

contention, respect and not ridicule, counsel and not criticism, correction and not condemnation. They are spoken with clarity and not with confusion. They may be tender or they may be tough, but they must always be tempered.

The real challenge that we face in our communications with others is to condition our hearts to have Christlike feelings for all of Heavenly Father's children. When we develop this concern for the condition of others, we will then communicate with them as the Savior would. We will then warm the hearts of those who may be suffering in silence. As we meet people with special needs along life's way, we can then make their journey brighter by the things that we say.

Christlike communications will help us to develop righteous relationships and ultimately to return to our heavenly home safely. May we treasure the divine gift of communication, and may we use it wisely to build and to assist others on this marvelous journey through mortality. May

Heavenly Father bless us to this end, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang "How Firm a Foundation" without announcement.

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### President Monson

Elders Robert E. Sackley and L. Lionel Kendrick, members of the First Quorum of the Seventy, have just addressed us, followed by the choir singing "How Firm a Foundation."

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "Redeemer of Israel," following which we shall be pleased to hear remarks from Elder John K. Carmack, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

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The choir and congregation sang "Redeemer of Israel."

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## Elder John K. Carmack

I am sure I speak for all of you when I say how much we have been inspired by this great choir. I think I speak for all of you and especially the Brethren in welcoming these four new members of the First Quorum of the Seventy and sustaining our new leaders, Elder Clarke and Elder Scott.

What does it mean to bear testimony? A testimony is an open declaration or confession of one's faith. To bear is to give or bring forward. So as I bear testimony, I am giving a declaration of my faith.

Most of you would gladly bear testimony if called upon. I wish we could yield a minute to each one of you. The real power of the Church is not financial or political, but the quiet testimonies of its members.

### Keep testimonies growing

Members may describe their testimonies as growing. A few say they have

lost their testimonies. In bearing testimony, some use the term *know*, some *believe*. Some say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

I desire to edify all, no matter what the status of their testimonies.

When Shirley and I returned from the marriage of our son in the Oakland Temple last month, we strolled into the backyard. The lawn had looked particularly healthy and green this summer. To our horror, we discovered that the lawn had withered and turned as if to straw in the few days we had been gone. The automatic sprinkler had failed, and the hot summer sun had scorched the lawn.

Testimonies are like our lawn. They may be green and growing, but the heat of summer can change all of that. I shudder when I hear anyone declare, "I will never deny my testimony of the gospel." I seem to hear another standing by and answering quietly, "Well, we shall see."

We need your testimonies. We cannot afford to lose a single one. "Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; . . . therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee" (John Donne, *Devotions*, XVII).

The bell tolls for all of us. To those with strong testimonies I say, keep them growing. To those who have lost their testimonies I say, we need you back once again to take "sweet counsel together, and [to walk] unto the house of God in company" (Psalm 55:14). Isaiah promised, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles" (Isaiah 40:31).

### The soil and roots of testimony

The parable of the sower teaches us the principles by which we can gain or retain our testimonies and hints of pitfalls which we need to avoid at the peril of losing them.

The bottom line is simple enough. The gospel seed must be sown in good ground. A seed planted in good ground will grow into a plant which will yield fruit and have a strong root system to withstand the heat of summer. But the plant must be nurtured and watered.

How can we develop that rich and healthy soil in which the word of God can grow? How can we ensure an adequate root system to withstand the heat of summer?

I shall offer three principles and three warnings in answer to the questions posed. This will lead to two specific exhortations to all of us.

### Be rooted in Christ

First, our testimonies will be in good ground if they are rooted in Christ. Christ is the source of our greatest strength and comfort in times of stress or doubt.

Years ago I faced a temporal crisis in my business which threatened to engulf me. In answer to fervent prayer, the

Savior not only comforted me, but revealed the pathway out of the crisis into light.

In 1984, when President Hinckley called asking me to bring Sister Carmack and come to general conference for the interview resulting in this calling, the Savior visited me in spirit before dawn and again provided solace and peace.

"He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:4). "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee" (Psalm 55:22). We can cry in times of distress, "O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death" (Alma 36:18).

I testify that He lives! I know His presence and have heard His voice in my mind and in my heart (see Enos 1:10, D&C 8:2).

He is the rock, the cornerstone, and our Redeemer. He is the "true vine" to which our testimonies must attach. Good soil, then, is enriched by the Savior.

### Desire to gain a testimony

The second principle is so simple that it could easily escape our grasp and hide in the thicket of more profound and complex ideas.

Faith begins by a *desire* to know if the gospel is true. To desire is to want or long for something. It is a strong wish.

When we *desire* to gain a testimony, *desire* to know, *desire* to believe, testimony can begin or grow.

Abraham became the great patriarch because he desired "to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace." He desired "to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God" (Abraham 1:2).

Alma also explained that one must start on the road to a testimony by having a desire, or as he stated, you must "awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, . . . even if ye can no

more than *desire* to believe" (Alma 32:27; italics added).

