

Given on June 22nd, 2014

Testimony and Change

Elder Oaks taught: "A testimony of the gospel is a personal witness borne to our souls by the Holy Ghost that certain facts of eternal significance are true and that we know them to be true."

Today I want to talk about how a testimony can help us in our lives and what God wants us to do with a testimony upon receiving it.

President Eyring talks about us looking forward to a future day. In one of his talks, he used the temple as an example...for us to look forward to the day we enter the temple and receive those ordinances. He said,

"If you can look forward to such a day with enough desire born of testimony, you will be strengthened to resist the temptations of the world. Each time you choose to try to live more like the Savior, you will have your testimony strengthened. You will come in time to know for yourself that He is the Light of the World.

You will come to feel light growing in your life. It will not come without effort. But it will come as it grows and *you choose to nurture it*. Here is the sure promise from the Doctrine and Covenants: "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."

What I would like to focus on today, is how our testimony can help us receive more light until the perfect day. In the scripture that President Eyring just quoted, we learned that that which is of God is light. We were all born of God, and are His children. Every child of God was born with light in them. What we do with that light will not only effect those around us, but our eternal destiny. If we receive that light, and continue in God then we will receive more light. How can our testimony help us receive more light? Let us use an example from the scriptures.

Nephi is commanded of the Lord to build a ship. With great faith, he does not complain, but rather asks the Lord,

"Lord, whither shall I go that I may find ore to molten, that I may make tools to construct the ship after the manner which thou hast shown unto me?" 1 Nephi 17:9

With his exceeding faith, he knew that the Lord would help him. So then, he asks his brothers to help him build the ship. They mocked him and made fun of him for probably quite a while, and said that he was crazy and was a fool, and that they would not help him. Then Nephi taught them about people in the Bible who were commanded of God to do great things. He bore his testimony to them,

“50 And I said unto them: If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done.

51 And now, if the Lord has such great power, and has wrought so many miracles among the children of men, how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?”

We can see from this passage that Nephi was a man of faith, who acted upon his faith. As a result of this, his testimony grew throughout his life. It is easy to see that his testimony grew significantly between the beginning of the Book of Mormon, to 2 Nephi 31 when he teaches us of the doctrine of Christ. And while we study this passage we can see what opportunities he had to act and not be acted upon. A testimony is a powerful blessing that the Lord can bestow upon all His children, but a blessing that His children must seek earnestly to receive, and then work tirelessly to keep. A testimony is not simply a passive belief; it is a belief or knowledge put into action. President Eyring said that a deep testimony will,

“shape your daily and hourly choices.”

In my life, I am constantly trying to live the way that I know I should live. Many of us have been members of the Church for quite some time now. Others of us may have just recently come in contact with the church. Many of us know gospel truths. Many of us pray earnestly to know God’s will in our lives. The truth is all of us know more about God, and the plan He has for us, than most people who have ever lived on this earth. If we take a moment to contemplate how much He has taught us through scripture, modern day prophets, through His Spirit, we will be overwhelmed with joy because of how much He has taught us about Him. But what do we do to show Him that we are grateful for this knowledge? King Benjamin exhorted,

“And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them” (Mosiah 4:30).

Are the things we know reflected in how we live?

“Have we received His image in our countenances? (Alma 5:14).

In the Miracle of Forgiveness, President Kimball taught,

“In our journey toward eternal life, purity must be our constant aim. To walk and talk with God, to serve with God, to follow his example and become as a god, we must attain perfection. In his presence there can be no guile, no wickedness, no transgression. In numerous scriptures he has made it clear that all worldliness, evil and weakness must be dropped before we can ascend unto ‘the hill of the Lord.’”

Is purity our constant aim? Unfortunately for me, purity isn’t always my constant aim. I’m trying to have it be, but it isn’t something that comes naturally or even easily. It is difficult for us to constantly

focus on eternal things while living in this carnal world. To have purity be our constant aim, we must seek heavens help; we must vigilantly seek it, and we must receive the power of the atonement in our lives.

Sarah and I were reading Step 2 in our addiction manual the other day and we read about grace. It says,

“In the Bible Dictionary, grace is defined as ‘divine means of help or strength’ given through the ‘bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.’ This gift of divine strength enables you to do more than you would be able to do if left on your own. The Savior will do for you what you cannot do for yourself. His grace is the means by which you can repent and be changed.”

While discussing this phrase about grace in the addiction manual, Sarah said something profound that made me ponder deeply upon my own life,

“With grace, these people who have serious, devastating addictions are overcoming them. And how many of us, who don’t have serious addictions, live our lives in mediocrity, not tapping into the power of the atonement?”

The atonement of Jesus Christ is for all people at all times. It is not just for the addict trying to find freedom from his addictions. It is not just for what we call serious sins. The atonement of Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to become perfect. It allows us to become clean from all sin. It allows us to become pure. We must have the strength to use our testimonies to direct each hour and each moment of our lives in such a way that we receive the power of the atonement in our lives to the blessing and purifying of our souls.

Hebrews 4:16 reads,

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

For us to receive grace, Paul said we must come boldly unto the throne of grace. This requires work. I imagine that to simply “come” unto the throne of grace would be to ask the Lord for help, and recognize our need for Him and His divine help in our lives. I then imagine, that to “Come boldly” means that in addition to recognizing our need for Him in our lives, and asking Him for help; we also have the faith to change our conduct, and to do everything we possibly can to receive the grace of our Lord. Alma teaches us well what it means to come boldly unto the throne of grace,

“Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism.”

