

“To Believe on Their Words”

RICHARD D. OSGUTHORPE

It is a privilege and an honor to be speaking to all of you gathered here today. I love the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I count it a great blessing “to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life”¹ at this remarkable university. The seeds of my affection for this university were planted deep inside my heart as a young boy. My dad was a professor on this campus, and I quickly developed a passion for BYU sports. There are certainly those who are equally “loyal, strong, and true,” but there is no one who is more ready to “rise and shout . . . and cheer our Cougars of BYU”² than I am.

As evidence, when I was eight years old, while playing in the street with my friends, I slipped and hit my head on the asphalt, which resulted in a large gash on my forehead that required dozens of stitches to close. After a couple of days, my mom removed the bandage, and I could tell from the expression on her face that it was an unpleasant sight. But as I looked at the stitched-up wound in the mirror, all I could do was smile. The cuts in my skin—and the soon-to-be resulting scar—were in the shape of the letter Y! My mom wanted to

regularly apply ointment to help decrease the visibility of the scar, but I could not have been more pleased with the good fortune of my fall. A Y on my forehead for the rest of my mortal life—a literal godsend! Some people say they bleed Cougar blue, but I have the scar to prove it.

Another strong manifestation of my intense enthusiasm for BYU athletics in my youth was my desire to listen to games on the radio when I could not view them in person or on television. I would tune in to the play-by-play announcers and visualize every exciting moment on the football field or basketball court, engraving the most important moments in my mind forever.

For example, when I was eight, our star player, Danny Ainge, took the inbounds pass with eight seconds left against Notre Dame, drove the length of the court, weaving through every defender, and scored the winning basket to send our team to the Elite Eight in the NCAA tournament. Over the ensuing days, I replayed that moment in my mind countless times and reenacted it again and again on my home court.

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Weeks later though, I finally saw the miraculous winning basket on a television replay, and I could not make sense of what I was seeing. The basketball court looked different than the one in my mind's eye. The light in the arena was too dim. The uniforms were a different color. The play started out on the wrong side. The ball switched hands too many times on the dribble drive. The winning layup didn't go off the backboard, and the shot didn't go in just as time expired. Finally, the team didn't put our star player on their shoulders and carry him off the court—he just ran off on his own. The image I had created in my mind from the words of the radio announcers was slightly off. The dramatic ending, the miraculous athletic feat, the singular determination of our players, and the ultimate outcome of the game were exactly the same. But I had envisioned that moment a little differently in my eight-year-old mind, and it was a bit disorienting to see the play on television for the first time.

Fortunately, my abridged and filtered understanding of the radio announcers' words did not dissuade me from continuing to tune in to future radio broadcasts of BYU games. And I certainly never questioned the accuracy of the broadcasts, even if I could not see the events in person or on television. I simply listened to and trusted the verbal accounts, even when I knew my mind's eye might be off a little bit. Moreover, I got better at creating images of those important moments based on the actual words of the announcers.

My message today is that there is great value and importance in developing the spiritual gift of believing on the words of others. In the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. . . .

*To others it is given **to believe on their words.***
[Doctrine and Covenants 46:13–14; emphasis added]

Throughout most of my life, I have misinterpreted this description of spiritual gifts to mean that those with the strongest testimonies simply know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God without any reliance on the witness or words of others

and that somehow believing on the words of others is a sign of a weak and fragile testimony. I think my misinterpretation stems from a misunderstanding of Elder Heber C. Kimball's cautionary warning that "the time will come when no man nor woman will be able to endure on *borrowed light.*"³

I certainly agree that we cannot live on borrowed light alone. However, I do not think Elder Kimball was suggesting that borrowed light is inconsequential. Instead, I think he was simply declaring that borrowed light can expire. I believe there is great spiritual strength in borrowed light because of two powerful properties.

First, no one ever asks us to return borrowed light. Borrowing light is not like borrowing money or even like borrowing your neighbor's lawn mower—items that we are contractually obligated to return by signed document or social agreement. Borrowed light might have an expiration, but it doesn't have a return date.

