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A Discussion of Lecture 7: Fruits of Faith

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Fruits of Faith

Ardeth G. Kapp

I pray earnestly that my message, with a specific focus on Lecture 7 from the Lectures on Faith, may increase understanding of the fruits of faith and point our hearts toward earnestly seeking the greatest of all the gifts of God.

An ancient writer once asked the question:

“Who is man . . . that he should take his place before thy face. . . . How can the clay and the potter sit together; or who understands thy wonderful plan of God?” And he supplies the answer: “For eternal glory he has chosen me, and for that he teaches me. . . .” the Way of Light itself is “the spirit of the understanding of all the Plan. . . . Without thee nothing came into existence—and he instructed me in all knowledge” (Nibley 33).

It is through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the plan of salvation, that the way is provided for each of us one day to sit down with the potter, the Creator, even God our Father and his Son Jesus Christ and to be one with them and to be like them, the ultimate fruit of faith.

I would like to discuss and illustrate some principles which relate to the fruits of faith as presented in the seventh lecture:

First, faith brings an eternal perspective to our mortal life;

Second, salvation is the result of faith; and

Third, perfection comes through faith.

Faith Brings an Eternal Perspective to Our Mortal Life

Faith Is the First Principle in the Science of Theology

In Lecture 7:5-6, we read:

It is only necessary for us to say that the whole visible creation as it now exists is the effect of faith. It was faith by which it was framed, and it is by the power of faith that it continues in its organized form. . . . So, then, faith is truly the first principle in the science of theology, and, when understood, it leads the mind back to the beginning, and carries it forward to the end, or, in other words, from eternity to eternity. . . . All the blessings of eternity are the effects of faith.

Expanding this concept further, we read in paragraph 20:

From this we may extend as far as any circumstances may require, whether on earth or in heaven, and we will find it the testimony of all inspired men or heavenly messengers that all things that pertain to life and godliness are the effects of faith and nothing else. All learning, wisdom, and prudence fail, and everything else as a means of salvation but faith.

Power by Which God Operates

Faith is literally the power by which God himself operates in earthly and heavenly affairs. Miracles are the fruits of faith; faith precedes the miracle. Behind each miracle is divine power, and that power is faith.

As a young girl who had just had a serious mastoid operation, I overheard the doctors explain to my parents that I would not only lose my hearing but also my equilibrium and thus the ability to walk. With my name on the prayer roll in the temple and my father's hands placed on my head, assisted by another Melchizedek Priesthood bearer, I knew that with faith in God I would be healed.

We read in the scriptures, "And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first

believed in the Son of God” (Ether 12:18). Truly, as the Lord Jesus said: “All things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23). “For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith” (Ether 12:12).

Faith is a principle, a key of power, that opens the door to our progress. The abundance of life and salvation can come to us only through our faith. It is the source of our feeling of well-being, of courage, and of peace both in this life and in the world to come. If we begin with Adam and look through the history of the generations of this earth, we see his descendants (ourselves included) receiving blessings and privileges according to the degree of faith that they possess. We read in Lecture 7:17, “Every man [has] received according to his faith: according as his faith was, so were his blessings and privileges. And nothing was withheld from him when his faith was sufficient to receive it.”

By the Power of Faith the Heavens Are Opened

The restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ began with the faith of one young boy. He had studied the scriptures. He had implicit trust in the words of God: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. . . . But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:5-6). Of that scripture he recorded, “Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine” (JS-H 1:12). One beautiful spring morning in a grove of trees near his home, Joseph Smith knelt in prayer. He prayed vocally for the first time in his life and asked God a specific question. His prayer of faith unlocked the heavens. By the power of faith, the Father and his Son Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith, called him by name, and instructed him. That same invitation to ask God in faith is extended to each of us today; and because of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we know of the nature of God, the love of God, the reality of God and the great plan of salvation provided for us, his children, to return and once again dwell with him.

