

# STRENGTHEN FAITH AS YOU SEEK KNOWLEDGE

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*Let me share with you five principles that I believe are essential as you place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of your lives as you seek diligently for knowledge.*

In the doctrines of the Church, faith and the quest for knowledge are not inconsistent; they are compatible and complementary. When I speak of faith, I am speaking of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith and knowledge require equal effort and commitment. We cannot expect to have faith at the center of our lives if all of our efforts are expended on knowledge, sports, hobbies, making money, or other pursuits.

Let me share with you five principles that I believe are essential as you place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of your lives as you seek diligently for knowledge.

**1. Understand that there is truly opposition in all things. The choices you make are critical.**

You are at the stage of life where you have numerous options for some of the most important choices you will ever make. These choices are the key to your future and your happiness.

The prophet Lehi near the end of his life taught, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11).

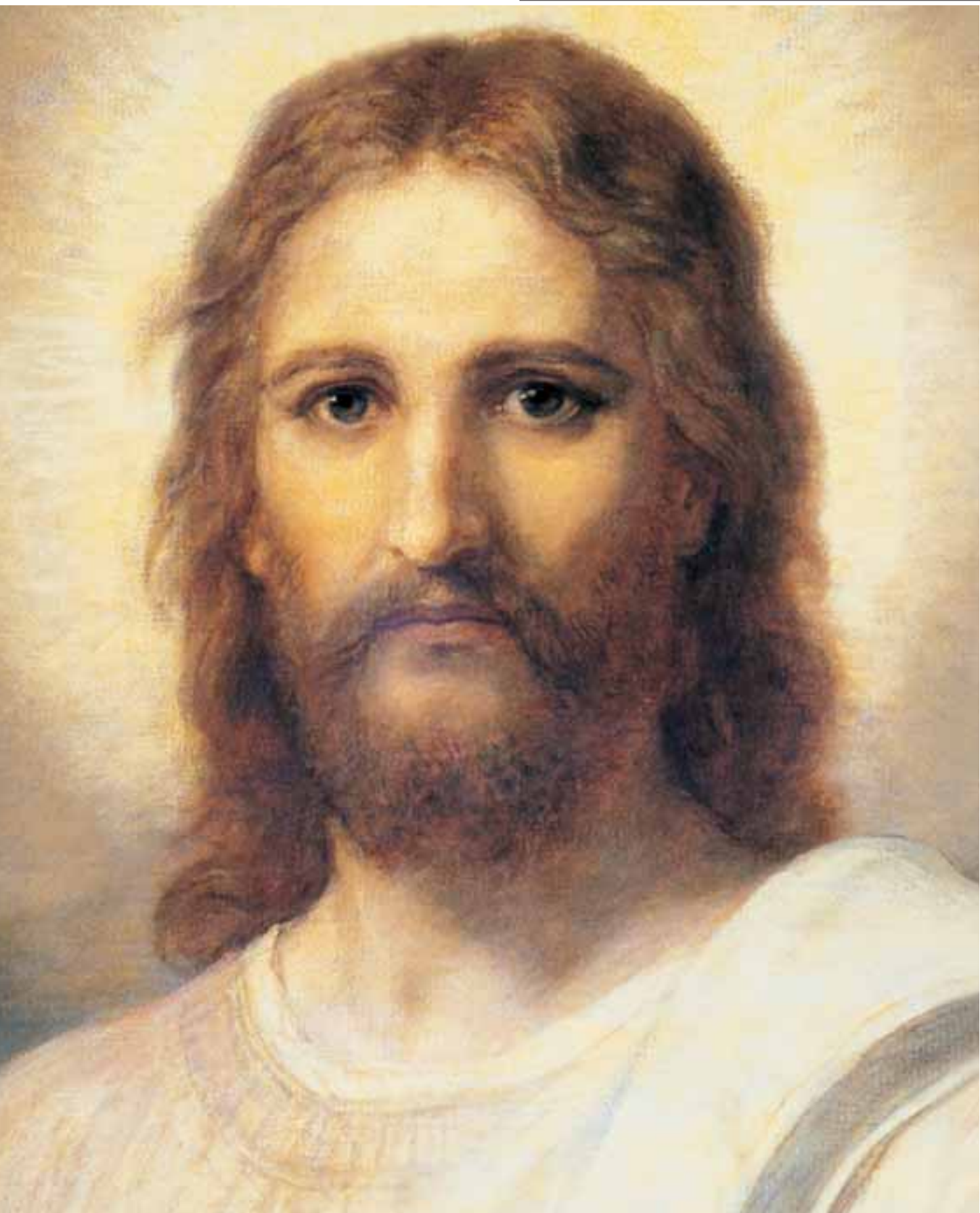
He continues later: “Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27).

We know there was a war in heaven over the plan of salvation, so it is not surprising that the religious principles that have been taught in this, the last dispensation, are attacked with malignant ferocity.

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) made this promise to you: “Here you are on the threshold of your mature lives. You . . . worry about school. You worry about marriage. You worry about many things. I make you a promise that God will not forsake you if you will walk in His paths with the guidance of His commandments.”<sup>1</sup>

**2. Strengthen your own testimony as a foundation for all of the choices you make.**

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When I was 15 years old, I realized the significance of a testimony of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, and the Savior and how it affects our choices.

