

A Life Founded in Light and Truth

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I am grateful to be with you at the start of this Education Week. All those who have made the arrangements and those who will teach and perform deserve our praise and thanks. I am grateful for your attendance, which for many required substantial sacrifice. And I offer my thanks and admiration to those who have taken time to participate at a distance through what seems to be an unending stream of the miracles of electronic communication. We welcome you warmly.

One glance at the newspaper or at the television tells us that we live in stormy times. One thought of our families grips our hearts with concern for the forces of error that beat upon them. All of us know that we must build our lives on a solid foundation of truth to be safe. And we are under covenant to be witnesses of truth to others as long as we may live. It won't protect them just to have our witness of truth unless they build their lives on it. So there are few questions as important as this one: "How does a person build a life founded on truth?" It won't surprise you that the answer is simple enough for a child to understand, but that applying it is easy only for a person who has the heart of a child.

Jesus Christ answered the question of how to build on a foundation of truth with a story.

You not only can remember it, but you can visualize it—especially if you've ever lived in a floodplain or in tornado country:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. [Matthew 7:24–27]

Obedience to commandments is the way we build a foundation of truth. Here is the way that works, in words that are so simple a child could understand. The truth of most worth is to know God our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus

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Christ, and Their plan for us to have eternal life with them in families. When God communicates that priceless truth to us, He does it by the Spirit of Truth. We have to ask for it in prayer. Then He sends us a small part of that truth by the Spirit. It comes to our hearts and minds. It feels good, like the light from the sun shining through the clouds on a dark day. He sends truth line upon line, like the lines on the page of a book. Each time a line of truth comes to us, we get to choose what we will do about the light and truth God has sent to us. If we try hard to do what that truth requires of us, God will send more light and more truth. It will go on, line after line, as long as we choose to obey the truth. That is why the Savior said that the man who obeyed His commandments built on a rock so solid that no storm or flood could hurt his house.

In another place in the scriptures, the Lord described in a beautiful way how that foundation could be built so that we could finally come to know all He knows and become like Him and our Heavenly Father. Listen to His words. His words are truth. And listen to see if something comes into your mind that you should do, because these words are true.

I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, 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. [D&C 93:19–20]

And then a few verses later the Lord says:

And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;

And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.

The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth;

And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.

He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. [D&C 93:24–28]

Now you can understand why President Joseph F. Smith made building on a foundation of truth sound like a long list of things to do. He seems to be describing work rather than the exciting adventure that it is. I remember President Benson saying with a smile about his service, “I love this work. And it is work.” Here is President Smith’s description of the work it takes to build an imperishable foundation of truth. You will notice that the work is simple obedience. It is not complicated things—it is not fancy things or getting great spiritual manifestations. This is work within the abilities of the most humble and the least educated. Here is his list:

But the men and the women who are honest before God, who humbly plod along, doing their duty, paying their tithing, and exercising that pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, which is to visit the fatherless and the widows in their afflictions and to keep oneself unspotted from the world, and who help look after the poor; and who honor the holy Priesthood, who do not run into excesses, who are prayerful in their families, and who acknowledge the Lord in their hearts, they will build up a foundation that the gates of hell cannot prevail against; and if the floods come and the storms beat upon their house, it shall not fall, for it will be built upon the rock of eternal truth. [GD, 7–8]

It sounds so simple to build on a foundation of truth that you may wonder why everyone doesn’t succeed. For one thing, it takes great humility. It is hard to repent, to admit you are wrong on faith alone, before the coming of the

evidence of a feeling of being forgiven and the appearance of light. But that is the way it has to be. First comes obedience, and then come the confirming assurances, the revelation of truth, and the blessing of light.

That is so because God gave us agency—not just as a right, but as a necessity. We must choose with our agency to obey in faith that the promised blessing will come, that the promise is true because it comes from God. You remember the words of the scripture in Ether 12 that tell us both why that is hard and why it is necessary:

Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.

And it came to pass that Ether did prophesy great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe, because they saw them not.

And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith. [Ether 12:4–6]

There is another reason why it is not easy for the proud to build on a foundation of truth. It is because the enemy of righteousness also works in little steps—steps so small that they are hard to notice if you are thinking only about yourself and how great you are. Just as truth is given to us line upon line and the light brightens slowly as we obey, even so, as we disobey, our testimony of truth lessens almost imperceptibly, little by little, and darkness descends so slowly that the proud may easily deny that anything is changing.

I have heard the boast of a man who walked away from the Church slowly. At first he just stopped teaching his Sunday School class, then he stayed away from Church, and then he for-

got to pay tithing now and then. Along the way he would say to me: “I feel just as spiritual as I did before I stopped those things and just as much at peace. Besides, I enjoy Sundays more than I did. It’s more a day of rest.” Or, “I think I’ve been blessed temporally as much or more as I was when I was paying tithing.” He could not sense the difference, but I could. The light in his eyes and even the shine in his countenance was dimming. He could not tell, since one of the effects of disobeying God seems to be the creation of just enough spiritual anesthetic to block any sensation as the ties to God are being cut. Not only did the testimony of the truth slowly erode, but even the memories of what it was like to be in the light began to seem to him like a delusion.