Some time ago, I was asked to speak to a group of young women on an early morning in the high Uinta mountains. At the conclusion of my remarks, I reminded them that the Prophet Joseph Smith went into a grove of trees and prayed in faith. I made the following suggestion:

“Each one of you, sometime before returning home, find a quiet spot in nature where you can experience reverence for life all around you, and talk with your Father in heaven and share with him the things that are in your heart. He is always there, and he will hear you.” . . . Two weeks later, in a fast and testimony meeting, [in her own ward,] Becky [the assistant youth camp director] stood [to bear] her testimony. . . . “Something about the feelings I had that special morning made me want to be alone for a while. [So I] found a private spot where there was a little opening in the trees. When I knelt down on the ground, thick with pine needles, I didn’t know for sure what to say, so I closed my eyes and said, ‘Heavenly Father, do you know I am here?’ I waited and waited, and I could hear the wind in the trees. Then I opened my eyes and saw the sun coming through the leaves, and I felt all warm inside.” She paused a moment and then, in a reverent whisper, added, “You may not think it was anything, but I know he knew I was there” (Kapp, *Miracles* 39-40).

Becky, like the Prophet, had faith in God. She felt her request was appropriate. She had simply asked, “Do you know I’m here?” and she received an immediate answer. When she left the mountains, she was never the same again. She knew more about God than she had ever known before. She could better understand the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, that God did hear and answer his prayer.

Do we know he knows we are here? Have we asked? From Becky’s communication with God and by the power of faith, she learned for herself that God is real. He cares about us, his children. He hears our prayers. He answers with a message to our spirit that speaks louder than words. While others may not be impressed or believe, we can *know* he knows we are here by the power of our faith. And with that assurance, we have the first requirement necessary to develop the faith that leads to salvation—we know for ourselves that God lives.

Our Need for Greater Faith

We live in a time when people's hearts are failing them and they need greater faith in God and a deeper understanding of his eternal purposes. The burdens of life can be lifted through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but without faith people are unsettled, unsure, and unsaved. Skepticism, cynicism, and doubt run rampant as the world ripens in iniquity and would, if possible, destroy faith and its fruits like hoards of black crickets devouring tender shoots. In the absence of faith, the darkest clouds of fear and depression close in and put out the light.

These are no ordinary times. President Ezra Taft Benson, speaking recently to the youth of the Church, stated, "While our generation will be comparable in wickedness to the days of Noah, when the Lord cleansed the earth by flood, there is a major difference this time: God has saved for the final inning some of His stronger and most valiant children, who will help bear off the kingdom triumphantly. . . . You are the generation that must be prepared to meet your God" (Benson 73).

Our young Latter-day Saints are showing evidence of the quality of faith that will carry them through difficult times and prepare them to meet their God. Rosanna, a young girl from Anchorage, Alaska, one of many thousands of young women of the Church who wrote a message tied to a balloon and set it aloft on 11 October 1986, shared her testimony:

I am 15 years old and a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I know that God lives and loves us. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. I love them with all my heart. If I could wish for anything for the world, I would wish that everyone had a sure knowledge that God lives and that he hears and answers prayers. I'm thankful for the answers I've received to my prayers. You too can receive answers to your prayers. All you have to do is ask. No matter who you are or what you have done, God will listen (*The Rising Generation* 44).

With faith in God and a knowledge that he listens to the prayers of his children, this young woman, with hundreds of others, is bearing strong testimony. Their faith will keep them on

course as they walk the straight and narrow path leading to salvation.

Salvation Is the Result of Faith

Lecture 7:17, reads:

Salvation is the effect of faith. . . . All the heavenly beings work by this principle; and it is because they are able so to do that they are saved, for nothing but this could save them. And this is the lesson which the God of heaven has been endeavoring to teach to the world by the mouth of all his holy prophets. Hence we are told that “without faith it is impossible to please him [God]” (Heb 11:6), and that salvation “is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed” (Rom 4:16).