My brother, Joe, was 20 years old. It was during the Korean conflict, and only one young man in each ward could go on a mission. The others had to be available to be drafted into the military. A young man in our ward had gone on a mission early in the year; my brother's birthday was in September, so he didn't think he would get the opportunity to serve a mission.

Our stake president called my brother in and told him that one of the wards had not used its allotment and he might be able to

go. Missionaries were called at 20 years of age in those days, and my brother had just filled out his application to medical school. He was a good student. My father, who was not active in the Church, had made financial preparations to help him with medical school and was disappointed when he learned of the conversation with the stake president. My father counseled Joe not to go and suggested that he could do more good by going to medical school.

This was a big issue in our family. That night my brother and I talked about the choice. He was five years older, so it was mainly his thinking. As we reasoned it out, we concluded: If Jesus Christ was a great man but not divine, if Joseph Smith was a wonderful teacher but not a prophet, or if

the Book of Mormon had wonderful counsel but was not the word of God, then Dad was right—it would be better to go to medical school. But if Jesus Christ is divine, if Joseph Smith is a prophet, and if the Book of Mormon is the word of God, then it would be more important to accept the call and proclaim the gospel.

That night, more than ever before, I wanted to know the answers to these questions. I had always believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ. I believed in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, but I wanted confirmation from the Lord. That night, as I prayed, the Spirit bore witness to my soul of the Savior and the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and that Joseph Smith was a prophet. My brother received the same witness and made the choice to serve a mission. Incidentally, when my brother returned from his mission, he went to medical school. When I reached my 20th birthday, my father was happy to see me serve a mission.

### **3. Seek knowledge diligently, wisely, and humbly.**

In the quest for both faith and knowledge, we need to maintain humility. Jacob taught:

“O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves. . . .

“But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:28–29).

One reason to be humble about knowledge is that much of it is subject to change. My brother, Joe, as I indicated, is a medical doctor. Now in his 70s, he has taken the medical recertification exam in his area of expertise six times. He laughingly indicated to me that the questions are the same as those presented over 35 years ago, but the answers keep changing. On the exam 35 years ago, a typical multiple-choice question might be: What is the primary cause of a peptic ulcer? The answer would have related to stress. Today the answer to the same question would be that it is caused by bacteria that can live and grow in

the gastric tissue. As you can see, the questions have not changed, but many of the answers have. This is true in several fields of knowledge.

This example is not meant to reduce your commitment to knowledge; knowledge is essential. Knowledge in all areas is important. We are particularly fortunate to live in an age when the technological revolution is in progress.

Knowledge has always been important, and today we are at the threshold of new and exciting major technology. Certainly this technology revolution could have enormous benefits for the Church and for your fellow human beings. Knowledge, whether old or new, is important.

### **4. Follow the prophet’s counsel as you make your choices.**

In a worldwide leadership training meeting, President Hinckley said:

“No one need tell you that we are living in a very difficult season in the history of the world. Standards are dropping everywhere. Nothing seems to be sacred anymore.

“. . . I do not know that things were worse in the times of Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . I think our Father must weep as He looks down upon His wayward sons and daughters.”

As was characteristic of President Hinckley’s positive leadership, he went on to say:



**R**ationalization for bad choices will not be effective, but repentance will. Those who repent will be particularly blessed by the Atonement.

“We must not give up. We must not become discouraged. We must never surrender to the forces of evil. . . . If it means standing alone, we must do it.

“But we shall not be alone.”<sup>2</sup>

Prophets are not speaking just to our own day; they give us counsel that will bless us and our children in the future and through the eternities.

If we follow the prophet, we can look to the future with great optimism.



**5. Live so the Atonement can be fully efficacious in your life.**

Rationalization for bad choices will not be effective, but repentance will. Those who repent will be particularly blessed by the Atonement. Without the Atonement, the eternal principle of *justice* would require punishment (see Alma 42:14). Because of the Atonement, *mercy* can prevail for those who have repented and allow them to return to the presence of God (see Alma 42:15).

I first began to understand the significance of the Atonement when my grandfather was dying. After attending law school,

I was studying for the California bar exam when my mother called and said if I wanted to see my grandfather before he died, I better come to Utah. My grandfather, who was 86 years old, was very ill. He was so pleased to see me and share his testimony.

He had three concerns:

1. He loved his 10 children very much. They were all good people. He wanted them all to be temple worthy.

2. His father was one of the young men who had carried members of the Martin handcart company across the Sweetwater River. His father had died when my grandfather was three years old, and he looked forward to seeing him and hoped his father and other family members would approve of his life.

3. Finally, and most importantly, he told me how he looked forward to meeting the Savior. He referred to the Savior as the “Keeper of the Gate,” a reference to 2 Nephi 9:41. He told me that he hoped he had been sufficiently repentant to qualify for the Savior’s mercy.

All of us have sinned, and it is only through the Atonement that we can obtain mercy and live with God. I can remember to this day the great love that Grandfather had for the Savior and the appreciation he had for the Atonement.

I personally testify of the divinity of the Savior and the reality of the Atonement, and I hope that you will prayerfully consider the significant choices that are before you. **NE**

*From a Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional given on March 14, 2006.*

**NOTES**

1. “A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Liabona*, Apr. 2001, 30; *New Era*, Jan. 2001, 6.
2. “Standing Strong and Immovable,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 20.