

Foundations of Faith

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By Elder Quentin L. Cook
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

My plea is that we will make the sacrifices and have the humility necessary to strengthen the foundations of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This has been a magnificent general conference. We have truly been edified. If there is one preeminent objective of general conference, it is to build faith in God the Father and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

My remarks address the foundations of that faith.

Personal foundations, like many worthwhile pursuits, are usually built slowly—one layer, one experience, one challenge, one setback, and one success at a time. A most cherished physical experience is a baby's first steps. It is magnificent to behold. The precious look on the face—a combination of determination, joy, surprise, and accomplishment—is truly a seminal event.

In our family, there is one event of a similar nature that stands out. When our youngest son was about four years old, he came into the house and gleefully announced to the family with great pride: "I can do everything now. I can tie, I can ride, and I can zip." We understood he was telling us that he could tie his shoes, he could ride his Big Wheel tricycle, and he could zip his coat. We all laughed but realized that for him they were monumental achievements. He thought he had truly arrived and was grown up.

Physical, mental, and spiritual development have much in common. Physical development is fairly easy to see. We begin with baby steps and progress day by day, year by year, growing and developing to attain our ultimate physical stature. Development is different for each person.

When we watch a great athletic or musical performance, we often say that the person is very gifted, which is usually true. But the performance is based upon years of preparation and practice. One well-known writer, Malcolm Gladwell, has called this the 10,000-hour rule. Researchers have determined that this amount of practice is necessary in athletics, musical performance, academic proficiency, specialized work skills, medical or legal expertise, and so on. One of these research experts asserts "that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert—in anything."¹

Most people recognize that to obtain peak physical and mental performance, such preparation and practice are essential.

Unfortunately, in an increasingly secular world, less emphasis is placed on the amount of spiritual growth necessary to become more Christlike and establish the foundations that lead to enduring faith. We tend to emphasize moments of sublime spiritual understanding. These are precious instances when we know the Holy Ghost has witnessed special spiritual insights to our hearts and minds. We rejoice in these events; they should not be diminished in any way. But for enduring faith and to have the constant companionship of the Spirit, there is no substitute for the individual religious observance that is comparable to physical and mental development. We should build on these experiences, which sometimes resemble initial baby steps. We do this by consecrated commitment to sacred sacrament meetings, scripture study, prayer, and serving as called. In one recent obituary tribute for the father of 13 children, it was reported his "loyalty to daily prayer and scripture study profoundly influenced his children, giving them an immovable foundation of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."²

An experience I had when I was 15 years old was foundational for me. My faithful mother had valiantly tried to help me establish the foundations of faith in my life. I attended sacrament meeting, Primary, then Young Men and seminary. I had read the Book of Mormon and had always prayed individually. At that time a dramatic event occurred in our family when my beloved older brother was considering a potential mission call. My wonderful father, a less-active Church member, wanted him to continue his education and not serve a mission. This became a point of contention.

In a remarkable discussion with my brother, who was five years older and led the discussion, we concluded that his decision on whether to serve a mission depended on three issues: (1) Was Jesus Christ divine? (2) Was the Book of Mormon true? (3) Was Joseph Smith the prophet of the Restoration?

As I prayed sincerely that night, the Spirit confirmed to me the truth of all three questions. I also came to understand that almost every decision I would make for the rest of my life would be based on the answers to those three questions. I particularly realized that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was essential. In looking back, I recognize that, primarily because of my mother, the foundations were in place for me to receive the spiritual confirmation that evening. My brother, who already had a testimony, made the decision to serve a mission and ultimately won our father's support.

Spiritual guidance is received when needed, in the Lord's time and according to His will.³ The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ is an excellent example. I recently viewed a first edition of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith completed the translation when he was 23 years old. We know something of the process and instruments he used in that translation. In that first 1830 printing, Joseph included a short preface and simply and clearly declared it was translated "by the gift and power of God."⁴ What about the aids to translation—the Urim and Thummin, the seer

stones? Were they essential, or were they like the training wheels on a bicycle until Joseph could exercise the faith necessary to receive more direct revelation?⁵

Just as repetition and consistent effort are required to gain physical or mental capacity, the same is true in spiritual matters. Remember that the Prophet Joseph received the same visitor, Moroni, with exactly the same message four times in preparation for receiving the plates. I believe that weekly participation in sacred sacrament meetings has spiritual implications we do not fully understand. Pondering the scriptures regularly—rather than reading them occasionally—can substitute a superficial understanding for a sublime, life-changing enhancement of our faith.

Faith is a principle of power. Let me illustrate: When I was a young missionary, a great mission president⁶ introduced me in a profound way to the scriptural account found in Luke 8 of the woman who had an issue of blood for 12 years and had spent everything she had on physicians who could not heal her. It has remained to this day one of my favorite scriptures.