-Alma 7:15

Today is the perfect day to do this. Today is the perfect day to re-enter into a covenant with our Heavenly Father. It is the perfect day to make a change, to get rid of a bad habit, or make a good new

trend in your life. In our lives, change can be difficult or easy. If I invited the men in this room to go one hour without touching their face, and the women in this room to go one hour without touching their hair....it may be difficult for some, but with the proper focus and motivation anyone could do it. In our lives, our Heavenly Father doesn't want us to merely change our conduct, He wants us to change our hearts, to become more like Him, to have enduring change that will last eternity. I once heard said that each day is the first day of the rest of your life. So what are we going to do with it? What are we going to do to show God that we love Him?

For us to be able to lay aside every sin as Alma taught, we must use the atonement. The atonement is the vital key to our repentance that allows us to grow closer to the Father and become more pure each time we are humble enough to use it. For us to use the atonement, it also requires great work. We need to constantly be aware of our actions, our words, our thoughts, and our standing with God. President Kimball taught,

“There is never a day in any man's life when repentance is not essential to his well-being and eternal progress...There is a prevalent, perhaps subconscious, feeling that the Lord designed repentance only for those who commit murder or adultery or theft or other heinous crimes. This is of course not so. If we are humble and desirous of living the gospel we will come to think of repentance as applying to everything we do in life, whether it be spiritual or temporal in nature. Repentance is for every soul who has not yet reached perfection.”

-Miracle of Forgiveness pg. 32-33.

There have been times in my life where I reached what I will call, a plane of contentment. I was doing good things, avoiding most the bad things, and because of where my mind was at, I was content with my life and conduct. I was not repenting often because I was perhaps too prideful to see or recognize my sins. After some time I realized that my spiritual growth had been halted. I yearned to be closer to my Heavenly Father, but because of where my head was at, I was unable to see what I could change. I began to pray more fervently. I wanted to be able to recognize my sins, all of them. I prayed and prayed. Well, it didn't take long. I was down in the depths of despair because I realized that I was the worst and lowest human being on the planet. ☺ Alright, it wasn't that bad. But the Lord really did show me what I had asked to see. All of a sudden, I could not count the number of sins in a day, and I struggled to truly repent of some because they were habits, occurring multiple times daily.

I share this story, because it is common for us to be living on a plane of contentment. It is common for us to come to church each Sunday, but not truly ponder the sacrament or the atonement. If we desire to be like our Savior bad enough, He will teach us how. If we seek His knowledge in faith, He will give it to us.

Repentance is a fruit of people who recognize their need for God, and have a testimony or at least a belief that He exists to help them. For us to receive more light and grow brighter until the perfect day, repentance must be our constant companion. Repentance must be our friend. In the Miracle of Forgiveness, President Kimball named several sins of commission that make us unclean,

“Murder, adultery, theft, cursing, unholiness in masters, disobedience in servants, unfaithfulness, improvidence, hatred of God, disobedience to husbands, lack of natural affection, high-mindedness, flattery, lustfulness, infidelity, indiscretion, backbiting, whispering, lack of truth, striking, deceitfulness, irreverence, boasting, arrogance, pride, double-tongued talk, profanity, slander, corruptness, thievery, embezzlement, despoiling, covenantbreaking, incontinence, filthiness, ignobleness, filthy communications, impurity, foolishness, slothfulness, impatience, lack of understanding, unmercifulness, idolatry, blasphemy, denial of the Holy Ghost, Sabbath breaking, envy, jealousy, malice, maligning, vengefulness, implacability, bitterness, clamor, spite, defiling, reviling, evil speaking, provoking, greediness for filthy lucre, disobedience to parents, anger, hate, covetousness, presumptuousness, abomination, insatiable appetite, instability, ignorance, self-will, speaking evil of dignitaries, becoming a stumbling block; and in modern language masturbation, petting, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and every sex perversion, every hidden and secret sin and all unholy and impure practices” (page 25).

As I was reading this list by President Kimball, many things may have happened to us as individuals. Some may have enjoyed hearing this list because they love the doctrine, but thought little of what it actually means in their lives. Others humbly thought about their own personal sins, and which of these sins could be found in their daily conduct. Some probably thought that these same things are always said in church and so hold little relevance in their lives. Some may have become saddened, being overcome with a feeling of not being good enough, or being overwhelmed at the task at hand to become perfect.

I shared this list with you because we are all different and will respond in different ways when we hear prophets speak and perhaps when the Spirit counsels us to do something. Satan would have us become saddened and overwhelmed with the quantity of our sins while our loving Savior would have us look forward with an eye of faith and joy. Those who love the doctrine are in a good place, but it is better to love, understand, and know to apply doctrine. Those who pondered in their hearts how they could be better, how they could change from hearing these things understand at least in part what it means to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments.

With how imperfect all of us are, we should not be stressed or worried at the great tasks that lie ahead of us. Our Heavenly Father created us knowing that we would have to live in imperfection and He has provided the way whereby we may experience joy in this life, becoming better each day. We should not give up and think that that it is impossible to be live perfectly. Instead we should,

“Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men” (2 Nephi 31:20).

Our Heavenly Father loves us. We were created by Him so that we could one day become perfect and glorified as He is. His work and His glory are to help each of us receive all that He has. I know from personal experience that He will always do everything that He can to help us each day. We need not have fear. We need not be stressed about how far we have to come or how little and insignificant we may feel at times. We must do today, that which will mean something tomorrow. We must seek to live like Christ today, so that we can live with Christ tomorrow. With the precious gift of testimony that our Heavenly Father has given us, let us show forth gratitude unto repentance and witness unto Him that we are willing to take upon us the name of His Son even Jesus Christ. Let us lay aside every sin which doth easily beset, and come boldly unto the throne of grace. It is my testimony that as we do so, Christ will receive us as His and we will one day will live in the presence of our Father with our eternal families forever. In the name of Jesus Christ amen.