



By **Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr.**
Of the Seventy

Testimony

The fundamentals of gaining and retaining a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ are straightforward, clear, and within the capacity of every person.

One of the great blessings of my life over many years has been the opportunity to be surrounded by and work with the young people of the Church. I consider these associations and friendships to be among the sweetest and most valuable of my life. They also are much of the basis for the optimism I have for the future of the Church, society, and the world.

During these interactions I have also had the privilege of conferring with some who have had various doubts or challenges with their testimonies. While the specifics have been varied and occasionally unique, many of the questions and causes for confusion have been quite similar. Likewise, these are issues and concerns not restricted to any demographic or age-group. They may trouble those who are multigenerational Church members, relatively new Church members, and also those just becoming familiar with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their questions are usually the result of honest inquiry or curiosity. Because the implications are so significant and serious for each of us, it seems appropriate to consider the matter of our testimonies. In our Latter-day Saint context, we refer to

our testimonies as our sure witness of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is obtained by revelation through the Holy Ghost.

While a testimony is simple and clear in this defining declaration, arising from this declaration are several potential questions, such as: Who is entitled to have a testimony? How does one obtain the necessary revelation? What are the steps in obtaining a testimony? Is gaining a testimony an event or an ongoing process? Each of these queries and others have their own subsets, but the fundamentals of gaining and retaining a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ are straightforward, clear, and within the capacity of every person.

Let me briefly respond to these possible uncertainties and then refer to some insights that have been shared recently by trusted young adult friends who have had personal experience in gaining their testimonies. They have also had opportunities to minister to others having challenges or difficulties with some aspects of their faith and beliefs.

First, who is entitled to have a testimony? Everyone who is willing to pay the price—meaning keeping the commandments—may have a testimony. “Wherefore the voice of

the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear” (D&C 1:11). A fundamental reason for the Restoration of the gospel is so “every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth” (D&C 1:20–21).

Second, how does one obtain the necessary revelation, and what are the fundamental steps to achieve it? The pattern has been clear and consistent throughout the ages. The promise given for obtaining a testimony of the Book of Mormon also applies generally:

“And when ye shall receive these things”—meaning you have listened, read, studied, and pondered on the question at hand—“ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true”—meaning you will pray thoughtfully, specifically, and reverently with a firm commitment to follow the answer to your prayer—“and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

“And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:4–5).

Third, is gaining a testimony an isolated event or an ongoing process? A testimony is similar to a living organism that grows and develops when treated properly. It needs constant nourishment, care, and protection to thrive and prosper. Likewise, neglect or deviance from the pattern of living that a testimony clarifies can lead to its loss or diminishment. The scriptures warn that transgressing or breaking the commandments of God can result in the loss of the Spirit and even to one denying the testimony he or she once possessed (see D&C 42:23).



Khayelitsha, South Africa

Let me now share 10 of the observations and suggestions of my valued and faithful young friends. The ideas they share have a commonality in their thinking and experience; thus, they likely will not be surprising to any of us. Unfortunately and especially at times of our own struggle and distress, we may temporarily forget or discount their applicability to us personally.

First, everyone has worth because we are all children of God. He knows us, loves us, and wants us to succeed and return to Him. We must learn to trust in His love and in His timing rather than in our own sometimes impatient and imperfect desires.

Second, while we believe fully in the mighty change of heart described in the scriptures (see Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:12–14, 26), we must understand it often occurs gradually, rather than instantaneously or globally, and in response to specific questions, experiences, and concerns as well as by our study and prayer.

Third, we need to remember that

a fundamental purpose of life is to be tested and stretched, and thus we must learn to grow from our challenges and be grateful for the lessons learned that we cannot gain in an easier way.

Fourth, we must learn to trust the things that we believe in or know to sustain us in times of uncertainty or with issues where we struggle.

Fifth, as Alma taught, gaining a testimony is usually a progression along the continuum of hoping, believing, and finally knowing the truth of a specific principle, doctrine, or the gospel itself (see Alma 32).