The understanding of grace is essential to our faith as we face our own limitations and weaknesses. The Bible Dictionary of the LDS edition of the scriptures explains grace as “an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts” (BD 697).

Again from the seventh lecture we read that the plan of salvation is offered to every child of God and is referred to as a “system of faith” that “begins with faith . . . continues by faith, and every blessing which is obtained in relation to it is the effect of faith, whether it pertains to this life or that which is to come” (LF 7:17).

What is the relationship between faith and salvation? The answer is found in the teachings of the Savior. Lecture 7:16 explains what Jesus proposed to the human family when he provided a means to save them. “He proposed to make them like unto himself, and he was like the Father, the great prototype of all saved beings. For any portion of the human family to be assimilated into their likeness is to be saved, and to be unlike them is to be destroyed. On this hinge turns the door of salvation.”

Our diligent effort to plant the seed of faith and nourish it daily is the most significant thing we can pursue in this life. It gives us life. It is the very breath of life. It is the purpose of life.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie states, “We are on a course that calls for us to pursue faith, and we have to pursue it until that faith is perfected in us, meaning until we have the degree and quality and kind of power that God our Father possesses” (“Lord, Increase Our Faith” 6).

The Gradual Nature of Attaining Salvation

The plan of salvation revealed in these latter days includes all that is needed for us to return to our Father in Heaven and live with him once again, but it unfolds gradually to each of us according to our diligence and faith in following the plan. Faith and salvation are linked together. As mortals we are in the process of ultimately gaining salvation. Faith possesses qualities that move us forward toward that ultimate goal. Wendell O. Rich writes:

Faith is active. . . . [It] “will impel to action.” . . . Faith is specific. . . . [It] is vested in, and has force and power as it relates to particular individuals, teachings, principles, and relationships. Faith is individual. . . . As a principle of growth and action it must be won, with the help and power of God, by each within himself. . . . Faith is spiritual insight. [It is] “the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1) . . . Faith is assurance. It is a feeling of inner certainty. . . . From such a feeling of assurance the ancient psalmist exclaimed, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid.” (Psalms 27:1) Faith is creative. . . . [It] moves men to solve problems, to find solutions, to ask questions believing that there are answers to be found. . . . Faith is divine companionship. He who has faith in a Divine Father is never alone. Faith in God carries with it the promise of divine companionship (70-73; emphasis in original).

Fruits of Faith Bring Power to Endure Trials

It is the remarkable reality of the promise of this divine companionship that fills our souls in peaceful and troubled times and assures us we are never alone. We have covenanted with God and he with us. When we went into the waters of baptism and covenanted to keep his commandments, he also covenanted with

us that he would never desert us, never leave us, but that we could always have his Spirit to be with us. It is faith in this companionship with the Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to his commandments that allow us to endure all of the vicissitudes of this mortal sojourn so necessary for our spiritual growth.

We see the great power of faith in the lives of our brothers and sisters in various degrees and in various circumstances. This unseen but very real force often appears more evident during times of trial and testing. President Pablo Choc of the Patzicia Branch of the Guatemala, Guatemala City Mission was one whose faith was tried. While attending “a Mormon funeral for a 15-year-old boy, [he] was impressed by the spirit at the meeting. . . . [He] asked the missionaries to stay and teach him” when the service had ended. He was baptized and in time he served as branch president twice (7 years) over a period of sixteen years.

But . . . his service to his fellowman was never greater than during the 1976 Guatemalan earthquake. At the same time the fearsome earthquake was knocking the supporting beam on top of Elder Randall Ellsworth while the young missionary was sleeping in the Patzicia Branch cultural hall, it was tumbling the walls of Pres. Choc’s home, killing his wife, a young son and daughter. After he had seen to the needs of his family, and taken care of the bodies of his wife and two children, Pres. Choc immediately went to the branch chapel to check on the damage there. At the building he assisted in freeing Elder Ellsworth and helped transport the missionary to Guatemala City for medical aid, knowing all the while that his beloved wife and children lay dead back in Patzicia.

