

Elder Loren C. Dunn

Of the First Council of the Seventy

My brothers and sisters, I pray for the inspiration and strength and Spirit of the Lord during the few minutes that I am before you this afternoon.

In a recent area general conference held in Mexico, President Harold B. Lee made this statement:

"The strength of the Church is not to be measured by the amount of money paid as tithing by faithful members, nor by the number of the total membership of the Church, or the number of Church chapels and temple buildings.

"The real strength of the Church is to be measured by the individual testimonies to be found in the total membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Individual testimonies

No matter what position a person holds in this church, there is one thing to which he is entitled, and that is a testimony of its truthfulness.

Not only is it the right of every member to know for himself, but every soul, whether member or nonmember, can if he desires receive a realization that God the Father actually lives; that Jesus Christ is his Son, and gave up his life on the cross that we might live, and was resurrected to ascend on high to take his place on the right hand of God; that Joseph Smith was a true prophet and that in reality he saw God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, and that he became the legal administrator to restore the kingdom of God to the earth; that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that kingdom of God on the earth, and anyone who makes himself worthy for baptism, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance, can gain entrance to that kingdom; that the Book of Mormon is true and "a person can get closer to

the Lord by following its precepts than by any other book"; and that we have today a living oracle, a prophet of God who stands at the head of this the Lord's church upon the earth.

It is not enough to enter into a scholarly discourse on the merits of this declaration or to accept or reject these claims with a wave of the hand. True strength, true peace of mind, true purpose in life comes when the individual, aside from what others may know, puts himself in a position so that the Lord can reveal to him the absolute truth of these things. It is an experience that defies description, at least to one who has not yet paid the price to receive it. It is the awakening of the mind and spirit to absolute truth. It is a revelation from God. It goes beyond what we can know and understand with our mortal senses. It is a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Around the world literally hundreds of people are gaining this testimony daily. I heard one such person speak just a few days ago. He was a new convert to the Church. He was a young man and he had a young family. He told how his life had literally changed—how the life of his whole family had changed. For the first time he knew what his relationship to God was and what the Lord expected of him. Because of this, he said, he was a better husband and father. He knew where he was going and could lead his family in a better way. But mostly he was happy—happy with the quiet joy that fills the life of every truly converted person.

People who look at us from the outside can't understand what makes this church so alive and its people so faithful and devoted. President Lee truly answered that question in Mexico when he said, as I mentioned, "The

real strength of the Church is to be measured by the individual testimonies to be found in the total membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

The Book of Mormon

The way in which a person can gain such a testimony is clearly defined by the Lord. First let me read from the frontispiece of the Book of Mormon wherein the Lord gives the reasons for bringing forth this book to the world.

In the second paragraph we find this quote: "And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations."

So the purpose of the book is to convince the world, both Jew and gentile, that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself to all nations.

Next we read in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants where the Lord, speaking of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, says: "And gave him power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon;

"Which contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also;

"Proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old." (D&C 20:8-9, 11.)

Conviction of the truth

The Book of Mormon, then, has been brought forth to convince mankind that Jesus is the Christ and that the holy scriptures are true and that God is again speaking through prophets as he did in ancient times. The contents of the Book of Mormon then become the means whereby a person can

put himself in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord so he can prove to himself and be convinced these things are true.

How this should be accomplished is outlined by one of the last prophets to write in this ancient book of scripture. Some 421 years after the birth of Christ, the prophet Moroni, speaking to the people of this generation, gave the following guidelines:

"Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; 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." (Moro. 10:3-5.)

Three steps in seeking a testimony

The three steps, then, in seeking a testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel from the Lord himself are to read, ponder, and pray with real intent and sincerity of heart. If a person will prayerfully read the pages of this inspired book and carefully turn over in his mind what he has read and constantly ask the question, "Could any man have written this book?" the promise of the Lord is that he "will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost."

If the world would accept this invitation, then they would know for themselves the source of strength of The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—for like all of us, they would have gone to the source and received their own testimony.

Desire to know

And now to those who by heritage find themselves members of the Church but perhaps are not sure of their own testimony—to you I would suggest that it is no sin to admit to yourself that you do not know if, in fact, you don't know. The error might be, however, in coming to the realization that you don't know and then doing nothing about it. Any person, either member or nonmember, who wants to know *can* know. If at present you live by the faith and testimony of your parents and those around you, that is certainly all right. But seek to reach out and gain your own testimony so you can stand on the strength of your own personal relationship with the Lord. It will help you in solving many of your problems and bring peace to your heart.

Bearing testimony

I would hope that as Latter-day Saints we can strengthen each other in the way which the Lord provided, by bearing our testimonies often—at church meetings, at the end of gospel classes, even at fast and testimony meetings. We should renew our efforts to actually express our testimonies and give something more than a passing reference to the truthfulness of the gospel. With the bearing of testimony comes the spirit of testimony, and all are edified.

And finally, may Latter-day Saint parents bear their testimonies to their children in the home—actually express to your children exactly what it is about the Church you know to be true. If we think our children know these things just because they live in the same house with us, we are mistaken. We need to say the words so our families can feel the same spirit of testimony that we have felt. Family home evening is an ideal time for this to take place.

And may I add that the family setting is an ideal place to read the Book of Mormon. We as a family recently finished reading the Book of Mormon. Although two of our children are not old enough to read yet, we find that they understand more than we thought they would, for the spirit and truth of this great book enlighten all ages.

What greater inheritance can parents give their children than the spiritual heritage which the children have a right to receive! To all men, both member and nonmember, comes the invitation from the God of this earth to learn for themselves the truth. May all who have not received the knowledge accept the invitation of the Savior is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Harold B. Lee

Elder Loren C. Dunn of the First Council of Seventy has just addressed us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Paul H. Dunn of the First Council of Seventy. He will be followed by Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve.