

25. John 15:16.
26. Doctrine and Covenants 107:27, 30.
27. Doctrine and Covenants 112:31.
28. Doctrine and Covenants 68:4.
29. Doctrine and Covenants 124:32.
30. Doctrine and Covenants 124:45.
31. 3 Nephi 12:1.
32. Doctrine and Covenants 124:45.
33. Doctrine and Covenants 124:46.
34. See Alma 12:9.
35. Doctrine and Covenants 1:30.

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The chorus sang "Though Deepening Trials."

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### President Hinckley

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has spoken to us, and the chorus has sung "Though Deepening Trials."

Elder L. Aldin Porter of the Presidency of the Seventy will now address us.

## Elder L. Aldin Porter

### The First Vision changed the world

One hundred seventy-six years ago, an event occurred which lies at the very foundation of the Restoration of the gospel in these latter days. It is, in my judgment, the most significant event that has occurred in this world since the Son of God walked forth from the tomb a resurrected being. I refer to that first heavenly vision that came to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Let me read his words:

"It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.

"After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God."

He then described a few moments of severe spiritual anguish, convincing him that the forces of evil were real and powerful. Then he continued:

"I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the

sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

"It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*"<sup>1</sup>

That single event changed the future of the world. The appearance of the Father and the Son to the young prophet ushered in the dispensation of the fullness of times. It exemplified God's love for His children and changed the world forever.

### Testimony comes by revelation

How can one know of a surety that Joseph Smith actually saw and conversed with the Father and the Son? How can one ascertain the truthfulness of our bold assertion that God speaks to the world today through His prophets? God has provided a way.

Speaking of the supernal glory of that First Vision, President Gordon B. Hinckley has said: "Much has been written, much will be written, in an effort to

explain it away. The finite mind cannot comprehend it. But the testimony of the Holy Spirit, experienced by countless numbers of people all through the years since it happened, bears witness that it is true, that it happened as Joseph Smith said it happened, that it was as real as the sunrise over Palmyra, that it is an essential foundation stone, a cornerstone, without which the Church could not be "fitly framed together."<sup>2</sup>

I repeat: the testimony of the Holy Spirit bears witness that it is true. That testimony is the means, in most instances, by which God reveals truth to mankind. It is not a new or strange phenomenon but is as old as the human race. The scriptures are replete with examples of God communicating with man. By revelation Adam and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Moses and all of the faithful former-day Saints came to know of sacred things.

Nephi of ancient days taught this principle to his people. He said:

"And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.

"But behold, there are many that harden their hearts against the Holy Spirit, that it hath no place in them; wherefore, they cast many things away which are written and esteem them as things of naught."<sup>3</sup>

The Holy Spirit does not teach the proud, the unteachable, the indolent, or the doubter. A deep desire for truth and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will prepare one's heart to be taught spiritual things.

### The Spirit empowers missionaries

The Lord Jesus Christ directs His work on the earth by revelation through the Holy Spirit. The power of this reve-

latory Spirit moves and motivates an army of more than 52,000 missionaries who take the gospel message to the four corners of the earth. When they are successful in their work, it is because of the witness they bear, a witness accompanied and confirmed by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The Lord describes His emissaries as weak, unlearned, and despised. But He promises that through their efforts He will "thrash the nations by the power of [His] Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

When President Hinckley returned from the British Isles last fall, he told us of an interview he had with a member of the British Broadcasting Company Radio Services. The reporter asked President Hinckley, "How do you expect people to listen to these callow youth?" President Hinckley had to explain to some of us that *callow* meant immature, inexperienced, and lacking sophistication. Then he pointed out to this reporter that "people do receive them and listen to them. They are wholesome. They are bright, they are alert, they are . . . clean."<sup>5</sup>

And then at the general conference priesthood session held in October of last year, he said, speaking of the missionaries: "They are a miracle. . . . They speak out of their hearts with personal conviction. Each is . . . an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their power comes not of their learning in the things of the world. Their power comes of faith and prayer and humility."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus' commandment to preach the gospel to all nations is obeyed as the servants of God bear testimony, in humility, across the earth. And the Lord responds to their sacrifices and bears witness of their words by revelation.

### Too many deny the spirit of prophecy

Some years ago I enjoyed a stake conference assignment as a junior companion to Elder LeGrand Richards, who had, under the influence of this directing

Spirit, reorganized a stake presidency. We were driving home; he was very pensive. After a rather long period of silence, I asked him if there was something he would like to teach me. Quietly he said, "We have too many in the Church who deny the spirit of prophecy and of revelation." That was it—he said no more about it. As I reminisced about the calling of the new stake president that day, it occurred to me then that this Church could not function for even one day without the spirit of prophecy and revelation.