[Later, President Choc shared his feelings.] “I am of course saddened by the death of my wife and children, . . . and I will miss her in helping to raise our six remaining children. We were married very young, and in all those years of marriage we never had a real problem. Then in the three weeks after her death I did a lot of praying to the Lord, more than I had ever done before, and I found a lot of strength in my prayers and felt myself getting closer to the Lord. . . . Because of this I don’t think my faith ever weakened or wavered for a moment.”

During this time the Choc’s eldest son, Daniel, had been called on a mission and had been teaching the American missionaries the Mayan dialect so proselyting could be stepped up in the mission district. As a result of the earthquake, the missionaries had been assigned to assist in the cleanup work with the members of the Church in their area. Elder Choc was cleaning up the inside

of a home as an aftershock occurred. His companion and two other missionaries scrambled to safety, but Elder Choc was trapped by a falling wall and killed. As Pres. Choc talked about the deaths in his family, tears began to well in his eyes and slowly slide down his dirt-stained face.

“I was sad, very sad when Daniel was killed, but in a way I am very happy. There are so many of my Mayan people on the other side that Daniel, his mother and the other two children are spending their time teaching them the Gospel message in their native language, and they are spending their time serving the Lord. . . . This is really the Lord’s work” (Livingood 5).

It is only with faith in God that we are able to face the events of this life.

We often face the daily basic routine happenings, hardly recognizing the vital moving force that accompanies our comings and goings. However, like the ebb and flow of the waters on the shoreline, there come occasions of high tide when the power of faith is activated in ways that we recognize as miraculous, and they become the very fruits of faith. They bear evidence of the realities of God and our relationship to him. It is then that we can draw deeply from a reservoir of faith gradually accumulated over years of learning and living the gospel and coming to know the Savior. With unwavering faith in God and the righteous desire of our hearts, we can call upon the Lord and actually witness his hand in our own personal lives. I know this to be true.

President Harold B. Lee, speaking to seminary leaders at Brigham Young University, said:

Yes, the Savior, too, is in our midst. His eyes are upon us, but we can’t always see him. But the day can come when we could see him. It isn’t the Lord who withholds himself from us; it is we who withhold ourselves from him. And if we were living completely worthy, we could see him and have a personal visitation and we would have the assurance, even though we couldn’t see him, that he was there, walking, talking, listening, aiding, directing. Make no mistake—this is his work (Goates 319-20).

We would expect to see such faith among the prophets. But we also see it in the lives of all of his children who truly believe.

I recently received a letter from a thirteen-year-old Beehive class president. This young girl, called of God and set apart by the authority of his holy priesthood, wrote the following:

This past month has been a real trial for me. Dealing with my grandfather's death, then my mother is in the hospital, and then my grandma died. All within a month's time.

I now realize the power and influence that I have with the Beehive girls, and the difference I can make in their lives. I love this gospel, and I will strive to live the commandments of God all my life.

I know that I'm a daughter of a Heavenly Father who loves me, and I love him. I will stand as a witness of God at all times, in all things, and in all places. . . . I will be prepared to make and keep sacred covenants, receive the ordinances of the temple, and enjoy the blessings of exaltation! I hope that I can always be an example to others that they might be touched by my strong testimony of the gospel.

I hope that I can find the lost sheep of the Lord's flock. I *will* stand for truth and righteousness. I *will* hold my torch high for everyone to see that I love the Lord and his gospel.

How plentiful the fruits of faith can be, even in one so young.

Knowledge of God as One of the Fruits of Faith

In the process of gradually growing in faith, we gain a sure knowledge of God. It is in coming to know God in the full and true sense of the word that we gain all things pertaining to life and godliness. And so we each ask the question posed in Lecture 7:18:

How were they to obtain the knowledge of God? (For there is a great difference between believing in God and knowing him—knowledge implies more than faith. And notice that all things that pertain to life and godliness were given through the knowledge of God.) The answer is that through faith they were to obtain this knowledge; and, having power by faith to obtain the knowledge of God, they could with it obtain all other things which pertain to life and godliness.

