

# *An Untroubled Faith*

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A few weeks ago, Elder and Sister F. Arthur Kay and I arrived on the beautiful and exotic island of Tahiti. Our flight arrived at the Papeete airport at about four in the morning. We were met at the airport by a group of local Church leaders headed by our Regional Representative, Victor Cave. We quickly assembled our bags and headed for the hotel to get what rest we could before the day's activities began.

Our route took us through the deserted, dimly lighted streets of Papeete. In the dark we saw the faint figure of a man crossing the street in front of Brother Cave's car. He gave the man a lot of room and said to Brother and Sister Kay: "That man is Brother So-and-so. He is hurrying to get to the temple. The first session of the temple doesn't begin until nine o'clock, but he wants to be there well in advance."

"How far away does he live?" asked Brother Kay. The answer: "Two or three blocks." Brother Cave indicated that the caretakers open the temple gates early, and this man comes in and watches the day begin within the sacred precincts of the beautiful temple in Papeete.

I marveled at the faith of this simple man who is willing to forgo his sleep and other

activities in order to follow this ritual of meditation and contemplation. Some would no doubt say, "How foolish, how wasteful of time that could be spent sleeping or studying." I choose to hope that in these programmed hours of meditation and contemplation this faithful little man is coming to know himself and his Creator.

## **Nurturing a Simple Faith**

I should like to speak this evening of the need to nurture a simple, untroubled faith. I urge complete acceptance of the absolutes of our own faith. At the same time, I urge you not to be unduly concerned over the intricacies, the complexities, and any seeming contradictions that seem to trouble many of us. Sometimes we spend time satisfying our intellectual egos and look for all the answers before we accept any. Here at Brigham Young University we are in the pursuit of truth and knowledge. The nurturing of a simple untroubled faith does not

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*James E. Faust was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given at Brigham Young University on 28 September 1986.*

limit us in the pursuit of growth and accomplishment. On the contrary, it may intensify and hasten our progress. This is so because our natural gifts and powers of achievement are increasingly enhanced by the endless growth of knowledge. In our belief, it is possible to be even the helper of the Father and of the Son, and to be under their personal tutelage.

Nephi explained that his brethren had become so wicked and insensitive to the Spirit that they became “past feeling” even though they had seen and heard an angel, and even though God had spoken to them in a still small voice (see 1 Nephi 17:45).

In contrast, this same prophet Nephi tells us that if we “feast upon the words of Christ . . . the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

I have a dear friend with whom I grew up. Although bright and able, he was not a scholarly type. The press of family needs and concerns limited his educational opportunities. He did not graduate from high school. He acquired an old, beat-up truck and began hauling sand and gravel for a few of the contractors. The work was seasonal and not at all productive. The old truck would frequently break down and need repairs.

In his teenage years he drifted some, but married a good woman and settled down. Their circumstances were economically straitened, but somehow he managed to get a house built on part of the family property. I was bishop and called him to be the Aaronic Priesthood adviser. He took his calling seriously. He literally wore out the handbook, studying it. He had a notebook filled with dates when all of the young men in the ward would reach the age to be advanced in the Aaronic Priesthood. He kept good track of the young men and kept the bishopric informed of their activities.

Some years after I was released, he became a member of our bishopric. He needed a little nudging to become a full tithpayer, but responded faithfully as he had done before. Subsequently, he became our bishop. He

served wonderfully and well. In the meantime, he and an associate had learned how to lay bricks and formed a brick-contracting partnership. The difference between their work and the work of others was in the quality. They did beautiful work. They were in demand. He prospered and became very respected in the community. He became the president of the local water company. After many successful years as a bishop he was called to the high council and served well and faithfully. He is now a man of affairs, respected and honored, although his formal education ended before high school graduation. With the advantage of a college education he, no doubt, would have achieved even more.

What caused him to succeed? Industry? Thrift? Self-reliance? Yes, but there was more. Conscientiously and untiringly, he sought to know and do the mind and the will of the Lord. He had a simple, untroubled faith.

#### **“Stick with the Brethren”**

Our religion fosters the opportunity to come back into the presence of the Father and the Son, and it contemplates a future perfection of the human spirit and soul. This is a preferential condition in the hereafter. Why, then, should we be preoccupied unnecessarily with too many mysteries? In fact, the worldwide mission of the Church can be simply stated. It is to perfect the Saints, proclaim the gospel, and redeem the dead.

President Stephen L. Richards explained it this way: “The immortal soul which is the union of body and spirit becomes invested with the divine nature of our eternal Father and . . . Jesus Christ” (Stephen L. Richards, *CR*, April 1945, p. 30). That investment of the divine nature intensifies and magnifies our gifts and abilities. There is no greater teacher, no greater strength than the divine nature of the Eternal Father and Jesus Christ.