More than a few of those slides down the path of disobedience come in the years of transition from childhood to maturity. How often have you heard a parent describe a child’s tragic journey into years of sin and sorrow by saying, “It began when he was 16” or “It began when she was 14.” And yet in those same years the young man or the young woman who chooses obedience can build a foundation of truth to last in the years ahead, and many do. It is not by accident that seminary across the world is offered to young Latter-day Saints in those years. They are at risk in that time of transition, yet the very source of that risk creates an opportunity for them and for us who serve them.

Agency is the source of the risk. It is so priceless a gift from our Heavenly Father that the War in Heaven was fought to defend it. Lucifer sought to take it from us and with it take for himself the honor and glory of our Father. The teenager you love may well have been one of the valiant warriors on the side of agency and truth. Satan seems to feel he can win a double victory by drawing that teenager into sin. He can destroy one of his antagonists and in the process try to prove the Father wrong, prove that the risk of agency was too great.

We can help by seeing clearly the opportunity. The teenager who begins to say, “It’s my life to live, my choices to make,” is speaking the truth, a wonderful truth. The choice to do good is the only way to build a life on the foundation of truth and light. Yet those words can strike fear into a parent or a bishop or a Young Women leader who loves the teenager. That outburst of independence usually comes when a rule is announced or something is forbidden. It may come with the mere appearance of authority, with anyone telling them what they must do, or even with just a look at a hemline.

Our opportunity lies in their seeing a simple truth. And their seeing this is their opportunity, too. It is their life to live, and yet they live it with two powerful opposing forces pulling on them in different ways. One is God, who loves and will not compel and who offers eternal life through the plan of salvation. That plan depends on the Atonement made by the Savior, Jesus Christ, and the teenager’s choice to follow Him. The other, a terrible power, will use deception, force, and hatred to bring someone into bondage and misery. And the teenager is free to choose.

The opportunity is in their seeing that reality, but that is also the problem. It takes the revelation of truth from God to the teenager for those opposing forces to be seen as real. Once seen, the choice will be obvious. But many young people have little experience with persisting in obedience when the truth must be taken on faith alone until it is revealed to them. The opportunity lies in their sensing what they once knew, that the power to choose is a gift from God to bring them happiness in life and in the life to come with Him.

We can help in the way we react to their determination to choose for themselves. They will sense whether we see them as if they could well have been one of the faithful warriors from the premortal existence, committed still to the defense of moral agency and aware of its great value to bring them happiness. If we can

see them as faithful warriors from the premortal existence, we may also see their claims of independence as a sign of their potential, a sign that they are testing the power of agency that will bring them happiness. That is hard, because we know the risk should they choose sin. But when fear for them comes, as it does, it helps for us to remember and take comfort that there are opposing pulls. There is an influence of evil in the world, but there is also in the world, and across all creation, the powerful Light of Christ.

They were born with access to the Light of Christ. Because of that, they have in them the power to apply for themselves the test given in the book of Moroni—if they believe they can and if they choose to do it. Unless they have gone so far as to make that light imperceptible, it is not beyond them to apply this sure promise:

Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.

But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.
[Moroni 7:12–14]

And then a few verses later:

But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light

of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged. [Moroni 7:17–18]

The warning not to judge what is of God as evil nor what is from the devil to be good is a helpful caution to those of us who would help the young learn to choose the right. They will see some choices as good, or at least neutral, that we may see at first as evil. Before we begin to force a choice with what authority we may have, it will be wise to apply the test in Moroni ourselves. More than once I have been restrained and more than once I have been energized to action by those practical rules. What I at first thought was evil came clear to me as being neutral. And what I had thought was neutral was revealed to me as inviting to do evil. And by the teenager knowing that I would apply the test myself in humility, I could make it more likely that they would try the test for themselves.

Our best hope is that they will follow our example of humbly seeking to know if the choice they are considering will draw them nearer to God or away from Him. If they do what we have done and pray in faith, light and truth will come to them. And if they obey, not only will more truth come, but they will have learned how to build their lives on a foundation of truth.

The teenager most likely to have that happy experience will have been given earlier, in childhood, the chance to gain self-discipline enough to persist in obedience even when at first no good result seems to come. I know now why my mother had me weeding on my knees for what seemed like hours in a wet garden with rows that seemed to stretch to the horizon while the weeds broke off in my hand with roots still in the ground. I know now why she smiled so happily when she saw me trying to dig those roots out with my fingers in tearful frustration. She knew something about teenage years that were coming and what it would take in dogged persistence to build a foundation on light and

truth. I don't necessarily recommend weeding or hard labor for little children, but I offer the thanks to my mother now that I was not wise enough to give when I was in the garden.