This experience of gradually growing in faith should never be viewed as a casual half-hearted endeavor. President Lee gave specific advice. He said: “ ‘Learning by faith is no task for a lazy

man. Someone has said, in effect, that such a process requires the bending of the whole soul [through worthy living]—the calling up from the depths of the human mind and linking them with God. It makes those who follow this course great in the sight of the Lord' ” (Goates 539).

It is a great comfort to know firsthand that we can walk by faith on a daily basis. We should never get discouraged by thinking that it requires a mighty leap of faith before God will respond to our earnest supplication. The prophet Alma speaks words of hope and encouragement as he counsels, “But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words” (Alma 32:27).

Then comes the glory and absolute promise—

And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you (Alma 32:42-43).

Praying and Pondering

The example of Enos provides a guide for each of us as we seek diligently. First, he remembered what he had been taught; then he went before God with a specific desire. The words of his father regarding eternal life sank into his heart. His soul hungered. He cried out in mighty prayer. He was answered by the voice of the Lord and received a remission of his sins. He asked how it was done and was told that it came because of faith in Christ. His faith in the Lord became unshaken. He continued to pray, now in behalf of his brethren. The Lord said, “I will grant unto thee according to thy desires, because of thy faith. . . .

Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it” (Enos 1:12, 15).

Enos followed these steps, and we read his final testimony:

And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father (Enos 1:27).

The fruit then comes as a witness after our diligence, our faith, our patience, and maybe more important, “after the trial of [our] faith” (Ether 12:6).

After praying and pondering, we become attuned to promptings which help us discern truth from error and bring thoughts to our minds. Promptings come as surely as we live from day to day; to this I testify. We can hear the words and thoughts as they are formulated in our minds. We can learn to recognize promptings when they come. They are usually fleeting and faint, never imposed.

President Lee repeated instruction given by President David O. McKay concerning the promptings and impressions of the Spirit. He reported,

The President made the statement that . . . when we are relaxed in a private room we are more susceptible to those things [spiritual promptings]; and that so far as he was concerned, his best thoughts come after he gets up in the morning and is relaxed and thinking about the duties of the day; that impressions come more clearly, as if it were to hear a voice. Those impressions are right. If we are worried about something and upset in our feelings, the inspiration does not come. If we so live that our minds are free from worry and our conscience is clear and our feelings are right toward one another, the operation of the Spirit of the Lord upon our spirit is as real as when we pick up the telephone; but when they come, we must be brave enough to take the suggested actions (Lee 15-16).

I have always known the power of faith and prayer. But since my call as Young Women General President, I know it more surely than I have known before, perhaps because I have sought more diligently, more earnestly, more fervently. My prayers have

been more specific. There are occasions after inquiring of the Lord in prayer concerning important matters that words and thoughts have filled my mind. I take a pencil and pad and attempt to record all the insights and impressions as quickly as I can. Many times those very thoughts and words have been significant to my assignment. As we, our Father's children, have these undeniable experiences, is it any wonder we find ourselves striving, yearning, reaching to feel the operation of the Spirit of the Lord upon our spirit regularly and, if possible, constantly?

How do we develop faith? Faith requires effort and every individual can qualify to receive this gift. The process is simple and clear but requires diligence. It involves study, prayer, and obedience to the commandments.

First, we study. In the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord instructs: "And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (v 118).

Second, we pray. The promise of the Lord is that "the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith" (D&C 42:14). The Spirit enlightens our minds and teaches gospel truth. It witnesses the truth to us and carries it into our hearts.

Third, we strive to keep the commandments. The Savior gives us this glorious promise and insight in the Doctrine and Covenants: "I give unto you these sayings . . . that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For *if you keep my commandments*, you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace" (93:19-20; emphasis added).