By this time next week, another general conference will have come and gone. Many

may wonder what the Brethren are saying. Many will want to know. Others may not care. Before I had a seat in general conference, I tried to listen, either by television or radio, to the conference proceedings. One Saturday, on the opening of general conference, my youngest son and I went out to hunt ducks on the day the season opened. Of course, we listened on the car radio on the way and took a portable radio to listen in the duck blind. The season shooting began at twelve noon, so we were able to hear the morning's proceedings.

My son had an assignment in seminary to review the conference messages. We listened faithfully to all of the messages on Saturday morning. The shooting was over by one o'clock, and we listened to the afternoon's proceedings. As we were picking up our decoys and heading back to the car, my son thoughtfully said: "What are the Brethren saying?" He was trying to understand the grand overarching and undergirding messages. What will the Brethren be saying next weekend? The living prophets will be opening the visions of eternity and giving counsel on how to overcome the world. We cannot know if we do not listen. We cannot receive the blessings if we do not follow the counsel given.

As a young stake president, I had most of the General Authorities as stake conference visitors to our stake. I can tell you that was a great experience! President Hugh B. Brown came to one of our stake conferences just a week before he was called and sustained as a member of the Council of the Twelve. We enjoyed his warm spirit and his good humor. As I helped him with his coat and he walked out to his car to leave us, I said: "Brother Brown, do you have any personal advice for me?" His answer was: "Yes, stick with the Brethren." He did not choose to elaborate or explain but left that indelible message: have the simple faith to follow the Brethren.

My grandmother, Maud Wetzel Faust, used to tell us as little boys about going to general

conference when President Brigham Young presided. She also told us about the first train that came to Salt Lake City. Except for the Prophet Joseph Smith, she had known all of the Presidents of the Church up to Heber J. Grant. From her observations over the years, she had this to say: "Those who have turned their backs on the Brethren have not prospered." Then she proceeded to tell of a few examples.

What caused her to impart this lesson to her grandsons I do not know, but I would certainly wish all within the sound of my voice to have the simple faith to "stick with the Brethren."

We acknowledge that all Church leaders, past and present—except Christ himself—were human. The critics of the Church are wont to discredit this marvelous work because of the human weaknesses of its leaders. President Gordon B. Hinckley said at your sister campus in Hawaii a few years ago, "To highlight the mistakes and gloss over the greater good is to draw a caricature. Caricatures are amusing, but they are often ugly and dishonest. A man may have a wart on his cheek and still have a face of beauty and strength, but if the wart is emphasized unduly in relation to his other features, the portrait is lacking in integrity." President Hinckley continued speaking of the early leaders of the Church: "If some of them occasionally stumbled, or if their characters may have been slightly flawed in one way or another, the wonder is the greater that they accomplished so much" (Gordon B. Hinckley, BYU–Hawaii commencement address, June 18, 1983). The same is true today.

In an urgent plea for the Saints to concern themselves with the common things, President Wilford Woodruff had this counsel:

*How much longer I shall talk to this people I do not know; but I want to say this to all Israel: Cease troubling yourselves about who God is, who Adam is, who Christ is, who Jehovah is. For heaven's sake, let these things alone. Why trouble yourselves about these things. God has revealed himself, and when*

*the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants is fulfilled, whether there be one God or many gods, they will be revealed to the children of men, as well as all thrones and dominions, principalities, and powers. Then why trouble yourselves about these things? God is God. Christ is Christ. The Holy Ghost is the Holy Ghost. That should be enough for you and me to know. If we want to know any more, wait till we get where God is in person. I say this because we are troubled every little while with inquires from elders anxious to know who God is, who Christ is, and who Adam is. I say to the elders of Israel, stop this. Humble yourselves before the Lord; seek for light, for truth, and for a knowledge of the common things of the kingdom of God. [The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, pp. 235–36]*

### **Making a Solid Foundation**

To have a simple, untroubled faith you must keep your spiritual innocence. That requires avoiding cynicism and criticism. This is the day of the cynic, the critics, and the pickle suckers. Said President Hinckley, “Criticism is the forerunner of divorce, the cultivator of rebellion, sometimes a catalyst that leads to failure. In the Church it sows the seed of inactivity and finally apostasy” (Gordon B. Hinckley, BYU–Hawaii commencement address, June 18, 1983).

For some years now I have appreciated sharing a common reception room at the Church Administration Building with David M. Kennedy. I appreciate my personal relationship with him. After having been called to the Council of the Twelve Apostles, I was walking out of the Tabernacle with Elder Kennedy. I said to him: “David, there must be ten thousand men in this Church more able and qualified to serve in the Council of the Twelve than I am.” Brother Kennedy: “No, fifteen thousand.”