You will remember that she had faith that if she could but touch the border of the Savior's garment, she would be healed. When she did so, she was healed immediately. The Savior, who was walking along with His disciples, said, "Who touched me?"

Peter's answer was that all of them, walking together, were pressing against Him.

"And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me."

The root word for *virtue* could easily be interpreted as "power." In Spanish and Portuguese, it is translated as "power." But regardless, the Savior did not see her; He had not focused on her need. But her faith was such that touching the border of the garment drew upon the healing power of the Son of God.

As the Savior said to her, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."⁷

I have contemplated this account all my adult life. I realize that our personal prayers and supplications to a loving Father in Heaven in the name of Jesus Christ can bring blessings into our lives beyond our ability to comprehend. The foundations of faith, the kind of faith that this woman demonstrated, should be the great desire of our hearts.

However, initial foundations of faith, even with spiritual confirmation, do not mean that we will not face challenges. Conversion to the gospel does not mean all our problems will be solved.

Early Church history and recorded revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants contain excellent examples of establishing foundations of faith and dealing with the vicissitudes and challenges that everyone faces.

The completion of the Kirtland Temple was foundational for the entire Church. It was accompanied by spiritual outpourings, doctrinal revelations, and restoration of essential keys for the continuing establishment of the Church. Like the ancient Apostles on the day of Pentecost, many members experienced marvelous spiritual experiences in connection with the dedication of the Kirtland Temple.⁸ But, as in our own lives, this did not mean they wouldn't face challenges or hardships going forward. Little did these early members know they would be faced with a United States financial crisis—the panic of 1837—that would test their very souls.⁹

One example of the challenges related to this financial crisis was experienced by Elder Parley P. Pratt, one of the great leaders of the Restoration. He was an original member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In the early part of 1837, his dear wife, Thankful, died after delivering their first child. Parley and Thankful had been married almost 10 years, and her death devastated him.

A few months later, Elder Pratt found himself in one of the most difficult times the Church has experienced. In the midst of the national crisis, local economic issues—including land speculation and the struggles of a financial institution founded by Joseph Smith and other Church members—created discord and contention in Kirtland. Church leaders did not always make wise temporal decisions in their own lives. Parley suffered significant financial losses and for a time became disaffected with the Prophet Joseph.¹⁰ He wrote a stinging criticism to Joseph and spoke in opposition of him from the pulpit. At the same time, Parley said he continued to believe in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.¹¹

Elder Pratt had lost his wife, his land, and his home. Parley, without telling Joseph, left for Missouri. On the road there, he unexpectedly met fellow Apostles Thomas B. Marsh and David Patten returning to Kirtland. They felt a great need to have harmony restored to the Quorum and persuaded Parley to return with them. He realized that no one had lost more than Joseph Smith and his family.

Parley sought out the Prophet, wept, and confessed that what he had done was wrong. In the months after his wife, Thankful's, death, Parley had been "under a dark cloud" and had been overcome by fears and frustrations.¹² Joseph, knowing what it was like to struggle against opposition and temptation, "frankly forgave" Parley, praying for him and blessing him.¹³ Parley and others who remained faithful benefited from the Kirtland challenges. They increased in wisdom and became more noble and virtuous. The experience became part of their foundations of faith.

Adversity should not be viewed as either disfavor from the Lord or a withdrawal of His blessings. Opposition in all things is part of the refiner's fire to prepare us for an eternal celestial destiny.¹⁴ When the Prophet Joseph was in Liberty Jail, the words of the Lord to him described all manner of challenges—including tribulations and false accusations—and conclude:

"If the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

"The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?"¹⁵

The Lord, in this instruction to Joseph Smith, also made it clear that his days were known and would not be numbered less. The Lord concluded, "Fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever."¹⁶

What, then, are the blessings of faith? What does faith accomplish? The list is almost endless:

Our sins can be forgiven because of faith in Christ.¹⁷

As many as have faith have communion with the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Salvation comes through faith on Christ's name.¹⁹

We receive strength according to our faith in Christ.²⁰

None enter the Lord's rest save those who wash their garments in Christ's blood because of their faith.²¹

Prayers are answered according to faith.²²

Without faith among men, God can do no miracle among them.²³

In the end, our faith in Jesus Christ is the essential foundation for our eternal salvation and exaltation. As Helaman taught his sons, "Remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation ... , which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall."²⁴

I am grateful for the fortification of the foundations of faith that has come from this conference. My plea is that we will make the sacrifices and have the humility necessary to strengthen the foundations of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Of Him I bear my sure witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.