the foundation for a solid offense. While you *can’t* effectively defend that which you know nothing or little about, you *won’t* defend it if you don’t deeply care. Just as a hireling, who is paid to care for the sheep, will retreat or flee at the first sign of trouble, so you will not hold your defensive lines very long unless you have a



spiritual conviction that your cause is just and true. To witness of and defend Christ and His Church, you must know that He lives and that this is His restored Church!

Those who know *and* live the gospel are filled with both understanding and a burning conviction kindled from worthiness and personal experience. They are more prepared to witness of the truth than those who have given attention only to learning how to give the answers.

2. Evaluate your fortifications. Follow the example of Captain Moroni. Honestly evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your gospel understanding. Are you setting a good example by living a Christlike life? Are you able to find answers to questions by searching the scriptures? Are you comfortable bearing your testimony? Can you answer questions regarding the Church's doctrines and teachings, even some that are more challenging to explain, by appealing to the scriptures? Are you prepared to say, "I don't know, but I will find out," or to direct people to places where they can find answers? Could it be that diligent study will help you gain the confidence and courage you seek?⁵

3. Strengthen your fortifications. With an assessment of your doctrinal "fortifications" before you, begin a focused, long-term study with the aim of making weak things become strong unto you (see Ether 12:27). Respond to Moses's cry, "Would God that all the Lord's people were

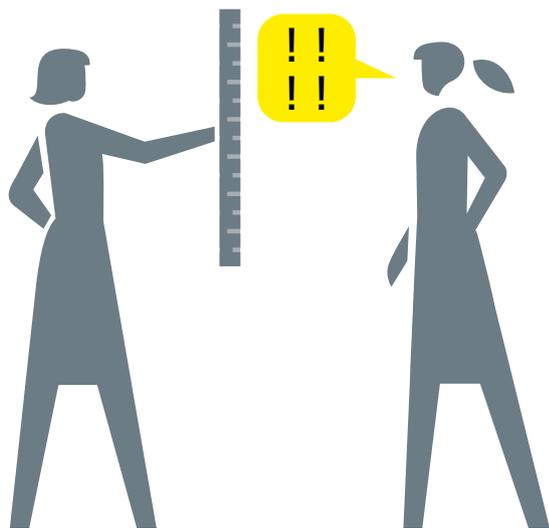
prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29). Weary the Lord with the request that for every spoonful of daily effort, He will heap pounds of earth onto your defensive walls.

Prayerfully read the scriptures, again and again. Don't merely sip familiar stories through a straw. Feast upon them. Consider keeping doctrinal study notes and continually adding to them. For each topic, consider identifying and then memorizing in logical order a few scriptures to support your own thoughts and teachings. As Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, "When scriptures are used as the Lord has caused them to be recorded, they have intrinsic power that is not communicated when paraphrased."⁶

Consider memorizing a few quotes by prophets and apostles. The Holy Ghost typically can "bring . . . to your remembrance" only that which you first put there (see John 14:26). True Christ-centered doctrinal knowledge combined with "the sword of [His] Spirit" (D&C 27:18) is the greatest fortification and offensive weapon you possess.

4. Practice! The Church's full-time missionaries are encouraged to role-play to prepare for situations in which they might find themselves. Because you may be asked to defend the Church or to explain its doctrine at the most unexpected times or places, consider following the missionaries' example by preparing yourself *spiritually* before you have a conversation *naturally* (see Moses 3:5, 7). Role-play before you find yourself in circumstances in which you are teaching or defending gospel standards. Whether alone or with family or friends, pose hypothetical questions and then answer them! As you become increasingly prepared, you will "wax stronger and stronger" in your confidence as a witness of Christ (see Helaman 3:35). Start with brief and simple answers. They will be adequate in most situations. But you can also strengthen your defenses even more by studying related scriptures and connecting various doctrines.

5. Seek opportunities. Having thus prepared yourself, pray for opportunities to humbly yet confidently share and, if needed, defend the gospel. Remember, "*discouragement* is not the absence of adequacy but the absence of



courage.”⁷ Pray that you will love Heavenly Father’s children in and out of the Church sufficiently to share and defend gospel standards. Pray that you will never experience indifference or resignation regarding personal doctrinal blind spots, but with faith in Christ work to overcome them.