Sixth, teaching someone else what we know strengthens our own testimony as we build that of another. When you give someone money or food, you will have less. However, when you share your testimony, it strengthens and increases for both the bearer and the hearer.

Seventh, we must do the little but necessary things daily and regularly. Prayers, scripture and gospel study, attendance at Church meetings, temple

worship, fulfilling visiting teaching, home teaching, and other assignments all strengthen our faith and invite the Spirit into our lives. When we neglect any of these privileges, we place our testimonies in jeopardy.

Eighth, we should not have higher standards for others than we do for ourselves. Too often we may let the mistakes or failures of others, especially leaders or Church members, influence how we feel about ourselves or our testimonies. Other people's difficulties are not an excuse for our own deficiencies.

Ninth, it is good to remember that being too hard on yourself when you make a mistake can be as negative as being too casual when real repentance is needed.

And tenth, we must always be clear that the Atonement of Christ is fully and continuously operative for each of us when we allow it to be so. Then everything else fits into place even when we continue to struggle with certain details, habits, or seemingly

missing parts in the mosaic of our faith.

I am grateful for the insights, strengths, and testimonies of so many of my exemplary young friends and associates. When I am with them, I am strengthened, and when I know that they are with others, I am encouraged with the knowledge of the good that they are doing and the service that they are rendering in behalf of the Master they worship and strive to obey.

People do good and important things because they have testimonies. While this is true, we also gain testimonies because of what we do. Jesus said:

“My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16–17).

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Like Nephi and Mormon of old, “I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17; see also Words of Mormon 1:7), but let me tell you what I do know.

I know God our Heavenly Father lives and loves us. I know His uniquely special Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer and the head of the Church, which bears His name. I know Joseph Smith experienced all that he has reported and taught with respect to the Restoration of the gospel in our day. I know we are led by apostles and prophets today and President Thomas S. Monson holds all of the keys of the priesthood necessary to bless our lives and advance the work of the Lord. I know we are all entitled to this knowledge, and if you are struggling, you can rely on the truthfulness of the testimonies you hear from this pulpit at this conference. These things I know and bear testimony of in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■



By Elder Dallin H. Oaks
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Desire

To achieve our eternal destiny, we will desire and work for the qualities required to become an eternal being.

I have chosen to talk about the importance of *desire*. I hope each of us will search our hearts to determine what we really desire and how we rank our most important desires.

Desires dictate our priorities, priorities shape our choices, and choices determine our actions. The desires we act on determine our changing, our achieving, and our becoming.

First I speak of some common desires. As mortal beings we have some basic physical needs. Desires to satisfy these needs compel our choices and determine our actions. Three examples will demonstrate how we sometimes override these desires with other desires that we consider more important.

First, food. We have a basic need for food, but for a time that desire can be overridden by a stronger desire to fast.

Second, shelter. As a 12-year-old boy I resisted a desire for shelter because of my greater desire to fulfill a Boy Scout requirement to spend a night in the woods. I was one of several boys who left comfortable tents and found a way to construct a shelter and make a primitive bed from the natural materials we could find.

Third, sleep. Even this basic desire can be temporarily overridden by an even more important desire. As a

young soldier in the Utah National Guard, I learned an example of this from a combat-seasoned officer.

In the early months of the Korean War, a Richfield Utah National Guard field artillery battery was called into active service. This battery, commanded by Captain Ray Cox, consisted of about 40 Mormon men. After additional training and reinforcement by reservists from elsewhere, they were sent to Korea, where they experienced some of the fiercest combat of that war. In one battle they had to repel a direct assault by hundreds of enemy infantry, the kind of attack that overran and destroyed other field artillery batteries.

What does this have to do with overcoming the desire for sleep? During one critical night, when enemy infantry had poured through the front lines and into the rear areas occupied by the artillery, the captain had the field telephone lines wired into his tent and ordered his numerous perimeter guards to phone him personally each hour on the hour all night long. This kept the guards awake, but it also meant that Captain Cox had scores of interruptions to his sleep. “How could you do that?” I asked him. His answer shows the power of an overriding desire.

“I knew that if we ever got home, I would be meeting the parents of