

Pillars and Rays

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We too can have our own pillar of light—one ray at a time.

My message is for those who worry about their testimony because they haven't had overwhelming spiritual experiences. I pray that I can provide some peace and assurance.

The Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ began with an explosion of light and truth! A teenage boy in upstate New York, with the very ordinary name of Joseph Smith, enters a grove of trees to pray. He's worried about his soul and his standing before God. He seeks forgiveness for his sins. And he's confused about which church to join. He needs clarity and peace—he needs light and knowledge.¹

As Joseph kneels to pray and “offer up the desires of [his] heart to God,” a thick darkness envelops him. Something evil, oppressive, and very real tries to stop him—to bind his tongue so he cannot speak. The forces of darkness get so intense that Joseph thinks he's going to die. But he “exert[s] all [his] powers to call upon God to deliver [him] out of the power of this enemy which [has] seized upon [him].” And then, “at the very moment when [he's] ready to sink into despair and abandon [him]self to destruction,” when he doesn't know if he can hang on any longer, a glorious brilliance fills the grove, scattering the darkness and the enemy of his soul.²

A “pillar of light” brighter than the sun gradually descends upon him. One personage appears, and then another.³ Their “brightness and glory defy all description.” The first, our Heavenly Father, speaks his name, “pointing to the other—[Joseph!] *This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”⁴

And with that overwhelming burst of light and truth, the Restoration has begun. A veritable flood of divine revelation and blessings will follow: new scripture, restored priesthood keys, apostles and prophets, ordinances and covenants, and the reestablishment of the Lord's true and living Church, which will someday fill the earth with the light and witness of Jesus Christ and His restored gospel.

All that, and much more, began with a boy's desperate prayer and a pillar of light.

We too have our own desperate needs. We too need freedom from spiritual confusion and worldly darkness. We too need to know for ourselves.⁵ That is one reason President Russell M. Nelson has invited us to “immerse [ourselves] in the glorious light of the Restoration.”⁶

One of the great truths of the Restoration is that the heavens are open—that we too can receive light and knowledge from on high. I testify that is true.

But we must be wary of a spiritual trap. Sometimes faithful Church members become discouraged and even drift away because they haven't had overwhelming spiritual experiences—because they haven't experienced their own pillar of light. President Spencer W. Kimball warned, “Always expecting the spectacular, many will miss entirely the constant flow of revealed communication.”⁷

President Joseph F. Smith likewise recalled, “The Lord withheld marvels from me [when I was young], and showed me the truth, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.”⁸

That is the Lord's typical pattern, brothers and sisters. Rather than sending us a pillar of light, the Lord sends us a ray of light, and then another, and another.

Those rays of light are continuously being poured down upon us. The scriptures teach that Jesus Christ “is the light and ... life of the world,”⁹ that His “Spirit giveth light to every man [and woman] that cometh into the world,”¹⁰ and that His light “fill[s] the immensity of space,” giving “life to all things.”¹¹ The Light of Christ is literally all around us.

If we have received the gift of the Holy Ghost and are striving to exercise faith, repent, and honor our covenants, then we are worthy to receive these divine rays constantly. In Elder David A. Bednar's memorable phrase, “we are ‘living in revelation.’”¹²

And yet, every one of us is different. No two people experience God's light and truth in exactly the same way. Take some time to think about how you experience the light and Spirit of the Lord.

You may have experienced these bursts of light and testimony as “peace [spoken] to your mind concerning [a] matter” that has worried you.¹³

Or as an impression—a still, small voice—that settled “in your mind and in your heart”¹⁴ and urged you to do something good, such as helping someone.

Perhaps you've been in a class at church—or at a youth camp—and felt a strong desire to follow Jesus Christ and stay faithful.¹⁵ Maybe you even stood and shared a testimony that you hoped was true and then felt it was.

Or maybe you've been praying and felt a joyful assurance that God loves you.¹⁶

You may have heard someone bear testimony of Jesus Christ, and it touched your heart and filled you with hope.¹⁷

Perhaps you were reading in the Book of Mormon and a verse spoke to your soul, as if God had put it there just for you—and then you realized that He did.¹⁸

You may have felt the love of God for others as you served them.¹⁹

Or maybe you struggle to feel the Spirit in the moment because of depression or anxiety but have the precious gift and the faith to look back and recognize past “tender mercies of the Lord.”²⁰

My point is that there are many ways to receive heavenly rays of testimony. These are just a few, of course. They may not be dramatic, but all of them form part of our testimonies.

Brothers and sisters, I have not seen a pillar of light, but, like you, I have experienced many divine rays. Over the years, I've tried to treasure such experiences. I find that as I do, I recognize and remember even more of them. Here are some examples from my own life. They may not be very impressive to some, but they are precious to me.

I remember being a rowdy teenager at a baptism. As the meeting was about to begin, I felt the Spirit urge me to sit down and be reverent. I sat down and stayed quiet the rest of the meeting.