Second, and connected to this first property, we can make borrowed light our own. Spiritual light is not loaned; it is freely given. Thus, when we borrow light, we can use it to ignite our own testimonies. That spark is the spiritual gift of believing on the words of others. Their words of testimony—the borrowed light—become our own faith-filled witness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ as those words are received through the power of the Holy Ghost in our hearts and minds.

In these two ways, "to believe on their words" is like borrowing a flame to light a spiritual fire. There is no need to return the flame; no one comes asking for it. We just need to continue to fuel the fire. And those words can become pure revelation that we call our own.⁴

President Russell M. Nelson has pleaded with us and urged us to increase our capacity to receive personal revelation, "a witness borne to [our] heart and mind about what is true." He has proclaimed:

*You don't have to wonder about what is true. You do not have to wonder whom you can safely trust. Through personal revelation, you can receive your own witness. . . . Regardless of what others may say or do, no one can ever take away a witness borne to your heart and mind about what is true.*⁵

Throughout my life, some of my most sacred revelatory experiences have come through believing on the words of others—on the words of those who know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The answers to my most sincere questions have come from God through the ministering of the Holy Ghost in ways that spoke revealed truth clearly and directly to both my mind and my heart. Today I would like to share three experiences of believing on the words of others that have served to strengthen the foundation of my faith. In turn, I will describe how each revelatory moment has provided a witness of Jesus Christ and His divine mission—specifically, how He is the light of the world, the healer of the afflicted, and the lover of our souls.

Jesus Christ Is the Light of the World

More than thirty years ago, as a young missionary in Canada, I experienced a time of great personal confusion. I had been in the field for about three months, and I felt all alone—no one knew who I was, and sadly I began to wonder if I knew who I was. I found myself on a path of doubt and discouragement, and I was holding onto mere threads of a testimony.

One Sunday evening as I washed the dishes and pondered my predicament, I thought about what it would be like to have to go home early from my mission and explain how I no longer thought I had a testimony of the gospel.

In that moment of deep despair, I suddenly heard my mother’s voice in my head. She was singing a song that she had sung a few times while sitting at the piano during the summer prior to my departure. I had never sung this song myself, I had never learned the words, and I had not heard the song in months, but the words and music were ringing distinctly and beautifully in my mind:

*When your world is filled with darkness, doubt, or fear,
Just hold on, hold on,
The light will come.⁶*

While I stood there at the kitchen sink, tears welled up in my eyes as I “listened” to my mom singing. I pictured her at the piano, and for that

small moment, my whole body was filled with light, and there was no darkness in me (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:67). I don’t know if my mom was actually at the piano on that Sunday evening, but the image in my mind’s eye was clear, and I could certainly hear her voice testifying of the Savior’s light, promising me that I only needed to “look unto [Him] in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:36).

At the kitchen sink that evening, the light came as I believed on the words of my mother. Like the stripling sons of Helaman, I had been taught by my mother that if I did not doubt, God would deliver me. And because of this witness as a missionary, I do not doubt my mother knew it. As we read in the Book of Mormon:

They had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them.

*And they rehearsed unto me **the words of their mothers**, saying: We do not doubt our mothers knew it. [Alma 56:47–48; emphasis added]*

The heavens brought peace to my mind and comfort to my soul through the angelic ministering of my mother. From that point on I began to experience the joy that comes from full-time missionary work, and I was able to rebuild the foundation of a testimony that continues to grow to this day. I believed on the words of my mother, and the witness I received is that Jesus Christ is the light of the world.

