

# Gaining a TESTIMONY

BY ELDER PAUL K. SYBROWSKY

Of the Seventy

I was raised in a wonderful but less-active family. I wasn't accustomed to hearing testimonies borne of the truthfulness of the gospel within my home. So even though I grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, in a predominantly Latter-day Saint environment, I didn't grow up in a typical Latter-day Saint family. We didn't hold family home evening or gather for family prayer. Many of the Church practices that my friends were used to were a little foreign to me.

By virtue of this home environment, I was probably one of the least likely to stand and bear my testimony in front of a large seminary gathering. I was also a rather shy 15-year-old, so I was quite surprised when I found myself standing at a microphone in front of 300 seminary students. But I was comfortable because of what I felt deep inside. Even today, I still remember the overwhelming prompting by the Spirit to stand and bear my testimony in that seminary meeting.

I don't remember the exact words I spoke, but I will never forget the burning in my heart, the sure witness I received that the Church is true. I remember well the feeling of the Spirit of the Holy Ghost that

descended upon me as I bore witness to the truthfulness of this Church.

## I Knew

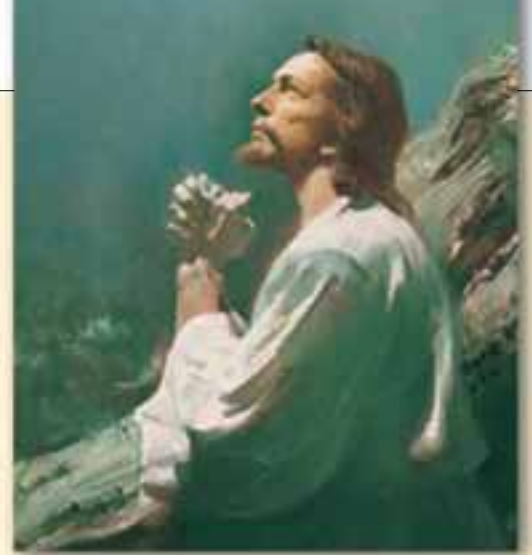
Before that day I *believed* the Church was true. I liked the Church. I thought it was good, and I participated in it. But at that defining moment in my life, I *knew* the Church was true. I couldn't deny it, and no one could take that testimony away from me.

Since that day in seminary, I have shared my testimony thousands of times. I remember some of these other occasions, but none have been quite so dramatic for me or have been so influential in shaping my future as that first instance when I was a teenager. One of the reasons this event made such a lasting impression on me is because I was about the same age as the Prophet Joseph Smith when he saw Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, and learned that he would be instrumental in restoring the true Church to the earth.

The experience of bearing my testimony and gaining a sure witness was a turning point in my life in many ways. When instruction comes from the Lord to you, it is the greatest thing you will ever learn. Because of this testimony, I wanted to serve, to become



*I can remember many instances of bearing my testimony but none more vividly than the time I stood as a shy teenager in front of 300 classmates.*



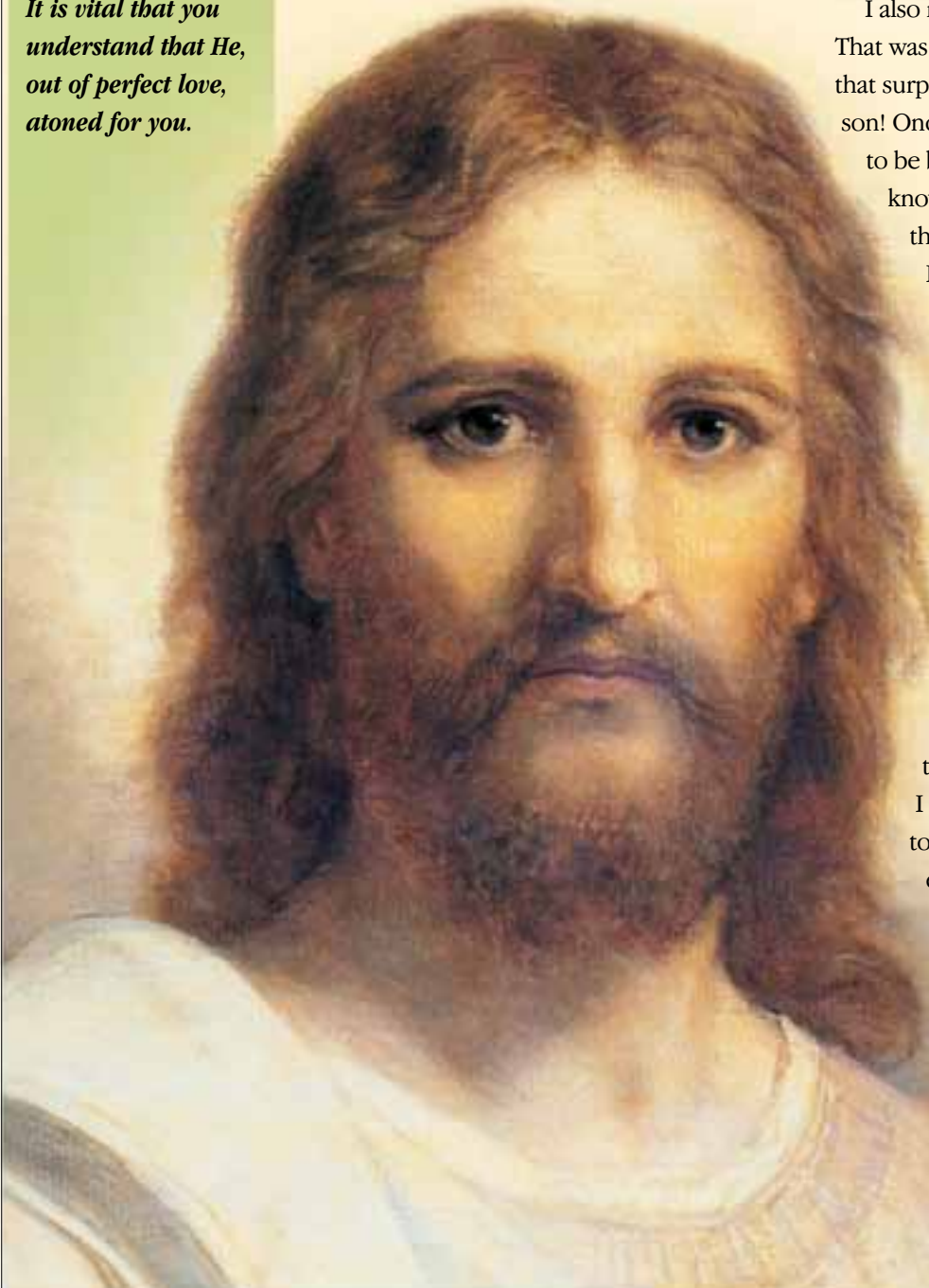
I also realized that God knew who I was. That was one of the really important things that surprised me and changed me. I was His son! Once you know who you are, you want to be better. There comes a power in that knowledge—a power you can get only through the inspiration of our Heavenly Father.

As I look back on this experience, I believe that Heavenly Father wanted to give me an opportunity to develop some attributes and skills so He could work with me a little easier. I think He also wanted to get me thinking about serving a mission, which was not something that was encouraged in my home. As a young teen, I hadn't thought much about a mission. But through my testimony experience, I knew for the first time that I wanted to serve a mission. Many other experiences reinforced that desire, but that was the first instance that I knew I wanted to go. I knew my Father in Heaven wanted me to serve a full-time mission to share what I now knew with His children.

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a better student, and to develop better social and personal skills. My desire to learn more about the scriptures was greatly increased. I had more purpose in life. I knew that as I kept myself worthy, I would be permitted to preach the gospel.



## Open Your Heart

Gaining a testimony is like what the Nephites went through when the Savior came to visit them. At first they did not understand God's voice because they were hearing with their ears only. But when they opened their hearts, then they understood His voice.

"And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came.

"And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard" (3 Nephi 11:5–6).

Opening your heart to the inspiration of our Father in Heaven is a crucial element in life. You will need His inspiration.

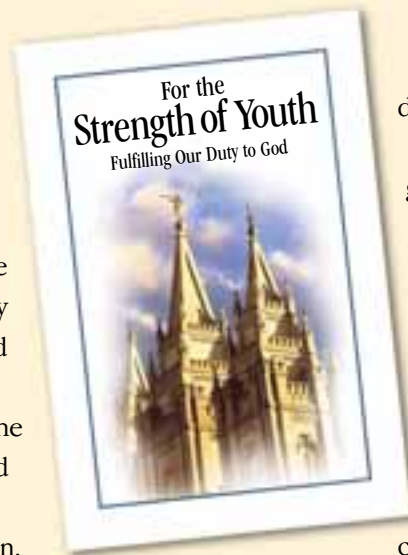
You face some unique challenges, and the way to overcome these challenges is to allow the Holy Ghost to distill upon you. Let Him guide you. Strength from our Heavenly Father comes to us spirit to spirit and heart to heart. And it is in the strength of the Lord that we can move forward. The Lord will provide that strength in our individual testimonies.

## Enjoy Being a Teen

Strengthening your testimony will help you enjoy your teenage years, which can be one of the most exciting times of your life. That doesn't diminish anything in terms of serving a mission or getting married in the temple or any of the wonderful experiences you will have later in your life, but I encourage you to enjoy life as a teenager. So how do you do that? By keeping all the Lord's commandments; they are not multiple choice! Each is given for a wise purpose—to keep you safe.

Part of the First Presidency's message in *For the Strength of Youth* reads:

"Your Heavenly Father wants your life to be joyful and to lead you back into His presence. The decisions you make now will determine much of what will follow



during your life and throughout eternity.

"Because the Lord loves you, He has given you commandments and the words of prophets to guide you on your journey."<sup>1</sup>

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our prophet and President, has said: "Let us be a happy people. The Lord's plan is a plan of happiness."<sup>2</sup> Let us follow the prophet, and let us have happy lives. This time of your life is exciting—it should be fun. Activity in the Church can help you truly enjoy your youth.

Have the courage to follow what you feel in your heart. Hold on to those feelings and enlarge them. It is vital that you build a testimony and have faith that Jesus Christ is your Savior and your Redeemer. It is vital that you understand that He, out of perfect love, atoned for you.

With that knowledge, you have the wonderful privilege of combining your faith in Jesus Christ with repentance to ensure that your covenants are in effect. Then you can receive direction and guidance from a member of the Godhead, even the Holy Ghost. What a gift that is! That great gift comes as a result of having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoying the fruits of repentance.

When I was a teenager, I received another gift: a living, growing witness, a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As I nourished that testimony, it continued to grow. I began to understand the Lord's pattern—His plan to lead me back to my Father in Heaven. "That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24).

I bear my solemn witness that God is our Father and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is the Savior of all mankind. You too can have that witness. You too can have that testimony. You can have it even now as a teenager, just as I did. You don't have to wait. ■

## NOTES

1. *For the Strength of Youth* (2001), 2.
2. "Each a Better Person," *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 99.