But ours is a day of dwindling faith and increasing skepticism about sacred things. Our time reminds me of the period just prior to the coming of the resurrected Savior to this continent. They were very dark days.

Mormon recorded the roots of the problems that beset Nephite society when he said, "And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation."<sup>7</sup>

Later Mormon continues: "And because of their iniquity the church had begun to dwindle; and they began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face."<sup>8</sup>

### Revelation continues today

We boldly assert that the spirit of revelation rests upon the Lord's living prophets, seers, and revelators.

President Spencer W. Kimball from this very pulpit bore his testimony when he said: "I say, in the deepest of humility, but also by the power and force of a burning testimony in my soul, that from the prophet of the Restoration to the prophet of our own year, the communi-

cation line is unbroken, the authority is continuous, and light, brilliant and penetrating, continues to shine. The sound of the voice of the Lord is a continuous melody and a thunderous appeal."<sup>9</sup>

When the appointed servants of this Church speak under the influence of the Holy Ghost as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ, their words are carried by the power of the Spirit to those whose hearts are open to revelation.

When, with heavenly power, that witness comes to a person, he or she will soon understand that personal sacrifice is its constant companion. The spiritual witness of these sacred things and the demands of sacrifice inevitably walk the road together. In time, one comes to understand the necessity of this and is filled with gratitude that it is so.

### Spirit reveals most important knowledge

The most important knowledge to be gained in this life is that which comes by revelation through the Holy Spirit. This is not to belittle in any way information available in a multitude of disciplines or fields of study. But any of it individually or all of it together can never equal the importance of receiving the personal witness, borne on the wings of the Spirit, of sacred things. That witness brings light and certainty and peace.

I raise my voice and state again that Joseph Smith saw the Father and the Son. This certain knowledge is independent of all mortal men, for this conviction has come to me by the Holy Spirit, as promised.

The kingdom of God on earth continues to move forward with dedicated missionary and member alike having the conviction confirmed by the Holy Ghost that Joseph Smith saw God our Father and His Son Jesus Christ. It moves forward empowered by the assurance in the heart of each faithful member, individually, that those who lead us do so with the spirit of prophecy and revelation.

We must never lose this precious gift. We must pay whatever price of faith and obedience is required to retain this great blessing.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. Joseph Smith—History 1:14–17.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1984, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 52.
3. 2 Nephi 33:1–2.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 35:13.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 51.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 51.
7. Helaman 4:12.
8. Helaman 4:23.

9. In Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 115; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 78.

#### President Hinckley

Elder L. Aldin Porter of the Presidency of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

The chorus and congregation will now join in singing “Now Let Us Rejoice.” We shall then hear from Sister Virginia H. Pearce, first counselor in the general Young Women presidency.

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The chorus and congregation sang “Now Let Us Rejoice.”

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## Sister Virginia H. Pearce

### Hoping we will be active and faithful

Several months ago my husband performed the baptism of a dear friend. As I sat in the service, my mind and heart raced over her years of preparation for that single event—the principles carefully taught, constantly observed, and quietly accepted, the acknowledgment of God’s hand in life events, the sweet confirmation of the Spirit as difficult but right choices were made. My mind recalled the past and rejoiced in the present, and I couldn’t help but anticipate the future. I hoped with all my heart that this good woman would remain actively connected to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the rest of her life—that she would continue to learn and live the gospel and experience the fulness of its blessings.

This morning, as I remember those hopes, I think about the 375,469<sup>1</sup> others who were baptized last year. And then I think of the rest of us, the roughly nine million who have stepped into the waters

of baptism sometime in the past. Though our stories are individual, each of us came to that ordinance having been taught the true doctrines of the kingdom, having felt the Spirit, having understood how the doctrines fit into the context of our lives, and having demonstrated a willingness to try always to live those truths.

It seems too hard to think about the possibility, even the probability, that not all of us will continue to “cling to the Church and live its principles.”<sup>2</sup> Many of us will leave and never return to this happy fellowship. Some of us will leave for a time and find our way back with a heightened sense of gratitude for participation in the kingdom of God on earth. The reality of life is that each of us is daily at risk for drifting or even marching into inactivity.

### Church classes foster growth

There are so many things in place to help us remain active. This morning I