



Finding Strength through Obedience

BY PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON

In our world today, the accent is on youth. Everyone wants to look young, feel young, and be young. Indeed, vast sums of money are expended each year for products that people hope will restore the youthful look. Well might we ask ourselves, “Is the search for youth new to our day, to our generation?” We need but to thumb the pages of history to find our answer.

Centuries ago, in the great age of exploration, expeditions were outfitted and ships containing confident and adventurous crews set sail on uncharted seas in search of a literal fountain of youth. The legend of the day promised that somewhere in the “great out there” was a magical fountain containing the purest of water, and all one had to do to regain the vibrancy of youth and to perpetuate this vigor was to drink deeply of the flowing water from this fountain.

Ponce de León, who sailed with Columbus, made subsequent voyages of exploration, searching in the Bahamas and other Caribbean areas in full trust of the legend that this elixir of youth could be found. His efforts, like those of many others, yielded no such discovery, for in the divine

plan of our God, we enter mortal existence to taste of youth but once.

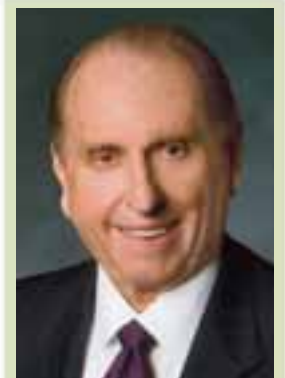
The Fountain of Truth

Although there is no fountain of youth that we may wisely seek, there is another fountain containing more precious water, even the waters of eternal life. This is the fountain of truth.

The poet captured the real significance of the search for truth when he wrote these immortal lines:

*Yes, say, what is truth? 'Tis the brightest prize
To which mortals or Gods can aspire.
Go search in the depths where it
glittering lies,
Or ascend in pursuit to the loftiest skies:
'Tis an aim for the noblest desire. . . .*

*Then say, what is truth? 'Tis the last and the first,
For the limits of time it steps o'er.
Tho the heavens depart and the earth's
fountains burst,
Truth, the sum of existence, will weather
the worst,
Eternal, unchanged, evermore.¹*



There is no need to sail uncharted seas in search of the fountain of truth. For a loving Heavenly Father has plotted our course and provided an unfailing map—obedience!



LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW BEER; CHRIST'S IMAGE BY HENRICH HOFMANN; COURTESY OF C. HARRISON CONROY CO.; RIGHT: ILLUSTRATION BY JERRY THOMPSON



In a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith at Kirtland, Ohio, in May of 1833, the Lord declared:

“Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; . . .

“The Spirit of truth is of God. . . . He [Jesus] received a fulness of truth . . . ;

“And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.

“He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.”²

There is no need for you or me in this enlightened age, when the fulness of the gospel has been restored, to sail uncharted seas or travel unmarked roads in search of the fountain of truth. For a loving Heavenly Father has plotted our course and provided an unfailing map—*obedience!*

His revealed word vividly describes the blessings that obedience brings and the inevitable heartache and despair that accompany the traveler who detours along the forbidden pathways of sin and error. To a generation steeped in the tradition of animal sacrifice, Samuel boldly declared, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”³

The prophets, ancient and modern, have known the strength that comes through obedience. Think of Nephi: “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded.”⁴ Or Mormon’s beautiful description of the strength possessed by the sons of Mosiah:

“They had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

“But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.”⁵

Keep the Commandments

President David O. McKay (1873–1970), in one of his opening messages to the membership of the Church at a general conference, gave us direction for our time very simply and yet very powerfully: “Keep the commandments of God.”⁶

Such was the burden of our Savior’s message when He declared, “For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and

the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.”⁷

The Master’s very actions give credence to His words. He demonstrated genuine love of God by living the perfect life, by honoring the sacred mission that was His. Never was He haughty. Never was He puffed up with pride. Never was He disloyal. Ever was He humble. Ever was He sincere. Ever was He true.

