

family, the husband of his sister. I remember a confused young convert to the Church seeking a blessing to help him change the self-destructive pattern of his life. He received a blessing so unusual I was astonished when I heard the words I spoke.

Brethren, young and old, do not be hesitant to ask for a priesthood blessing when you are in need of spiritual power. Fathers and other elders, cherish and magnify the privilege of blessing your children and the other children of our Heavenly Father. Be prepared to give priesthood blessings under the influence of the Holy Ghost whenever you are requested in sincerity and faith.

This is the true church of our Savior. I testify of the saving mission of

Jesus Christ. We are bearers of his priesthood. God bless us to exercise that priesthood under his direction, for the blessing of his children. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Hinckley

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to listen to Elder Robert L. Simpson, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and General President of the Sunday School.

## Elder Robert L. Simpson

### The faith and zeal of youth

My beloved brethren, and you wonderful young men of the Aaronic Priesthood, I just can't tell you how good you look. It's wonderful to see you here, wonderful that you've met your appointment with the Lord in this important priesthood meeting.

Where would we be without the faith of youth? I'm thinking of a boy named David in the Old Testament. I'm thinking of a young lad named Nephi in Book of Mormon history. I'm thinking of a young fifteen-year-old named Joseph Smith, who had faith and who became the head of this dispensation. I'm so grateful for the zeal of youth and the faith and the discernment of youth.

One short story: a preacher finally came to the point where he felt that he had enough faith to walk on water. And so he sent the word out to all the land, and people came from far and near. There were thousands there. But right in the front row was a deacon from the LDS Church. He had great interest in this kind of faith. He'd heard about it in Sunday School and in family home

evening, and he was on the front row, not fifteen feet away.

As the preacher walked up to the water, he paused momentarily and as he bent down to roll up his trousers the boy said, "Mister, you'll never make it." And he didn't.

### Three recurring questions

Recently I was impressed by a group of teenage Aaronic Priesthood holders who were assembled together with their bishops and advisers for an informal gospel discussion. It was a small, relaxed gathering, just to talk things over, to reason together. By the initial comments and greetings, it became obvious that each young man respected his bishop and had appreciation for the quorum advisers. It was also clear from their comments that they loved the Lord. But with all of this, there were still some who were struggling and wondering about a few things. Three main concerns came out of the discussion that morning. First, the question, Why does life have to be so hard?

A little later, a boy about fifteen years of age, obviously worried about some mounting peer pressure at school, commented, "I am not so sure it's worth it all."

And finally this—they all wanted to know, "How can I be certain that the Church is true?"

These questions are not new. They are as old as man. Nor are they reserved for just a few. I doubt that there is even one in this vast congregation who has not been faced with these same recurring questions through the years.

### **The Lord will help us**

Let's start with the first question about life being hard. I like what one of the seminary students said. He commented, "Life here in mortality is no different from the explanation we received in the premortal existence." He went on, "According to our Sunday School teacher, we shouted for joy and not only agreed to come to earth but literally clamored for the opportunity."

One of the advisers turned to a scripture to show how the Lord is always there to help us over the rough spots if we do our part.

He read, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock," said the Savior. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Did you catch the point, young men, that it is up to us to open the door? I think the Savior gives us another vital key as He declares, "For without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). That's powerful!

### **We can receive all that God has**

Remember the next comment? "I am not sure if it is worth it all." One of the bishops was quick to ask this question: "Do you think it would be worth it to some day become eligible to receive all that the Father has?" He went on to remind us that to receive all that the Father has is the very essence of the oath and covenant of the priesthood.

Let's reread together those words given us in the eighty-fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants with regard to that sacred obligation, an obligation that we all share alike. Please listen carefully. I'm going to start with the thirty-third verse:

"For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified."

And then skipping down to the thirty-eighth verse:

"And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father's kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him.

"And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood" (vs. 33, 38–39).

My young friends, please realize that these conditions that we just read are set. They have all been affirmed. We have already had priesthood authority conferred upon us. The Lord has promised a guaranteed destiny for all who magnify that priesthood; and that destiny is eternal life, which, according to scripture, is the greatest of all the gifts (see D&C 14:7). Because we have been ordained, we are on our way. Not only are we on our way, but it looks like we have reached the point of no return, for the Savior assures us that this is an oath and covenant of the Father "which he cannot break, neither can it be moved" (D&C 84:40).

### **Agency is preserved**

Let me interject an interesting little sidelight. As we read that last scripture concerning the oath and covenant that cannot be broken and neither can it be moved, one of the lads said, "Hey, where is my free agency in all of this?" A boy who had just been ordained a priest then spoke up: "We exercised our free agency in the premortal existence; people agree to baptism before they are baptized; we choose to renew the baptismal covenant each week during the sacrament service; we agreed to the conditions of the priest-

hood during the bishop's interview. No," he concluded, "I don't think our free agency has been violated."