Before my mission, I was afraid my testimony wasn't strong enough. No one in my family had ever served a mission, and I didn't know if I could do it. I remember studying and praying desperately to receive a more certain witness of Jesus Christ. Then one day, as I pled with Heavenly Father, I felt a powerful sense of light and warmth. And I knew. I just knew.

I remember being awakened one night years later by a feeling of "pure intelligence" telling me I would be called to serve in the elders quorum.²¹ Two weeks later I was called.

I remember a general conference where a beloved member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke the exact words of testimony I had told a friend I hoped to hear.

I remember kneeling with hundreds of brethren to pray for a dear friend who lay unconscious on a ventilator in a small, faraway hospital after his heart had stopped. As we united our own hearts to plead for his life, he woke up and pulled the ventilator out of his own throat. He serves today as a stake president.

And I remember waking up with strong spiritual feelings after a vivid dream of a dear friend and mentor who passed away far too early, leaving an enormous hole in my life. He was smiling and joyful. I knew he was OK.

These are some of my rays. You have had your own experiences—your own light-filled bursts of testimony. As we recognize, remember, and gather these rays "together in one,"²² something wonderful and powerful begins to happen. "Light cleaveth unto light"—"truth embraceth truth."²³ The reality and power of one ray of testimony reinforces and combines with another, and then another, and another. Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a ray and there a ray—one small, treasured spiritual moment at a time—there grows up within us a core of light-filled, spiritual experiences. Perhaps no one ray is strong enough or bright enough to constitute a full testimony, but together they can become a light that the darkness of doubt cannot overcome.

"O then, is not this real?" Alma asks. "I say unto you, Yea, because it is light."²⁴

"That which is of God is light," the Lord teaches us, "and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."²⁵

That means, brothers and sisters, that in time and through "great diligence,"²⁶ we too can have our own pillar of light—one ray at a time. And in the midst of that pillar, we too will find a loving Heavenly Father calling us by name, pointing us to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and inviting us to "Hear Him!"

I bear witness of Jesus Christ, that He is the light and life of the whole world—and of your personal world and mine.

I testify that He is the true and living Son of the true and living God and that He stands at the head of this true and living Church, guided and directed by His true and living prophets and apostles.

May we recognize and receive His glorious light and then choose Him over the darkness of the world—always and forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Joseph Smith—History 1:10–13.
2. See Joseph Smith—History 1:14–16.
3. See Joseph Smith, Journal, Nov. 9–11, 1835, 24, josephsmithpapers.org.
4. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
5. See Joseph Smith—History 1:20. When Joseph Smith returned home after the First Vision, his mother asked if he was OK. He replied, “I am well enough off. ... *I have learned for myself* that Presbyterianism is not true” (emphasis added).
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 122.
7. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Munich Germany Area Conference, 1973, 77; quoted in Graham W. Doxey, “The Voice Is Still Small,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 25.
8. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (1998), 201: “When I as a boy first started out in the ministry, I would frequently go out and ask the Lord to show me some marvelous thing, in order that I might receive a testimony. But the Lord withheld marvels from me, and showed me the truth, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, until he made me to know the truth from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, and until doubt and fear had been absolutely purged from me. He did not have to send an angel from the heavens to do this, nor did he have to speak with the trump of an archangel. By the whisperings of the still small voice of the Spirit of the living God, he gave to me the testimony I possess. And by this principle and power he will give to all the children of men a knowledge of the truth that will stay with them, and it will make them to know the truth, as God knows it, and to do the will of the Father as Christ does it.”
9. Mosiah 16:9.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 84:46; see also John 1:9.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 88:12–13.
12. David A. Bednar, *The Spirit of Revelation* (2021), 7.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 6:23.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 8:2; see also Helaman 5:30.
15. See Mosiah 5:2; Doctrine and Covenants 11:12.
16. See 2 Nephi 4:21; Helaman 5:44.

17. The Lord has identified the ability to believe on the testimony of others as a spiritual gift (see Doctrine and Covenants 46:13–14).
18. Modern revelation teaches that the words of scripture “are given by my Spirit unto you, ... and save it were by my power you could not have them; wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:35–36).
19. See Mosiah 2:17; Moroni 7:45–48.
20. 1 Nephi 1:20. Elder Gerrit W. Gong has spoken of “look[ing] with eyes to see and rejoic[ing] in the Lord’s many tender mercies in our lives” (“Ministering,” *Liahona*, May 2023, 18) and of how “the Lord’s hand in our lives is often clearest in hindsight” (“Always Remember Him,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2016, 108). The gift of gratefully recognizing and acknowledging the hand of the Lord in our lives, even if we didn’t recognize it or feel it in the moment, is powerful. The scriptures speak often of the spiritual power of remembering (see Helaman 5:9–12; Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79), which can be a precursor to revelation (see Moroni 10:3–4).
21. Joseph Smith taught, “A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 132).
22. Ephesians 1:10.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 88:40: “For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light.”
24. Alma 32:35. Alma emphasized that these light-filled experiences, although often small, are real in every sense. Their reality becomes even more powerful when they are combined together to form a powerful whole.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 50:24.
26. Alma 32:41.