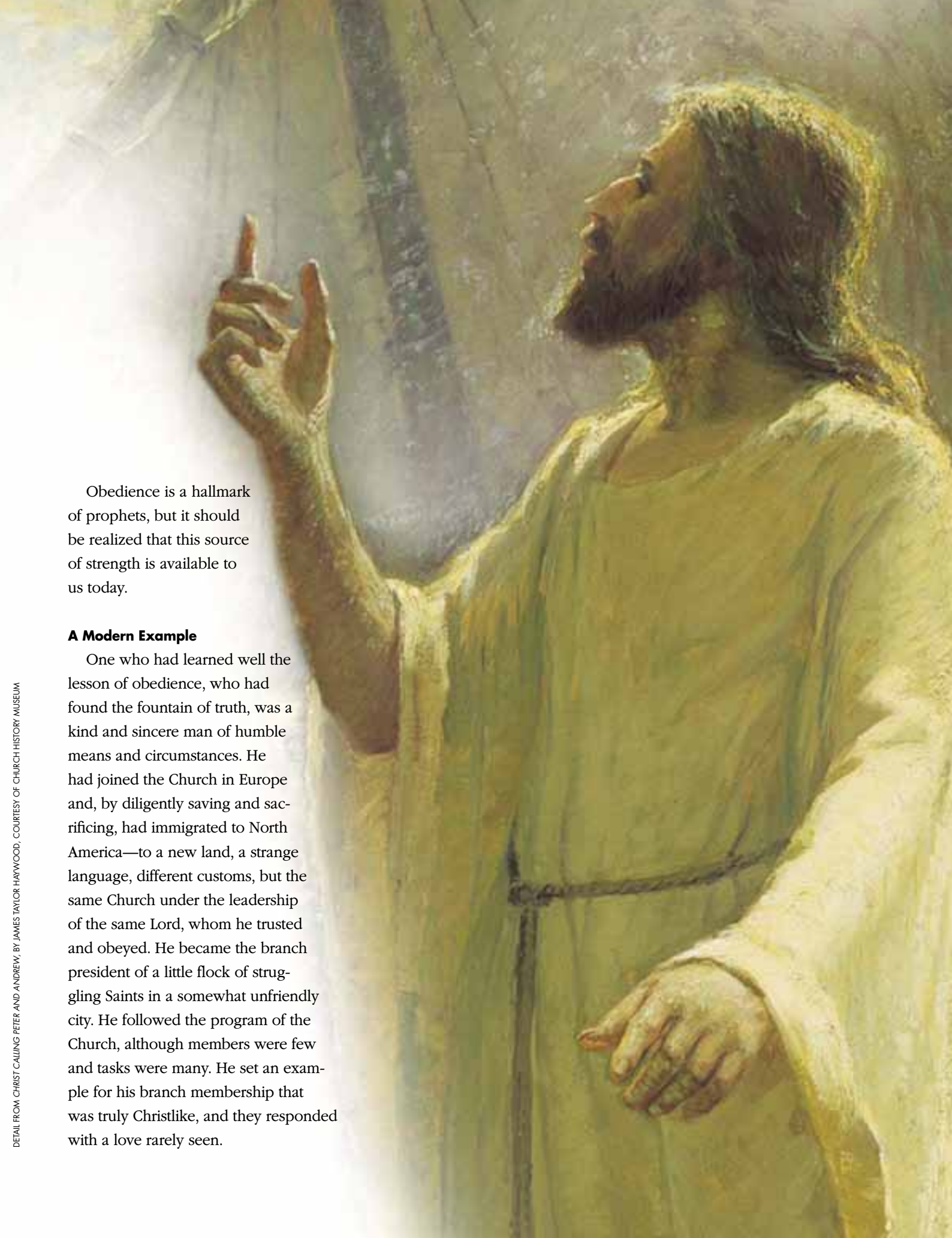
Though He was tempted by that master of deceit, even the devil; though He was physically weakened from fasting 40 days and 40 nights and “was afterward an hungry”; yet when the evil one proffered Jesus the most alluring and tempting proposals, He gave to us a divine example of

obedience by refusing to deviate from what He knew was right.⁸

When He was faced with the agony of Gethsemane, where He endured such pain that His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground, He exemplified the obedient Son by saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”⁹

To Peter at Galilee, Jesus said, “Follow me.” To Philip came the same instruction, “Follow me.” And to the publican Levi, who was sitting at receipt of customs, came the beckoning call, “Follow me.” Even to one who came running after him, one who had great possessions, came the words, “Follow me.”¹⁰ And to you and to me that same voice, this same Jesus, says, “Follow me.” Are we willing to obey?

