

Increasing Faith, Reaffirming Trust, Rekindling Love

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Sister Nadauld and I have an interesting perspective on the BYU experience that stems from three different periods of association. We were first here as students beginning in the fall of 1964, nearly thirty years ago. We returned twelve years later in 1976, and I spent some wonderful years as a faculty member, during which time I also served as a bishop on campus. We now experience BYU from the perspective of our children.

Some months ago I overheard President Lee talking to a parent who had several children here. He teasingly said, “President, you have more of our children, not to mention our money, than we do.”

The president replied with a classic line that I wish I had used as a university president and that endeared him to me in a way that only parents can appreciate. He said, “I only hope we can do as well with them here as you have done with them in your home.”

President Lee, you and the faculty and staff are a great blessing in the lives of men and women who are students here, and you are definitely doing well with them. We thank you.

Representing all of your parents, I hope you know how much we love you and how

much of our joy and satisfaction is bound inextricably to your success and happiness in life. The apostle John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). In that vein I have gained a deeper appreciation for an experience I had here twenty-eight years ago. I was a twenty-four-year-old returned missionary senior chemistry student sitting in my off-campus apartment when a knock came at the door. I opened the door, and there stood my mother. She came in, and we had a wonderful visit. It was a visit of love, humor, grace, and some subtlety. I realized when she left that she had determined, among other things, what I was eating, who I was dating, how my grades were, and how I was doing in church. She perhaps had a better idea than I did about what I was going to do the rest of my life. She had also inspected the kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. She drove two hundred miles, spent an hour with me,

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and drove two hundred miles back home. Such is a mother's love and a father's love.

I have come to appreciate that there were some very important things my mother was concerned about—beyond how much Top Ramen I was eating. I distinctly remember during those years the conversations with roommates until two or three in the morning. Years later, as a bishop, I counseled my ward members about similar concerns. And now, more years later, these are the concerns of my children. Fundamentally they have not changed: What should I major in? How should I earn a living? Who am I going to marry? Where am I going to live? Will I have a family?

It's evident that these questions and the potential consequences of their answers create feelings of uncertainty and anxiety and generate, as the French say, a certain malaise. Those decisions that you are wrestling with are appropriate to your stage in life. You may suppose that once you have successfully made them, it will be smooth sailing. Would that it were so. Unfortunately, they will be replaced by the anxiety and uncertainty of death, disease, false accusations, loss of job, and loss of loved ones.

So how is one to cope at your age with your particular set of challenges or, at any later age, with the inevitable circumstances that can cause the apprehension, anxiety, and angst that weigh us down?

I do not know fully the answers to that question, but I would like to speak to three notions that I believe can make a difference. Let us visit together about increasing faith, reaffirming trust, and rekindling love.

Much has been said about faith because it is the most fundamental of doctrines in the plan of redemption. We speak of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the first principle of the gospel. In Hebrews 11:1, Paul taught, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." One challenge to the ready understanding of this definition is

the implication that faith is "substance" or "evidence." This runs counter to the general use of the word that usually is interpreted to mean that something accepted on faith is accepted *without* proof, evidence, or substance. The footnote to this verse explains that the Prophet Joseph Smith preferred to translate the word *substance* as "assurance." Using the word *assurance* and adding several additional words allows us to formulate an expanded expression that provides significant insight into the issue of faith.

The expanded expression is: *Having* faith is *having* or *accepting* an assurance of things hoped for and *accepting* evidence of things not seen.

Let us continue by dealing with the first part of the expanded definition. Having faith is having or accepting an assurance of things hoped for. The meaning is enhanced by understanding what is *hoped for*. Throughout the scriptures the objects of hope are stated as "hope in eternal life," "hope in a glorious resurrection," and "hope in Christ."

Moroni provides a superb one-verse summary:

And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.
[Moroni 7:41]

So our passage reads: "Now *having* faith is *having* or *accepting* an assurance of Christ, his resurrection, his atonement, and eternal life."

The expanded expression fits beautifully with the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of Alma. Alma speaks of men being ordained priests for the purpose of teaching the plan of redemption. He then explains that they were called and prepared according to the foreknowledge that God had concerning their "faith" and "good works." One might wonder

how it was possible to have faith (or good works) in the premortal world where there was presumably no veil and no earthly distractions. But in fact, we could elect to have faith in the plan. Faith then was the same as faith now. Faith was *having* or *accepting* an assurance in the plan of redemption. It was not a slam dunk! We had to accept assurance that Christ would do what he said he would; that he would follow the plan; that he would come to earth as an infant, be tempted, suffer pain. Could he really do it? Some of us accepted the assurance offered, some did not.

Continuing on with the definition: What is the nature of the assurances? Suppose we partition them into two kinds: divine assurances and personal assurances. What a blessing to know that it is indeed possible to receive divine assurance of things hoped for. Section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants contains a marvelous discussion of gifts given by the Spirit of God. Verses 13 and 14 state:

To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.

This scripture speaks of both kinds of assurances: heavenly, those that come through the Holy Ghost; and personal, those that come to us by way of another person. The scripture teaches us that to some it is given to believe on the words of others; that is, to accept their personal assurances of things hoped for. This important point deserves some additional comment.

We attend each month a special meeting called a fast and testimony meeting. These are unusual meetings both in terms of format and content. Their purpose is to build faith. When we bear our testimony, we have an opportunity to provide assurances that others might accept.