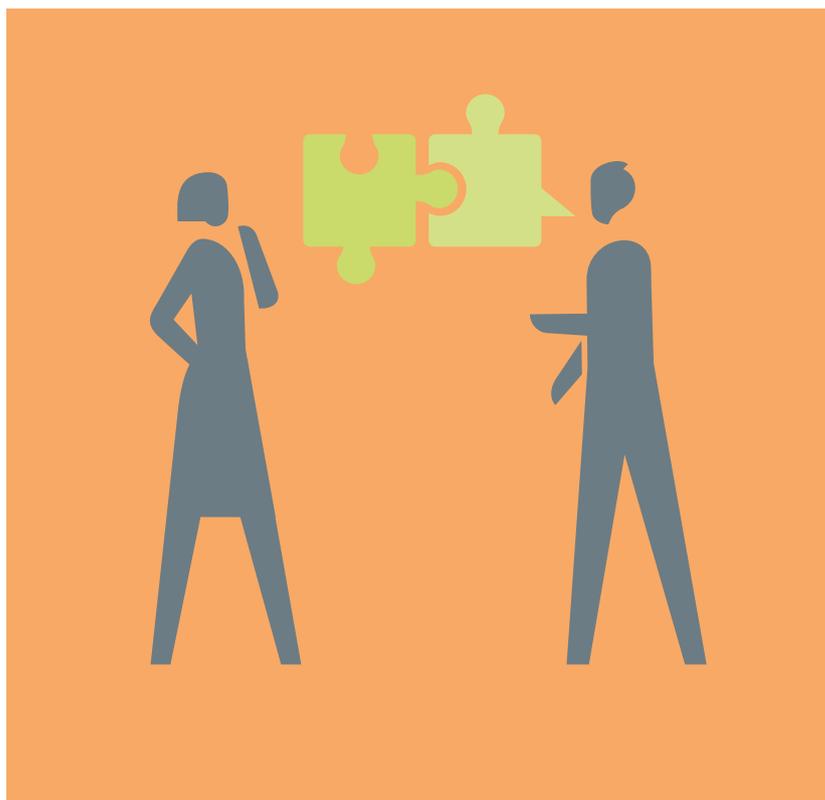
Remember that even a child can be a defender of Christ on the playground by bearing a simple testimony; that you don’t have to be a gospel scholar to be a witness of the truth; that you don’t have to have all the answers; that it is OK to sometimes say, “I don’t know” or “these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear” (Alma 37:11). Not being “ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 1:16) is more than simply ignoring or enduring half-truths and falsehoods; it means knowing and defending the doctrines! Hence, if we remain silent, let it not be out of fear but because we are following a prompting (see, for example, Alma 30:29).

Stand as a Proactive Witness

As you continue defending the gospel of Jesus Christ, “faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify [you] for the work” (D&C 4:5). Let us here call to mind that Christ was meek but never weak—that He invited but also rebuked, and that He also said, “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” (3 Nephi 11:29).

As a wicked world continues violating the moral and doctrinal standards of God, Christ depends on even the least of the Saints to be living witnesses of His name.

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) reminded us that “it is not enough just to be good. You must be good for something. You must contribute good to the world. The



world must be a better place for your presence. . . . In this world so filled with problems, so constantly threatened by dark and evil challenges, you can and must rise above mediocrity, above *indifference*. You can become involved and speak with a strong voice for that which is right.”⁸

If you desire to be a witness of the restored gospel, join the ranks of a latter-day army of witnesses by letting your light so shine! May your gospel living *and* your defense of that same gospel be a reflection of the depth of your conversion to Jesus Christ. ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 60.
2. See “The Road Not Taken,” *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (1969), 105.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, “Loving Others and Living with Differences,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 26.
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” 67.
5. The Gospel Topics essays at topics.lds.org are particularly helpful in answering questions about the history and doctrine of the Church.
6. Richard G. Scott, “He Lives,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 88.
7. Neal A. Maxwell, “Notwithstanding My Weakness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 14.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Stand Up for Truth” (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 17, 1996), 2; emphasis added.

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