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Obedience is a hallmark of prophets, but it should be realized that this source of strength is available to us today.

A Modern Example

One who had learned well the lesson of obedience, who had found the fountain of truth, was a kind and sincere man of humble means and circumstances. He had joined the Church in Europe and, by diligently saving and sacrificing, had immigrated to North America—to a new land, a strange language, different customs, but the same Church under the leadership of the same Lord, whom he trusted and obeyed. He became the branch president of a little flock of struggling Saints in a somewhat unfriendly city. He followed the program of the Church, although members were few and tasks were many. He set an example for his branch membership that was truly Christlike, and they responded with a love rarely seen.

He earned a living with his hands as a tradesman. His means were limited, but he always paid a full tithing and donated more. He started a missionary fund in his little branch, and for months at a time, he was the only contributor. When there were missionaries in his city, he fed them, and they never left his house without some tangible donation to their work and welfare. Church members from far away who passed through his city and visited his branch always received his hospitality and the warmth of his spirit and went on their way knowing they had met an unusual man, one of the Lord's obedient servants.

Those who presided over him received his profound respect and his extra-special care. To him they were emissaries of the Lord; he ministered to their physical comforts and was especially solicitous in his prayers—which were frequent—for their welfare. One Sabbath day some leaders visiting his branch participated with him in no fewer than a dozen prayers in various meetings and in visits to members. The leaders left him at the day's end with a feeling of exhilaration and spiritual uplift which kept them joyous throughout a four-hour drive in wintry weather and which now, after many years, warms the spirit and quickens the heart as that day is remembered.

Men of learning, men of experience sought out this humble, unlettered man of God and counted themselves fortunate if they could spend an hour with him. His appearance was ordinary; his English was halting and somewhat difficult to understand; his home was unpretentious. He didn't own a car or a television. He wrote no books and preached no polished sermons and did none of the things to which the world usually pays attention. Yet the faithful beat a path to his door. Why? Because they wished to drink at his fountain of truth. They appreciated not so much what he said as what he did, not the substance of the sermons he preached but the strength of the life he led.

To know that a poor man consistently and cheerfully gave at least twice a tenth to the Lord gave one a clearer insight into the true meaning of tithing. To see him minister to the hungry and take in the stranger made one know that he did it as he would do to the Master. To pray

IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Consider bringing a container of water to use as a visual aid. Share the story of Ponce de León, and explain that “there is another fountain containing more precious water, even the waters of eternal life. This is the fountain of truth.” Discuss with the family where and how to find truth and what President Monson says we need to do to reach the “fountain of truth.” Share your testimony of how being obedient has blessed your life.

2. Read from the section “Keep the Commandments,” and discuss President Monson's question “Are we willing to obey?” Share the story at the end of the article of the humble man. How did his obedience and willingness to follow the Savior bless others? Invite the family to ponder and do those things that show they are willing to serve the Lord.

with him and partake of his confidence of divine intercession was to experience a new medium of communication.

Well could it be said that he kept the first and great commandment and the second which is like unto it,¹¹ that his bowels were full of charity toward all men, that virtue garnished his thoughts unceasingly and, consequently, his confidence waxed strong in the presence of God.¹²

This man had the glow of goodness and the radiance of righteousness. His strength came from obedience.

The strength which we earnestly seek today to meet the challenges of a complex and changing world can be ours when, with fortitude and resolute courage, we stand and declare with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”¹³ ■

NOTES

1. John Jaques, “Oh Say, What Is Truth?” *Hymns*, no. 272.
2. D&C 93:24, 26–28.
3. 1 Samuel 15:22.
4. 1 Nephi 3:7.
5. Alma 17:2–3.
6. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, Apr. 1957, 8; or *Improvement Era*, June 1957, 391.
7. D&C 132:5.
8. See Matthew 4:1–11.
9. Luke 22:42.
10. Matthew 4:19; 9:9; John 1:43; see also Matthew 19:16–22; Mark 2:14; Luke 18:18–22.
11. See Matthew 22:37–40.
12. See D&C 121:45.
13. Joshua 24:15.