Jesus Christ Is the Healer of the Afflicted

The second experience occurred nearly twenty years ago. My wife, Gwen, and I, along with our daughters, Olivia and Lola, found ourselves in the Rapid City, South Dakota, mission home, celebrating Christmas with all my family. It was a joyous occasion, as we had not been together in quite some time. But Gwen and I were also secretly suffering on the inside. We were nearing the end of our time in graduate school, and we were not sure I was going to successfully complete my degree. We had no serious prospects for the desirable job offers we had expected to receive, and we worried that we had made an error in deciding to pursue

such a career path. We were also very concerned with Gwen’s inability to bounce back from the deep emotional struggle she had encountered after giving birth a few months previous. Most distressing to us was the health of our new baby, and we were overcome with anxiety regarding the lack of an accurate diagnosis for our sweet little Lola after countless tests and procedures—tests and procedures that would lead a year later to a diagnosis of a rare chromosomal anomaly.

By the time Christmas Eve rolled around, both Gwen and I were close to falling apart. We had spent sleepless nights caring for our children, and the stress of the trip had taken its toll. We were still smiling on the outside, but we both felt empty on the inside.

Following a longtime family tradition, we began our Christmas Eve with a special dinner, and then we went caroling to the mission home neighbors. Afterward we gathered in the living room to reenact the Nativity and read scriptures. I was seated in a chair, and Gwen was nestled into the adjacent couch. Admittedly my focus had drifted from the family purpose of the evening, and I was somewhat distracted with our plight as we made our way through our traditional stories and scriptural passages.

For the finale, we turned to 3 Nephi 17. To be honest, I had never quite understood why we read this chapter every Christmas Eve. When I was a child, my grandmother, Lola Sedgwick, had insisted that we read it. She never gave a reason for reading it, and I couldn’t figure out why it was so important to her at Christmastime, as it did not seem to have anything to do with Christ’s birth.

However, that evening this scriptural account took on new meaning for me, and it became clear to me that my *grandmother* Lola had insisted we read it every Christmas Eve so that years later it would serve as a balm to calm my concern for my *daughter* Lola. As we began to read those scriptural words of Mormon aloud, I could hear my grandmother’s voice in the Savior’s invitation to bring our Lola hither to be healed:

And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you.

Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy. . . .

And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him. [3 Nephi 17:6–7, 9]

Listening to those sacred verses immediately drew me into the embrace of the Savior’s love, and I was promptly overcome with a profound sense that our Heavenly Father was keenly aware of me and my family. Those words, voiced in my mind by my Grandmother Lola, came from the same source that had prompted us to name our daughter Lola after her. As I looked over at Gwen next to me, it was obvious that she had been spiritually touched in the same way. Our trials were not immediately removed. In fact, the nature of those tribulations remained in full. But we were both healed that evening, and we, like the Nephites of old, cried tears of joy (see 3 Nephi 17:10).

The witness that I received that evening came from my grandmother and her heavenly recitation of holy scripture. Similar to those who tarried with the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus without recognizing Him, I did not fully appreciate the presence of the living Christ in that moment until I discussed the experience later with Gwen. But our reaction was not unlike the reactions of those who sat at meat with Christ before He vanished out of their sight, leaving them to say, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32).

The heavens brought peace to my mind and comfort to my soul through the angelic ministering of my grandmother. I believed on her words, as described in this scriptural account, and the witness I received is that Jesus Christ is the healer of all those who are afflicted in any manner.

Jesus Christ Is the Lover of Our Souls

My third experience is more recent. Three years ago, Gwen and I made the difficult decision to uproot our family from Eagle, Idaho, and move here to Provo. The initial promptings that we received were clear and strong, but we—along with all our neighbors and friends—continued to wonder why we would ever leave our seemingly perfect life in Idaho.

In this anxious condition, just a couple of months before our departure, I found myself up in the mountains prayerfully considering how we would successfully navigate such a profound disruption to our comfortable family life, especially for our daughters and our two young boys, Trenton and Henry. I was participating in a camp with the young women who were graduating seniors in our stake, and on the second day, I took an early-morning walk by myself along a road adjacent to the river. My oldest daughter, Olivia, had been asked to sing a song at our upcoming testimony meeting, and when we had walked along the river the night before, she had requested that I sing with her. She had selected the hymn “Jesus, Lover of My Soul”—a favorite hymn of my Grandpa Joel Sedgwick that Olivia and I had sung many times together.