It would be wrong to suggest that it is easy to help young people obey long enough to qualify for the revelation of truth. Nor can I possibly suggest all that you may be led by the Spirit to do to help them. But I can give this counsel: Above all, you can love them. You can believe and follow the truth in the encouraging view of President Gordon B. Hinckley:

I love the youth of the Church. I have said again and again that I think we have never had a better generation than this. How grateful I am for your integrity, for your ambition to train your minds and your hands to do good work, for your love for the word of the Lord. . . .

*I have tremendous respect for fathers and mothers who are nurturing their children in light and truth, who have prayer in their homes, who spare the rod and govern with love, who look upon their little ones as their most valued assets to be protected, trained, and blessed. ["This Is the Work of the Master," *Ensign*, May 1995, 70]*

There is a connection between nurturing people in light and truth and the way we teach obedience. Wise mission presidents learn that early. Obedience is essential in a mission—for the safety of the missionaries if for no other reason. There are rules for staying with a companion. There are rules about where you can go. There are rules about driving cars. There are rules about when to be out of the place the missionary lives and when to be back at night and when to go to bed.

The great opportunity in teaching obedience to missionaries is to help them see the connection between the Savior, the companionship of the Spirit, and love. It is to teach them that obedience to the commands of the Father and His Son out of love for Them brings the Spirit. The companionship of the Spirit will bring light and

truth, the foundation of successful missionary work and of a happy life. It can be taught in simple matters. A missionary can put on a seat belt because he or she remembers the safety video from the last zone conference. Or they can do it because they love the mission president and he told them to do it. It is a completely different experience to do it because they think of the Savior's love and that He cares so much for their service and that He loves them so much that He wants them safe. The truth is that He needs us. He loves us. When a missionary feels that love of the Savior as he buckles up, he is more than safer in the car. He will be safe against the power of evil in his ministry and he will be safe in his life against more dangers than traffic accidents. He will have learned obedience to the Lord. He will encounter other rules and there will be other presidents, but the loving Savior will not change and He will always be there.

You can test what we have talked about today. What you do in the classes you attend, and even what you do in this devotional, can build your foundation more solidly on truth. Just try two things: listen for the whisperings of the Spirit and then commit to obey. You've noticed in this meeting that from time to time your mind wandered away from what I was saying. God will take advantage of that wandering if you let Him.

When the Spirit is invited into a meeting by those in it, truth is communicated beyond what is said aloud. Write down impressions or thoughts that you feel came from God. And, remembering what we have said about building a foundation, think carefully about whether the truth you received requires action. It is by obedience to commandments that we qualify for further revelation of truth and light. In this hour you may have committed to act on something you felt was true. Then more truth came to you. That process may slow or stop, if as you go out into daily life you fail to keep the silent commitments you made with God. God not

only loves the obedient, He enlightens them. I fear that more people make promises to God than keep them, so you will please Him when you are the exception and you keep your promise to obey. You should test those impressions of what you should do against a simple standard: Is it what the Master has commanded in the accepted revelations? Is it clearly within my calling in His kingdom?

Keeping some commandments gives you greater power to build your foundation on truth and light. You could think of those as enabling commandments, because they build your power to keep other commandments. Whatever invites the Holy Ghost as your companion will bring you the greater wisdom and the greater ability to obey God.

For instance, you are promised that if you always remember the Savior you will have His Spirit to be with you. You are commanded to pray that you may have the Holy Ghost. You are commanded to pray that you might not be overcome by temptation and so be clean and worthy of the Holy Spirit. You are commanded to study the word of God that you may have His Spirit. I would not set one commandment above another, but I might put some earlier in my efforts if they carry with them the promise of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. The Comforter will lead us to truth and light and will help us obey our Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son. We will come to love Them and those around us as we serve, and thus we will keep the great commandments.

Life will have its storms. We can and must have confidence. God our Heavenly Father has given us the right to know the truth. He has shown that the way to receive that truth is simple—so simple a child can follow it. Once it is followed, more light comes from God to enlighten the understanding of His faithful spirit child. That light will become brighter even as the world darkens. The light that comes to us with truth will be brighter than the darkness that comes from sin and

error around us. A foundation built on truth and illuminated by the light of God will free us from the fear that we might be overcome.

I leave you my witness as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ that God the Father lives. He knows us. He knows you. He knows me. We are His beloved children. His Son, Jesus Christ, is the Savior of the world. He came down into mortality, where we would become forever lost without Him, to give us the incomprehensible gift of the Atonement that we might someday be with Him and with our Father. He went below all things so that we might be exalted if we choose to follow Him. I testify that I know

He lives. I know that we will all be resurrected and stand before Him. I know that we can be washed clean if we repent and do what we are commanded to claim the precious gift of forgiveness. I know that the keys of the holy priesthood are on the earth, that Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord's prophet and exercises those keys. Joseph Smith was and is a true prophet. As an Apostle and witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, I promise you that as you obey the commandments you will know the truth and be strengthened and warmed by light and love, which will come from God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.