Brother Kennedy has had a most remarkable career in government, in business, and in the Church. Yet I have found him to be a man of simple faith. He has been secretary of the treasury of the United States,

ambassador-at-large, ambassador to NATO, and president and chairman of Continental Illinois Bank. He has also been a missionary, secretary of the mission, bishop, a member of a stake presidency, and now is serving as special ambassador of the First Presidency. The David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies on this campus memorializes his life and his name.

He has met with a host of kings, presidents, and heads of state in his lifetime. Yet his faith is basic, pure, and unshakable. He knows where he came from, who he is, where he is going, and what is most important in his life. He received this orientation from his father. When young David asked his father, “What are we supposed to be doing here on earth?” his father replied, “We are supposed to be serving God and our fellowman.”

To have a simple, untroubled faith we must accept some absolutes. They are basic. They are to believe:

1. That Jesus, the son of the Father, is the Christ and the Savior and Redeemer of the world.
2. That Joseph Smith was the instrument through which the gospel was restored in its fullness and completeness.
3. That the Book of Mormon is the word of God and, as the Prophet Joseph Smith said, it is the keystone of our religion.
4. That Ezra Taft Benson is, as were each of his predecessor Presidents of the Church, a successor in holding the keys and authority restored by Joseph Smith.

You may ask, “How can I acquire an untroubled faith and a spiritual assurance that each of these absolutes is true?” This untroubled faith can come by prayer, study, and a submissive willingness to keep as many commandments as we can. Let us be more specific.

As to the first absolute, the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, we have two thousand years of teaching and tradition that help the inquirers accept him as their Savior and

Redeemer. So this absolute, initially at least, may be the easiest to accept after study, prayer, and trying to follow his teachings.

The second absolute, the calling of Joseph Smith as the restoration prophet, may be more difficult for the honest seeker to accept. To have a fair appreciation for the greatness of Joseph Smith's mission, we must step back and view the panorama of it all. To me the only logical explanation for the majesty and success of his work is that he saw what he said he saw, and he was what he said he was. What he restored is so complete, so all-encompassing in concept, so majestic and awesome in potential, that only God himself could have been the author and motivating force behind it. The fruits of Joseph Smith's work, so plain for all to see, are also a testimony of the divinity of his work.

The third absolute, namely, a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, in my opinion comes exactly as Moroni stated, by the power of the Holy Ghost, by asking God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ if it is true. The promise then comes: "If ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4).

The fourth absolute is essential to enjoy an untroubled faith. It is the proposition that President Ezra Taft Benson is the inheritor of the restored keys as was each of his predecessors since Joseph Smith. Some accept the Savior, the divine mission of Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon, but then think that after Joseph's time somehow the Brethren went astray. Many who have thought this have taken others with them, and their efforts have not prospered.

There is a powerful precedent that comes down through the ages to sustain the succession of authority. After the crucifixion of the Savior, Peter, as the senior apostle, became the President of the Church. Since the restoration by Joseph Smith this practice has been followed in the successions to the Presidency of the Church.

As each of the apostles has been ordained to the apostleship and Quorum of the Twelve, he is given all of the keys of the kingdom of God on the earth, some of which are to be held inactive until the death of the President of the Church. Upon the death of the President of the Church, the keys rest with the Quorum of the Twelve as a body. When a new President is ordained and set apart, the Council of the Twelve unitedly lay their hands upon his head and activate the keys he has held since he came to the Quorum of the Twelve. It has been so since Peter, James, and John bestowed the keys upon the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was so with President Ezra Taft Benson.

Because of this transferring of keys and authority, we can truthfully say, since there is ultimate priesthood authority on the earth today, that President Benson has it.

The acceptance of these four absolutes, together with the ordinances as administered by the Church and obedience thereto, is a solid foundation for the enjoyment of the promise of the Savior, i. e., peace in this life and eternal life in the life hereafter (see D&C 59:23).

Third from last, like that little man crossing the street in Papeete at 4:00 a.m. hurrying to the temple, we can enjoy an untroubled conscience in the temples of God.

Next to last, I wish to bear testimony that having a simple, untroubled faith will lift us above selfish, sordid, and greedy aspects of the world.

Last of all, I bear witness as one of the special witnesses that the Father and the Son did appear to the boy Joseph Smith, and that he was given direction to reestablish the Church upon the earth in its fullness. I also testify of the divine and truthful message of the Book of Mormon. I believe that President Ezra Taft Benson holds all of the keys and authority to administer the affairs of the kingdom of God on the earth, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.