



**By Elder
Neil L. Andersen**
Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

STRENGTHEN YOUR FAITH THROUGH THE FIRST VISION

WHEN I WAS 16 YEARS OLD,

I traveled from my home in Idaho to a conference on the East Coast of the United States, attended by young men and young women from all 50 states and nearly 40 nations. Before then, I had rarely been in a situation where my beliefs and convictions set me apart.

One evening in an informal group setting, a discussion arose about some of the beliefs and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A large group of students suddenly turned their attention to me and started asking questions, some of which were critical of our beliefs.

That caught me off guard. But after I had reflected for a moment, I began sharing some basic gospel principles.

I explained that we have a Heavenly Father, that we are His sons and daughters, and that we are on earth to develop faith in Jesus Christ and to prove ourselves by choosing good over evil.

Sharing these principles led me to Joseph Smith's testimony. The other students had not asked about Joseph Smith, but I found myself going to the origins of why I believed what I believed. As I told of the appearance of the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove, suddenly everyone fell silent. A piercing feeling of holiness entered the room, and an enormous feeling of spiritual power rested upon me and my words.

Afterward, several students thanked me for my strong convictions. Some even asked for more information about

the Church. As I returned to my room that night, I realized that the person this experience had the greatest impact on was me. I had felt for myself the power of bearing testimony of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the First Vision.

Since that experience more than 50 years ago, I have testified hundreds of times of the Father, the Son, and the Prophet Joseph Smith. In these experiences, I have constantly felt the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost.

I would like to share five principles I have learned from my spiritual understanding of the First Vision. These principles have strengthened my faith in and my desire to follow our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son. I hope they strengthen you too.



I pray that you will follow Joseph's pattern of prayer, learn the truths he learned, and strengthen your faith in your Heavenly Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ.



FROM THE FIRST VISION, WE LEARN THAT THESE CELESTIAL BEINGS KNOW US PERSONALLY, JUST AS THEY KNEW JOSEPH.

1. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost Are Distinct Beings

For centuries, religious scholars and philosophers had debated the nature of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. Many believed They were one being. Because of Joseph’s experience in the Sacred Grove 200 years ago, we know the absolute truth about the nature of God.

First of all, He lives! Second, the Father and the Son are two separate, glorious,

resurrected beings, unique from each another. Later, Joseph learned that “the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22).

2. We Are Sons and Daughters of God

Through the First Vision and other experiences, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned that God is not some distant

power who created the world and its inhabitants and then forgot about them. In reality, each of us is “a beloved daughter [or son] of heavenly parents.”¹

The proclamation on the family states: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”² Our Father has clearly declared that destiny: “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Our identity is with God, and we are here on earth to become more like Him. This understanding from the First Vision allowed me as a young man to know that I had a personal Heavenly Father who loved me and wanted me to return to Him.

3. We Can Be Forgiven of Our Sins

One of Joseph’s deep concerns was to be forgiven of his sins. In one account of the First Vision, the Lord addressed the young seeker of truth with these words: “Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee. Go thy way, walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments. Behold, I am the Lord of glory. I was crucified for the world, that all those who believe on my name may have eternal life.”³

Joseph learned that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, he could be forgiven of his sins and become clean and pure before God. He was given a sure knowledge that Jesus Christ took upon Himself the sins and burdens of all who

have ever and will ever live on earth.

From the First Vision, we learn that because of the grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we too can be forgiven of our sins and one day stand clean before the Father.

4. Our Heavenly Father Hears and Answers Our Prayers

In the grove that day in 1820, Joseph learned that Heavenly Father hears and answers prayer. Later, Joseph said, “I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I previously had one” (Joseph Smith—History 1:29). His example teaches us that we can approach our Heavenly Father in prayer to receive our own answers.

Joseph repeated this pattern of prayer over and over. He had confidence that the Lord would hear and answer his prayers. He prayed about things you have likely prayed about.

He prayed for wisdom (see Joseph Smith—History 1:12–13).

He prayed about baptism (see Joseph Smith—History 1:68).

He prayed for deliverance (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–4).

He prayed for the missionaries (see Doctrine and Covenants 109:22).

He prayed for the Church, its members, and its leaders (see Doctrine and Covenants 109:71–76).

And he prayed for his family (see Doctrine and Covenants 109:68–69).

This is a pattern for us. Joseph showed us that we can all go to our Father in prayer.

5. The Father and Son Know Us Personally

From the First Vision, we learn that these celestial Beings know us personally, just as they knew Joseph. The Father called Joseph by name and, “pointing to the other,” said, “*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

The Father and Son knew Joseph’s needs, worries, and longings, just as They know ours. They also know our successes and sorrows.

In my youth, I prayed for many things. As I look back now, some of those things don’t seem that important. But they were important to me then, and I understood from an early age that I had a Father in Heaven who listened to me. I didn’t always receive an immediate answer, but I felt that in His own time and in His own way He would honor my petition in the way that was right for me.

Have confidence and trust that God will speak to you. Believe in those feelings that come deep into your heart. I came to believe in prayer and understand its power because I knew the experiences of the Prophet Joseph Smith. I knew that God knew my name and that He would answer me, just as He knows your name and will answer you.

Testimony

For many of the 68 years I have lived upon the earth, I have put Joseph’s pattern of prayer to the test. Like all true disciples of the Savior, I also have received answers from heaven. I know that Jesus is the Christ. He is the Son of God. He

was resurrected and lives today. He has the power to forgive our sins. Through our faith, obedience, and repentance, He can bring us safely back to our heavenly home.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and as His ordained witness, I testify with a sureness and conviction confirmed by the Holy Spirit that the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove. I pray that you will follow Joseph’s pattern of prayer, learn the truths he learned, and strengthen your faith in your Heavenly Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ. ■

NOTES

1. “Young Women Theme,” youngwomen.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 145.
3. “Joseph Smith’s Accounts of the First Vision,” josephsmithpapers.org.