Spiritual Confidence

As we strive to increase our faith in God and gain knowledge through our own experience, often the hardest thing to do is to believe in our own worthiness, our personal righteousness.

Is there a soul alive who has not had an occasion to cry out and plead with God at some time, with a burning desire to increase in personal righteousness, to reach and stretch far enough to connect? We yearn to know not only how to call upon the Lord in faith, but desire to do everything possible to activate the power of faith. Often, after extended periods of fasting and prayer, have we not asked, “But, Father, what more can I do? What should I understand about working by faith?” At those very times when we may feel least worthy and least comfortable in calling upon the Lord in faith, when we have a keener sense of our imperfections, when the flesh is weak and our spirit suffers disappointments knowing the frailties of our lives are shouting at us, in those moments our faith may waiver. It is then that we must trust in the Lord completely to compensate for our weaknesses after we have expended our own best efforts.

Our Savior, in his great understanding and love for each of us, has promised, “I will not leave you comfortless” (John 14:18). Through the process of cleansing our souls, when we have become meek and lowly of heart, then “cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope” (Moroni 8:26). Christ invited “all to come unto Him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him” (2 Nephi 26:33). With this hope, and being in tune with the Holy Spirit, we can be guided each day of our lives. As our ability increases, our capacity and desire increase, and we grow “grace for grace” (see D&C 93:20).

To increase in righteousness and in confidence before the Lord, Elder Bruce R. McConkie counseled:

Treasure up the words of light and truth. Hear the gospel taught by legal administrators. Study the revelations and believe what they say. Actually believe the recorded word from God and his prophets, with the result that the hearing of the word is taken into your soul. Then build on that foundation by righteousness and devotion and seeking the Lord, by compliance with his law—and the inevitable result will be to grow in faith (“Lord, Increase Our Faith” 10).

As we face each day and seriously consider those things that are worthy of our attention, we learn to exercise our faith every day. These matters of concern calling for increased faith might include such things as a desire to strengthen our faith, strengthen family relationships, increase understanding and sensitivity to the gift of the Holy Ghost, increase physical health, study the scriptures, magnify Church callings, continue in education, or increase employment skills. Through prayer and the promptings of the Spirit, we can develop our own personalized list according to our individual needs.

In the same talk, Elder McConkie counseled further:

Don't go out and try to move mountains, but go out and start in a small degree to do the thing you need to do in your life to get what you ought to have temporally and spiritually. . . . Work on the projects ahead, and when you have taken one step in the acquiring of faith, it will give you the assurance in your soul that you can go forward and take the next step, and by degrees your power or influence will increase until eventually, in this world or in the next, you will say to the Mt. Zerin's in your life, "Be thou removed." You will say to whatever encumbers your course of eternal progress, "Depart," and it will be so (11).

Perfection Comes Through Faith

Mental Exertion

Let us consider those things that may not move a mountain right away but will move us forward toward a more complete faith. Again we must ask, "What should I understand about working by faith?" To that searching supplication, we find this answer in Lecture 7:3:

We understand that when a man works by faith he works by mental exertion instead of physical force. It is by words, instead of by exerting his physical powers, with which every being works when he works by faith. God said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen 1:3). Joshua spake and the great lights which God had created stood still (Joshua 10:12-13). Elijah commanded and the heavens were stayed for the space of three years and six months, so that it did not rain; he again commanded and the heavens gave forth rain (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 41-45). All this was done by faith.

And the Savior says: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove . . . and it shall remove (Matt 17:20); or “say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up . . . and . . . planted in the sea; and it should obey you” (Luke 17:6). Faith, then, works by words; and with these its mightiest works have been and will be performed.