Desire begets faith and testimony. Testimony isn't achieved by logic and study. For example, we can list hundreds of evidences that the Book of Mormon and the New Testament are true, but the skeptic can probably match us point by point. Without desire, the skeptic is "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

I don't believe it was ever intended that the gospel be proven true by physical or documentary evidence acceptable to all. In this life, the believer must come to his witness by faith, not by logic and proof alone. And the starting point is to place the ingredient of desire in our soil.

### The gospel experiment

I come now to the third point. A *spiritual experiment* similar to scientific procedures is the way one gains conviction about gospel principles and is an essential ingredient in achieving the rich soil in which the seed of testimony may grow.

Jesus explained, "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 7:17). In other words, as you try it you can know it is true. This requires the faith to try, but it yields spiritual evidence. To the disciple who tries the experiment will come conviction, knowledge, and light. As the disciple continues, he receives "more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24).

So when I declare that I know this gospel is true, that Christ lives, and that Ezra Taft Benson is God's prophet, I am saying, in effect, that doing and serving have brought me the conviction that this work is true.

I declare today that the lame are healed, the blind are restored to sight, and the dead are raised. Pathways are illuminated. Men and women are called of God by prophecy, and the Lord reveals His will to His prophets for the guidance of the Church.

The three keys then, are, to be rooted in Christ, to have a desire to know,

and to do the things God has commanded. All can come to know that the doctrine is true, growing from light and truth to further light and truth until the perfect day.

The seed "will begin to swell . . . and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good" (Alma 32:28).

Yes, there are other ways to a testimony. Paul was converted by a heavenly manifestation. By study and reason one can find the truth. But a testimony based on reason and knowledge alone, without a spiritual witness, can be in danger when a premise of its tight logic gets weak or crumbles. Thanks be to the Lord that my testimony is founded on faith and continues to grow through experience. I have seen, I have felt, and I know what I know.

Yes, I have a whole box of unanswered questions, none of them threatening to my testimony. New questions enter that box regularly. Others come out of the box, yielding to both study and experience. My hope is that I will endure the summer heat and retain that testimony, anchored in Christ, until the end of my mortal probation.

### Dangers to a testimony

As I have watched beloved friends and family lose their faith, I have tried to identify major causes.

1. *Arrogance, or pride.* One of the three dangers I shall mention is arrogance, or pride. Intellectual pursuits, financial success, positions of power, and other achievements, in and of themselves neither morally bad nor good, sometimes lead to pride and away from humble dependence on the Lord. Jacob cautioned that "to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God" (2 Nephi 9:29). Financial and political power can also be seductive and corrupting influences.

It helps to remember and emulate the meekness of Enoch, Moses, and Spencer Kimball.

2. *Sin.* Testimonies are weakened by sin, especially sexual transgressions. The

sinner sometimes blames someone else, rejects the gospel, and flees. A plant growing in rocky soil withers quickly. Serious transgression, then, is the second danger to our testimonies. The road back includes removing the rocks, turning over and enriching the soil, overcoming the sin, and resisting further temptations. Increasing numbers are returning to the Church by repenting of their sins. They seldom completely lose their testimonies.

3. *Substitution.* The final danger I shall call substitution. Some fine and capable people become so committed to science, philosophy, history, art, music, athletics, professional pursuits, intellectual hobbies, or recreation that these interests replace the simple core values, covenants, and doctrines of the gospel. These pursuits become a substitute religion and the governing force in their lives.

The central gospel principles repeated over and over in the covenants and ordinances of the temple, embodied in the sacrament, and found in the scriptures are available to all of us if we do not imagine somehow that we have outgrown the gospel of Christ. We also have our latter-day gnostics who "know" more than the garden-variety disciples of Christ.

I do not mean, however, to suggest that we should not continue to learn and deepen our knowledge about life and about the gospel. A solid, mature, and growing knowledge of the gospel is desirable and should be a constant goal.

To repeat, three dangers which can damage our faith and harm or destroy our testimonies are arrogance and pride, serious transgressions, and the substitution of peripheral pursuits and values for Christ and the central core gospel ideals and standards.

As I prepared for this moment, the backyard lawn was beginning to look

green again, but the sprinkler on the front lawn shut down without warning. One must not become weary with well-doing (see D&C 64:33). Our testimonies, like our lawns, can wither.

### **Grow and serve**

At this point you may be asking, "So what?" I shall limit myself to two exhortations, one to all the members of the Church and one to the leadership of the Church.

First, to grow in light and testimony we must magnify our Church callings throughout our lives, our entire lives. By this means, combined with spontaneous Christian service, we will never lose our testimonies. They will grow brighter and greener.

And then finally, to the Church leaders: please ordain men to the priesthood and extend a call to every brother and sister, active or less-active, giving each an opportunity to serve others and to apply gospel principles. One Church calling for each member is an ideal which we can reach in most places. I know of nothing which will do more to build testimonies and bless people.

And may I just take this opportunity to express my great love to all of you members of the Church. I love you and appreciate you and admire all the things you do. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Monson**

Elder John K. Carmack, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, has spoken to us.

We shall now hear from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

## **Elder M. Russell Ballard**

Brothers and sisters, the topic I wish to address is one about which the Breth-

ren are deeply concerned. I have titled my remarks "The Hand of Fellowship."