

Do I Believe?

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If these things are true, then we have the greatest message of hope and help that the world has ever known.

On March 30, just one year ago, little two-year-old Ethan Carnesecca, from American Fork, Utah, was admitted to the hospital with pneumonia and fluid around his lungs. Two days later, his condition had become so serious that he needed to be flown by helicopter to Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City. His worried mother, Michele, was allowed to ride in the front seat and accompany her son. She was given a headset so she could communicate with the others in the helicopter. She could hear the medics working on her sick little boy, and being a pediatric nurse herself, Michele knew enough to understand that Ethan was in serious trouble.

In this critical moment, Michele noticed they were flying directly over the Draper Utah Temple. From the air, she looked out across the valley and could also see the Jordan River Temple, the Oquirrh Mountain Temple, and even the Salt Lake Temple in the distance. The thought came into her mind: "Do you believe it or not?"

She says of this experience:

"I had learned about the blessings of the temple and [that] 'families are forever' in Primary and in Young Women. I shared the message on families to the good people of Mexico on my mission. I was sealed to my eternal companion for time and all eternity in the temple. I taught lessons about families as a Young Women leader, and I shared stories about forever families with my children in family home evening. I KNEW it, but did I BELIEVE it? My answer came as quickly as the question popped into my head: the Spirit confirmed to my heart and mind the answer I already knew—I DID believe it!

"At that moment I poured out my heart in prayer to my Heavenly Father, thanking Him for the knowledge and belief I had that families truly are forever. I thanked

Him for His Son, Jesus Christ, who made it all possible. I thanked Him for my son, and I let my Heavenly Father know if He needed to bring my little Ethan to His heavenly home, it was OK. I trusted in my Heavenly Father completely, and I knew I would see Ethan again. I was so grateful that in a crisis moment, I had the knowledge AND the belief that the gospel was true. I had peace.”¹

Ethan spent many weeks in the hospital, receiving expert medical care. The prayers, fasting, and faith of loved ones, combined with that care, allowed him to leave the hospital and return home to be with his family. He is healthy and well today.

This defining moment for Michele confirmed to her that what she had been taught all of her life was more than just words; it is true.

Do we sometimes become so accustomed to the blessings we have been given as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that we fail to fully comprehend the miracle and majesty of discipleship in the Lord’s true Church? Are we ever guilty of being complacent about the greatest gift we can be offered in this life? The Savior Himself taught, “If you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God.”²

We believe that this Church is more than just a good place to go on Sundays and learn how to be a good person. It is more than just a lovely Christian social club where we can associate with people of good moral standing. It is not just a great set of ideas that parents can teach their children at home so they will be

responsible, nice people. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is infinitely more than all of these things.

Think for just a minute about the profound claims we make as a religion. We believe that the same Church Jesus Christ established while on the earth has been restored once again by a prophet called of God in our time and that our leaders hold the same power and authority to act in God’s name that ancient Apostles held. It is called the priesthood of God. We claim that through this restored authority, we can receive saving ordinances, such as baptism, and enjoy the purifying and refining gift of the Holy Ghost to be with us at all times. We have apostles and prophets leading and directing this Church through priesthood keys, and we believe that God speaks to His children through these prophets.

We also believe that this priesthood power makes it possible to make covenants and receive ordinances in holy temples that will someday enable us to return to the presence of God and live with Him forever. We also claim that, through this

the presence of God and live with Him forever. We also claim that, through this power, families can be bound together for eternity when couples enter the new and everlasting covenant of marriage in sacred buildings that we believe are literally the houses of God. We believe that we can receive these saving ordinances not only for ourselves but also for our ancestors who lived on the earth without having the chance to participate in these essential saving ordinances. We believe we can perform ordinances for our ancestors by proxy in these same holy temples.

We believe that, through a prophet and the power of God, we have received additional scriptures, adding to the testimony of that in the Bible declaring that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

We claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God and the only true Church on the earth. It is called the Church of Jesus Christ because He stands at the head; it is His Church, and all these things are possible because of His atoning sacrifice.

We believe that these distinguishing features can be found in no other place or organization on this earth. As good and sincere as other religions and churches are, none of them have the authority to provide the ordinances of salvation that are available in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We have a knowledge of these things, but *do we believe them?* If these things are true, then we have the greatest message of hope and help that the world has ever known. Believing them is a matter of eternal significance for us and for those we love.

To believe, we need to get the gospel from our heads into our hearts! It is possible for us to merely go through the motions of living the gospel because it is expected or because it is the culture in which we have grown up or because it is a habit. Perhaps some have not experienced what King Benjamin's people felt following his compelling sermon: "They all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually."³

We all need to seek to have our hearts and very natures changed so that we no longer have a desire to follow the ways of the world but to please God. True conversion is a process that takes place over a period of time and involves a willingness to exercise faith. It comes when we search the scriptures instead of the Internet. It comes when we are obedient to the commandments of God. Conversion comes when we serve those around us. It comes from earnest

prayer, regular temple attendance, and faithful fulfillment of our God-given responsibilities. It takes consistency and daily effort.

I am often asked, “What is the greatest challenge our youth face today?” I answer that I believe it is the ever-present influence of the “great and spacious building” in their lives.⁴ If the Book of Mormon was written specifically for our day, then surely we cannot miss the relevance for all of us of the messages in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life and the effect of those pointing their fingers and taunting from the great and spacious building.

What is most heartrending to me is the description of those who have already fought their way through the mists of darkness on the strait and narrow path, have clung to the rod of iron, have reached their goal, and have begun tasting of the pure and delicious fruit of the tree of life. Then the scripture says that those finely dressed people in the great and spacious building “were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.

“And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.”⁵

These verses describe those of us who already have the gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives. Whether we were born into it or had to fight our way through mists of darkness to find it, we have tasted of this fruit, which “is most precious and most desirable”⁶ and has the potential to bring us eternal life, “the greatest of all the gifts of God.” We need only to keep feasting and not heed those who would make fun of our beliefs or those who delight to create doubts or those who find fault with Church leaders and doctrine. It is a choice we make daily—to choose faith over doubt. Elder M. Russell Ballard has urged us to “stay in the boat, use your life jackets, and hold on with both hands.”⁷

As members of the Lord’s true Church, we are already in the boat. We don’t have to go searching through the philosophies of the world for truth that will give us comfort, help, and direction to get us safely through the trials of life—we already have it! Just as Ethan’s mother could examine her long-held beliefs and declare confidently in a moment of crisis, “I do believe it,” so can we!

I bear witness that our membership in the Lord’s kingdom is a gift of immeasurable value. I testify that the blessings and peace the Lord has in store for those who are obedient and faithful exceed anything the human mind can comprehend. I leave this testimony with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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