Prayer (thoughts and words) represents mental exertion. We need to learn to access power by pleading our cause in words that are specific to our needs.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie encouraged us to learn how to pray “boldly and efficaciously, not in word only but in spirit and in power, so that we may pull down upon ourselves . . . the very powers of heaven” (“Why the Lord Ordained Prayer” 9).

There are times when we may even feel at a loss to know for what we should pray. On those occasions, we read from the scriptures, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26).

Pondering and meditating are additional ways of learning through mental exertion. We first have the desire, then we seek and draw upon our personal experiences. We search for additional enlightenment and edification in an effort to expand our understanding. We study the principles of the gospel and consider how they might be related to the question at hand. Our Father in Heaven has promised that when we seek diligently, ask, and knock, “it shall be opened unto [us]” (D&C 88:63).

Thought allows us to create, to envision, to experience something in our mind. When we see clearly and become specific about what it is we are seeking and feel it is a righteous desire and according to the will of God, we can focus our thinking with a concentration of power so that we can bring our faith, the energy of our mental processes, to bear upon the thing for which we are praying. Through prayer we can then call upon the powers of heaven, the enabling power that allows us to exercise our faith. It is why we are counseled in the Doctrine and Covenants that our “eye be single to [his] glory” and that our “minds become

single to God” (D&C 88:67-68). In a very literal sense, we see in our mind as with an “eye of faith” (Ether 12:19).

As we learn to control our mind and our thoughts through mental exertion and set aside all doubts and fears and ask in faith, we can experience personal revelation through direct communication with God.

I am impressed by the words of Orson Pratt. On this subject he writes, “If a person trains his mind to walk in the spirit, and brings his whole mind to bear upon its operations, and upon the principles of faith which are calculated to put him in possession of the power of God, how much greater will be his faculties for obtaining knowledge” (*Journal of Discourses* 7:155-56).

I remember one time as a young girl worrying about the importance of gaining knowledge. In anguish I asked my father, “If the glory of God is intelligence and you are not smart, what will happen to you?” And my very wise and learned father, who never graduated from high school but was self-taught and intelligent through diligent *study* and great *faith*, eased my concern as he explained, “My dear child, if you are diligent in your studies and do your very best and are obedient to God’s commandments, one day, when you enter the holy temple, the university of the Lord, you will be prepared in your mind and spirit to learn and know all you need to know to return to your Father in Heaven.” It was faith in that promise that seemed to unlock my mind. Study and faith were then put to work together. And I emphasize the relationship of work to both study and faith—plodding toil, whole-souled devotion, mental exertion. Over time, the realization of the Lord’s promise came: “Seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (D&C 88:63).

Being One with Christ

Let us anticipate the consequence of this gradual unfolding of faith that takes us over mountain peaks and into valleys, allowing us to be tried and tested in all things. And after the trial

of our faith, what can we expect? Salvation is the greatest gift of all the gifts of God, the most glorious of all the fruits of faith. And this is what we can expect. This is a promise if we choose to qualify. In describing saved beings, Lecture 7:9 states:

They must be persons who can work by faith and who are able, by faith, to be ministering spirits to them who shall be heirs of salvation. They must have faith to enable them to act in the presence of the Lord; otherwise, they cannot be saved. And what constitutes the real difference between a saved person and one not saved is the difference in the degree of their faith. One's faith has become perfect enough to lay hold upon eternal life, and the other's has not.

Paragraph 8 of that lecture states:

When men begin to live by faith, they begin to draw near to God; and when their faith is perfected, they are like him. And because he is saved they are saved also; for they will be in the same situation he is in, because they have come to him. And "when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Elder McConkie taught:

To be saved is to be like Christ, inheriting, receiving, and possessing as he does. To gain salvation is to grow in faith until we have the faith of Christ and thus are like him. Our nearness to him and to salvation is measured by the degree of our faith. To gain faith is to attain the power of Christ, which is God's power. To believe in Christ in the full and true sense is to "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16), that is, to believe what he believes, think what he thinks, say what he says, and do what he does. It is to be one with him by the power of the Holy Ghost (*New Witness* 206-07).