As I proceeded down the road that morning, I practiced my part:

*Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high. . . .*

*Other refuge have I none;
Hangs my helpless soul on thee. . . .
All my trust on thee is stayed;
All my help from thee I bring.
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of thy wing.⁷*

As I sang, I felt some anxiety about the impending changes in our family life. The nearer waters were rolling by, and the tempest was still high in my mind. I had no refuge, and I needed somewhere to hang my helpless soul. I really needed the shadow of His wing.

At that moment of deep apprehension, I felt the presence of my grandpa. As I sang the words of his favorite hymn, I felt he was speaking directly to me—imploping me to be strong and assuring me that I was on the right path. As though he were there walking beside me, he said, “Richard, everything will be okay for you and your family. God has a work for you to do. You are going home: you will be living on the property that you took care of in your youth. You have worked every inch of it with me, and I will be there with you.”

I had not taken the time to contemplate that, during our first year in Provo, I would be living in the home that my grandpa had built and that he had hired me to care for when I was the age that my boys are now. I had worked for my grandpa for a few years because he had grown too old to mow, rototill, weed, clean, paint, garden, and so on. Harkening back to my blissful childhood, I imagined myself in that place with him, and I was immediately comforted by his inspired words. Moreover, I felt remarkable peace knowing that our children would have the opportunity to connect more meaningfully with both my parents and Gwen’s parents—perhaps helping to care for them, learning from them, and, ultimately, believing on their words.

When the prophet Alma was troubled over those who had fallen into iniquity because “they did not believe the tradition of their fathers” (Mosiah 26:1), he inquired as to what he should do. The Lord’s response is instructive regarding the importance of believing on the words of others:

*Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith **in the words alone** of my servant Abinadi.*

*And blessed are they because of their exceeding faith **in the words alone** which thou hast spoken unto them. [Mosiah 26:15–16; emphasis added]*

I was on the bank of the Payette River instead of the Waters of Mormon, but I was blessed that morning just the same. The heavens brought peace to my mind and comfort to my soul through the angelic ministering of my grandfather. The Lord reinforced what He would have me do in my life,

and it was clear that He was directing me and my family for good. I believed “in the words alone” that my grandfather had spoken unto me, and the witness I received is that Jesus Christ is the lover of our souls.

A Witness of the Truth

I have shared three examples of personal revelation that, for me, are akin to historic game-winning baskets. In these pivotal life moments, I have listened to the testimonies of loved ones, and I have believed on their words. But such a witness does not require an extraordinary life event. Notably, my sacred moments occurred while serving the Lord as a full-time missionary, gathering as a family to read holy scripture, and fulfilling my Church calling. Likewise, in our daily devotions, regular worship, and consistent efforts to build the kingdom of God, we can hear the voice of the Lord in the words of those who share both written and spoken testimony, and we can believe on their words. Some of these witnesses might not be as exhilarating to describe as a length-of-the-court dribble drive to win a big game, but the manifestation of the Holy Ghost is the same. Moreover, those who exhibit “such great faith” (Alma 19:10) are, perhaps, “more blessed” (3 Nephi 12:2) because they “nevertheless . . . believe,” despite having “had no witness save [the] word” of a chosen servant of God (Alma 19:9).

Like the descendants of those who were baptized by Alma in the Waters of Mormon, we are often faced with the choice to accept or reject the tradition of our fathers and to rely on the words alone of prophets, seers, and revelators. Hopefully, in making those choices, we avail ourselves of the spiritual gift of believing on the words of others, particularly the Lord’s chosen mouthpiece, the living prophet. However, in today’s world it is increasingly difficult to believe on others’ words because we are living at a point in time that is marked “by the steady beat of Babylon’s band.”⁸ This chorus of adversarial and angry voices that floods our forms of communication often drowns out the prophecies that really matter, making it so very difficult to believe the tradition of our fathers, to believe on their words alone, to have

our hearts burn within us, and to not doubt our mothers knew it.

