

paths is ours. God help us to follow his patterns and reap the rewards he has in store for the obedient, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Monson

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

Elder Robert K. Dellenbach, sustained as a member of the Seventy at April conference, will now address us. The choir will then sing "God Is Love." Elder Harold G. Hillam, also sustained as a member of the Seventy last April, will follow the choir.

## Elder Robert K. Dellenbach

### Gaining a testimony

May I tell you of the hour of my true conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ and his restored gospel. Perhaps my experience will strengthen those who desire a closer relationship with our Father in Heaven and a more profound testimony of the truthfulness of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Some years ago while traveling to a mission in Germany, I found myself, in stormy November, aboard a ship sailing from New York to Bremerhaven. The ocean boiled with turmoil. We were all seasick. All we could eat were soda crackers and Zwieback. I was almost afraid I was not going to die!

As the days passed it dawned on me: I'm really going on a mission. Do I truly have a testimony? Am I prepared to bear it "at all times and . . . in all places"? (Mosiah 18:9).

I thought I had a testimony, but now the real trial of my faith was coming. I was going to a foreign land where the only words I could speak in German were *Volkswagen* and *auf Wiedersehen*.

During the voyage I realized my testimony was not a spiritual fire of conviction, particularly of the Book of Mormon. And so I knelt down on the cold steel floor of that rocking ship and begged the Lord with my tears. I prayed, "Dear Father, I have got to know that the Book of Mormon is true. I have read it, I think I understand it, but I desire the fire which helps a man

know that the Book of Mormon is thy word. Please, Father, help me."

Somewhere out on the lonely Atlantic, during those turbulent days, a sweet spirit and peace came to me—"the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). I received a witness that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, and that supernal event became my hour of conversion.

If you question whether you have a testimony of the restored gospel, I encourage you to read, ponder, and study the Book of Mormon. Why the Book of Mormon? Because this holy scripture is the great testifier and converter. This ancient record is a spiritual compass for us to follow. Joseph Smith said, "The Book of Mormon was . . . the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book" (*History of the Church*, 4:461). When you come to know that this testament of Christ is true, you will know that Joseph Smith is the prophet of the Restoration and that Ezra Taft Benson is the Lord's prophet today. The Book of Mormon was written for our day to convince us "that Jesus is the Christ" (Book of Mormon title page). If your soul is searching for a more profound testimony of Jesus Christ and his restored kingdom, I suggest, in conjunction with studying the Book of Mormon, there are four steps you can take which will lead you to your hour of conversion.

These four steps are (1) desire, (2) works, (3) prayer, and (4) trust in the Lord. Let me briefly explain.

### Desire a more firm witness

*First, desire:* Oliver Cowdery desired a more firm witness of the plates which contained the Book of Mormon record. The Lord said to Oliver: "If you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter?" (D&C 6:22-23). The Lord told Oliver that, first of all, a person needs to have desire.

Alma said, "Even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you" (Alma 32:27).

### Do the works of righteousness

*Second, works:* Oliver Cowdery took a positive action. He moved himself from thinking to doing. In my case, while on board that ship, I had more intimately studied and pondered the Book of Mormon. Young Joseph reflected on the Bible, then went into the woods to pray. Moses climbed Mount Sinai. My Great-grandmother Nelson boarded a ship in Denmark, with a flock of little children, to join the Mormons in Utah. Righteous works yield a divine harvest. The Lord said, "He who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come" (D&C 59:23).

### Pray to know the truth

*Third, prayer:* "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, Uttered or unexpressed" (*Hymns*, no. 145).

As we sincerely pray to the Lord and rely upon his divine whisperings, that still, small voice will come to us (see Helaman 5:30). We will receive a peace, knowing that God has answered our prayers. Remember the peace that Oliver received. These spiritual embers can grow into a flame of testimony (see Helaman 5:45).