He was right. There has not been a violation of our free agency.

### **Adversity can help sanctify us**

I would hope that no one who has taken upon himself the sacred covenant of the priesthood would ever throw his hands up, walk away, and say, "I'm sorry, it's just too difficult." Nephi had problems galore: Laman, Lemuel, Laban, and so on down the list. But he realized in his hour of need that all the forces of heaven were available to him. Remember when he declared, "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them" (1 Nephi 3:7).

At this point, one of the young deacons quipped, "Yeah, but Nephi didn't have to go to my school." He was telling us that his problem was just about as big as Nephi's but in a little different way. And he may be right, but the point is this: the Lord didn't forsake Nephi. He didn't forsake the Prophet Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail. And he won't forsake a boy with peer pressure at school or with any other problem.

All of us who are to stand prepared for the great blessings associated with this priesthood authority that is ours must be sanctified from time to time by whatever process the Lord has in mind. Just as surely as we are assembled here, whether a General Authority, a bishop, an elder, a deacon, the process is exactly the same. We must try to understand that when adversity comes, it is likely a means of preparing us for something ahead. Yes, it's worth it. Believe me, young men, it's worth it all.

### **A lifelong endeavor**

Now the third great question: "How can we be certain that the Church is true?" Can anyone gain a so-called perfect testimony here in mortality? I think all of us here are still in the never-ending process of a developing testimony. Youth of Zion, forget about receiving a miracle, or the so-called sure sign from heaven. There are no shortcuts to eternity. Thus, extreme patience becomes another key factor as we develop our testimony over a lifetime. It is simply "line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little," just as the scriptures say (D&C 128:21).

### **Principles of developing a testimony**

There are basic principles that never change in the development of a testimony.

Let's use the Book of Mormon as an example. The great promise found in Moroni 10:4, with which we are all familiar, states that we must read the book—then ask Heavenly Father about it with a sincere heart, with faith in Christ. Then He says when we have done this, the truth will be manifest to us by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Now, whether it be a testimony about the Book of Mormon, tithing, the Word of Wisdom, the law of the fast, keeping the Sabbath day holy, or any other principle, the process is exactly the same. First we must understand it through the scriptures and then we live it to the best of our ability; then we ask Heavenly Father with a sincere heart, with faith in Christ; then the truth of that principle will be manifest to us by the power of the Holy Ghost.

If you want to know the truth, you become informed, you be willing, and you be available.

Be informed about truth by reading the scriptures and by listening to inspired leaders.

Be willing to live that truth to the best of your ability.

And then be available to the gifts of the Spirit through your personal worthiness that you may be directed and that you may recognize the answer when it comes.

### Use God's gifts to develop faith

O youth of the noble birthright, you young men of a royal priesthood, become a modern-day Nephi in your faith. Yes, we all agree, it's hard at times, but the rewards are overwhelming. And never forget this: anyone who has been foreordained as you have been, anyone who has been given the gift of the Holy Ghost as you have, and anyone who has had priesthood authority conferred upon him as you have, will surely find within his grasp the ability to acquire a strong testi-

mony—a testimony that should never stop growing. As with Joshua of old, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). And just as surely as you do that, the "doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven" (D&C 121:45). May it be so, I pray humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Hinckley

We have listened to Elder Robert L. Simpson of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will now speak to us.

## President Thomas S. Monson

### "The worth of souls is great"

Have you ever pondered the worth of a human soul? Have you ever wondered concerning the potential which lies within each of us?

Early in my service as a member of the Council of the Twelve, I was attending the conference of the Monument Park West Stake in Salt Lake City. My companion for the conference was a member of the General Church Welfare Committee, Paul C. Child. President Child was a student of the scriptures. He had been my stake president during my Aaronic Priesthood years. Now we were together as conference visitors.

When it was his opportunity to participate, President Child took the Doctrine and Covenants and left the pulpit to stand among the priesthood to whom he was directing his message. He turned to section 18 and began to read:

"Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. . . .

"And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father" (vs. 10, 15).

President Child then raised his eyes from the scriptures and asked the question of the priesthood brethren: "What is the worth of a human soul?" He avoided calling on a bishop, stake president, or high councilor for a response. Instead, he selected the president of an elders quorum—a brother who had been a bit drowsy and had missed the significance of the question.

The startled man responded: "Brother Child, could you please repeat the question?" The question was repeated: "What is the worth of a human soul?"

I knew President Child's style. I prayed fervently for that quorum president. He remained silent for what seemed like an eternity and then declared: "Brother Child, the worth of a human soul is its capacity to become as God."