This witness of the truth is a remarkable gift, and too often it is in short supply because we sometimes seek to know the truth from sources that will not make us whole.⁹ In such a misguided pursuit to know for ourselves, we simply become “learned[,] . . . think [we] are wise, and . . . hearken not unto the counsel of God, . . . supposing [we] know of [our]selves” (2 Nephi 9:28)—rejecting the tradition of our fathers and refusing to believe on their words, particularly the words alone of those we sustain as living prophets. I invite us all instead to develop the gift of believing on the words of others, and I echo our prophet’s plea to increase our capacity to receive personal revelation. President Nelson has taught us that in those revelatory moments, the Spirit will speak of things as they really are and show us what to do. The prophet has said:

*Never underestimate the profound truth that “the Spirit speaketh . . . of things as they **really** are, and of things as they **really** will be.” “It will show unto you all things what ye should do.”¹⁰*

In closing, these three sacred revelatory experiences describe my attunement to the witnesses of my mother, grandmother, and grandfather. Based on the “radio broadcast” of their words to my mind, I cannot be sure that I have painted an exact replica of their respective testimonies. In fact, I don’t know the color of the heavenly uniforms—although I sure hope they are Cougar blue—I cannot speak to the exact brightness of the Savior’s light, I am not sure which hand those in the multitude held while bringing their afflicted ones to be healed, and I am unclear as to the precise size of the shadow of the Savior’s wing. But that uncertainty of detail in my mind’s eye does not change the ultimate outcome of the feeling in my heart. I don’t “wonder about what is true,” nor do I “wonder whom [I] can safely trust.” I still believe on their words, and my ability to interpret those words has improved over time as I have continued to listen with both my mind and my heart. That borrowed light has become my own—and my

mother, grandmother, and grandfather have never asked me to return it.

In this way, through their words, the words of others, the words of holy scripture, and the words of prophets, I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I know that He is the light of the world, that He is the healer of all those who are afflicted in any manner, and that He is the lover of our souls. I do not doubt my mother, grandmother, and grandfather knew it; my heart has burned within me, and I have developed exceeding faith in their words alone. I have experienced Christ's light, His healing, and His love. I have received that witness in my mind and in my heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, and no one can ever take that away. It is a firm foundation of faith that, in the words of my favorite hymn, "I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"¹¹ My witness is not a special one, but it is mine—borne of my belief on the words of others. And I testify of the importance of that seemingly secondary spiritual gift in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. The Mission of Brigham Young University (4 November 1981).

2. "The Cougar Song," Clyde D. Sandgren, words and music, 1932; copyright by his son, Clyde D. Sandgren Jr., 1947; see Clyde D. Sandgren, "The Cougar Song," Traditions, BYU Athletics, byucougars.com/page/cougar-fight-song.

3. Heber C. Kimball, quoted in Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball, an Apostle: The Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1945), 450; emphasis added.

4. See Bruce R. McConkie, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane," *Ensign*, May 1985.

Declaring his powerful testimony of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in his final general conference address, Elder McConkie said:

In speaking of these wondrous things I shall use my own words, though you may think they are the words of scripture, words spoken by other Apostles and prophets.

True it is they were first proclaimed by others, but they are now mine, for the Holy Spirit of God has borne witness to me that they are true, and it is now as though the Lord had revealed them to me in the first instance. I have thereby heard his voice and know his word.

5. Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign*, May 2018.

6. Michael McLean, "Hold On, the Light Will Come," Shining Star Music, 1986; see Michael McLean, *Hold On, the Light Will Come: And Other Lessons My Songs Have Taught Me* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2003), 162.

7. "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 102.

8. Russell M. Nelson, "Make Time for the Lord," *Liahona*, November 2021.

9. See "Where Can I Turn for Peace?" *Hymns*, 2002, no. 129.

10. Nelson, "Make Time"; emphasis in original; quoting Jacob 4:13; 2 Nephi 32:5.

11. "How Firm a Foundation," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 85.