Lest we become discouraged, it is important to understand and remember the process by which we grow spiritually. It is not intended that we reach perfection in this life. On one occasion Joseph Smith made the following declaration:

When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond

the grave (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith 348; emphasis in original).

So many scriptures make reference to the Savior's statement that he came to fulfil his Father's will. Our purpose is to make our will the same as his will, even as expressed by Mary, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

As we feast upon the words of Christ through earnest study to know his will, then humble ourselves and learn to bend our will as well as our knees, our faith increases, becoming stronger and stronger. We have an ever-increasing desire to know his will and to carry it out, and we become able and anxious to follow the pattern set by the Nephites as recorded in the book of Helaman: "Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God" (3:35).

As we learn to yield our hearts to God in all things, we can experience the glorious promise given by our Savior as he comforted his disciples just prior to his crucifixion: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

As we continually strive to make our will the same as that of our Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, we will gradually begin to think as they think, speak as they speak, do as they do. Through faith our hearts will not be troubled, and we will be free of fear.

To the reality of this principle and power of faith leading us to salvation, I bear my personal witness. I watched a man of great faith experience the precious fruits of quiet submission, peace, and spiritual confidence as he faced the final stages of his mortal probation.

Not many years ago, my father, who then lived with us, was diagnosed as having cancer. Following his surgery, he came home from the hospital weak in body but undaunted in spirit.

Over the next many weeks I saw his body steadily weaken. It was as though his spirit was magnified by his increased faith as his body steadily wasted away. Sometimes I would wait outside his bedroom door while he was on his knees for what often seemed a very long time and pondered the two-way communication I knew was taking place. His meals consisted of a spoonful of baby food—all he could manage. But he expressed thanks for it and gratitude for the lessons of each day.

He taught us continually as he prepared himself for what he referred to as his graduation. At his last fast and testimony meeting, he spoke only briefly, quoting Mosiah concerning the need to yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit and to become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19).

A few days later Dad stayed in bed, sleeping off and on during the day.

I had decided to sit with him. It seemed his eyes were open, yet he wasn't seeing me. I took his hand in mine, a hand that had spanked me and blessed me and caressed me throughout my life. “Dad,” I whispered. He didn't respond. “If you know I'm here, please squeeze my hand.” I wasn't sure if there was a squeeze, but it didn't seem like it. I bent over and put my cheek next to his very bony cheek, with my hand on the other side of his face. I waited just a second, then straightened up. It was as though his gaze returned from a long way [off]. He looked at me just a moment, and in his eyes I saw complete peace. Joy, trust, confidence, and anticipation all mingled together in that look. A tear escaped from the corner of his eye. I pressed my cheek to his again. There are things we cannot find words or even sounds to express, but in that moment we spoke spirit to spirit, [and I knew he knew God was near].

Shortly after, . . . [my] father's eternal spirit left his mortal body. [We as a] family gathered together. I [had seen] what had taken place, but what I felt was more real than what I saw. Dad was not there in the body, but he was there with us extending his great

strength that had sustained us over the years. We knelt by his bed to give thanks. With tears of gratitude binding us together as a family, we knew that, because of what we had experienced but could not explain, we understood and felt that peace of which he had so often spoke [—that peace that passeth all understanding] (Kapp, *Echoes* 111-12).

Many times after this experience, I returned to my father's room to remember and to try to recapture the tangible warmth of the Spirit that had been there to comfort and reassure us of the reality of the plan and ultimately the promise of salvation, the greatest of all the fruits of faith.

Brothers and sisters, the plan of salvation gives meaning and direction, vision and hope. It is with faith in God that we begin and end this mortal life. God is our Father. We are his children and to become like him is our eternal quest, our destiny. While this striving for perfection will continue on after this life, we can witness evidence of the great saving power of faith and its fruits all along the journey. Of these eternal truths, I bear my personal witness.

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