Alma, upon meeting the four sons of Mosiah, who had been on a fourteen-

year mission, rejoiced at their knowledge of the truth. He said, "They had searched the scriptures diligently, [and] they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; [and] they taught with power and authority of God" (Alma 17:2-3).

"Ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ," counseled Moroni, "if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, . . . he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4).

Surely the Lord would not ask us to pray if he did not intend to answer our prayers. "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

### Trust in the Lord

*Fourth, "trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding"* (Proverbs 3:5). We can trust the Lord. He is our truest Friend. He always keeps his word. "Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith," admonished Ether (Ether 12:6).

May I ask you to extend your trust in the Lord. Take the Book of Mormon into your hands. As you read it, ask yourself, Could any man write this? Then ask the Lord, Is this thy word?

A word of caution: Satan wants to stop you. He will try to distract, deceive, and weaken your desire, your righteous works, your sincere prayers, and your trust in the Lord. Do not be afraid. We have already overcome the evil one at another time and place. We are told that in the great premortal war, "[we] overcame [Lucifer] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of [our] testimony" (Revelation 12:11). We had a valiant testimony in our premortal state, and we can resist Satan and awaken that testimony again today.

The Book of Mormon is our testimonial Liahona (see Alma 37:45). This voice from the dust guides us to know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that his church has been restored.

If you have even a small desire for a greater witness, please do the works of righteousness, trust in the Lord, pray and anxiously explore the Book of Mormon. I testify that it is the word of God. This iron rod marks the path that will guide your soul to your hour of conver-

sion. I rejoice with you in that glorious event. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang "God Is Love."

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## Elder Harold G. Hillam

### A shoeshine man in Lisbon

Some years ago, while I was serving as the mission president in Portugal, several of our missionaries introduced me to their shoeshine man. Their shoes looked so good that I was anxious to meet the man that could put such a shine on missionaries' shoes. Even though he had not chosen to listen to the missionaries' message, I considered the shoeshine man my friend, and we visited while he was busy shining my shoes. He indicated that his wife had died, that he had no family, and that about the only pleasure he had in life was seeing people walk away happy with the shoes he had just shined.

His place of business was on the curbside of a small square on a busy street in downtown Lisbon. His stand seemed to have all that was necessary. It consisted of a short, rusty, three-legged stool, upon which my frail friend would sit as he shined the shoes that were placed on a stained and well-used shoeshine box that was full of his polishes and brushes, and there was an ornate lamppost (which was kindly furnished by the city of Lisbon), upon which the customer would lean while he was having his shoes shined.

He would carefully apply two coats of polish, using a brush to polish between each coat. Last, he applied a special product that would give the shoes that extra special shine. With a final snap of the cloth, he would stand up, take off his little Portuguese cap, make a deep bow, and say, "*Pronto. Seus sapatos foram engrashados pelo o melhor engraxate do mundo.*" "There. Your

shoes were shined by the very best shoeshine man in the world." I was convinced that I had had my shoes shined by the very best.

A few months after our mission, I was called to serve as the Regional Representative to Portugal and had the opportunity to return to Lisbon a number of times. As occasion permitted, I would have my shoes shined by the "best shoeshine man in the world."

The last few times that I went, I was unable to find him at his usual place of business. I finally inquired at the prestigious stores that surrounded the square. The response was the same, "We don't know what happened to him. It seems that we had heard that he had died." I remember thinking, Could it be that the best shoeshine man in the world had died, and no one really knew or even seemed to care? I wondered: Had there been someone there with him, or did he slip away unnoticed?

### Brother and Sister Joaquim Aires

May we contrast that for a moment with Brother and Sister Joaquim Aires, a marvelous man and his wife who came to Portugal following the 1974 revolution of Portugal's colonies in Angola and Mozambique. They had returned to Portugal unknown and with very few possessions. A great blessing occurred in their lives. They opened their door to two young missionaries, who taught them of the restoration of Christ's church. They received the missionaries, accepted their message, and were baptized.