But if we wish to increase faith and be in harmony with the purpose of the meeting, those assurances must be of the things “hoped for.” Warm personalities, charisma, and travel experiences all have some appointed place, but the basic issue for a testimony meeting is whether or not we can stand and add our witness—add our assurance that there is a plan of redemption, a Savior, an atonement, a resurrection, and eternal life.

Let me illustrate. I know a young, impetuous, but very loving bishop who after a testimony meeting approached a youthful member of his ward who had spoken in the meeting. This bishop said in a way that only he could, “That’s an interesting testimony that you bore. Would you be willing to take this Book of Mormon home, read it every day, and come back next month and try it again?”

Now I hasten to add that this is not standard operating procedure. We would never want to *risk* offending anyone in an area as sensitive as that of personal testimony. In this case the person was unoffended but motivated and returned the next month to strengthen others with a strong witness of “things hoped for.”

Our definition now reads: Having faith is having or accepting divine and personal assurances of Christ, the atonement, the resurrection, and eternal life.

Let us add the second part of the definition: “Now faith is the evidence of things not seen.” We will work with the restated expression as cited earlier: Now *having* faith is *accepting* evidence of things not seen. That this is exactly the meaning that Paul intended is confirmed by examining verse 3 of the same chapter 11 of Hebrews. It says: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” While his wording to us may seem awkward, he is simply affirming that the worlds we see are evidence of the word of God, which we do not see. Thus the restatement “*having* faith is

accepting evidence of things not seen” is consistent with Paul’s example in which the existence of the world should be accepted as evidence of the unseen word of God that created it.

In the same manner that assurance was divided into divine and personal, let us partition evidence into two parts. Call the partitions *macro* and *micro*. So what is the macro-evidence we can accept? I agree with Paul that the earth, the seas, the mountains, the streams, the glorious world we live in is rich visual evidence of God’s unseen hand. The scriptures are replete with prophetic utterance on this issue.

I would say parenthetically that while here as a student, I majored in chemistry and minored in math and physics. I read and studied about the Heisenburg uncertainty principle, quantum mechanics, and relativity. I have read and studied geology, the fossil record, and evolution. I subscribe to *Scientific American* and read almost every article. It is all more or less useful, but all the evidence I ever needed came one night as I camped on the banks of the Snake River and lay on my sleeping bag looking up through the pine trees at the same glorious heavens that Abraham saw. My favorite expression of this macro-evidence is in the words of this hymn:

*O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow’r thruout the universe displayed. . . .*

*When thru the woods and forest glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze,*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!* [“How Great Thou Art,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 86]

Here in the tops of the everlasting hills, can there be any question about the handiwork of God? I believe the scriptures also serve as extraordinary macro-evidence of things unseen. The Book of Mormon especially is hold-in-your-hand, read-and-study “big” evidence—just the kind that Paul had in mind.

What about micro-evidence? Micro-evidence is a convenient taxonomy for including all the personal and individual experiences that each of us has that serve as evidence of the hand of God. They are private experiences, they are often sacred experiences—some ought not be shared, some can be.

I well remember such a personal experience that took place just a few blocks from here. It was more than twelve years ago. Margaret had gone into labor a month early, and about 3:00 a.m. on a beautiful June morning she gave birth to twin boys. After learning that she and the twins both seemed well, I was much relieved and went home for a few hours of sleep. About 7:00 a.m. the phone rang. It was a call from the hospital explaining that the second twin born was in serious trouble and that I should come quickly. I called my counselor in the bishopric, who was also an administrator at the hospital, and asked if he could meet me there immediately. I knelt in prayer and then rushed to the hospital, hoping to arrive in time to give the baby a priesthood blessing and, if necessary, a name. We found the baby lying in an isolette, a specialized chamber for premature infants. He was blue and gasping for breath. To my dismay he was so small and hooked up to so many tubes and pieces of apparatus that we could find no way to place our hands on his head to administer a blessing. After some agonizing moments we determined that there was a spot on his little chest about the size of a half-dollar that perhaps we could touch. So, reaching under and through and around all the tubes and equipment, we were able to get the very tips of four enormous index fingers on that one tiny

available spot on his chest. We blessed him that he would receive specialized medical attention, that his life would be spared, and that he and his brother would serve together as missionaries in the year two thousand.

That day in our family we received some very personalized micro-evidence of the unseen power of God.

We have expanded Paul's definition of faith and can now summarize: Having faith is having or accepting divine assurance and personal assurance of things hoped for; namely, a living Savior, a resurrection, an atonement, and eternal life. It is accepting macro-evidence and micro-evidence of the unseen, but very real power of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Now I suggest you take an inventory. Where do you stand relative to receiving a heavenly assurance that there is a plan of redemption, including all the "things hoped for"? Count up the personal assurances from those who have born witness and testimony to you. Include among them the powerful assurances coming to you from my brethren of the General Authorities. Rehearse to your satisfaction the macro-evidence that is shouted from God's handiwork and spoken plainly from the scriptures. Enumerate your own experiences—the undeniable expressions of the power of God, unseen but clearly demonstrated.

Each of us in our personal life can take such an inventory. For most of us the assurances, both heavenly and personal, and the macro- and micro-evidence, when reviewed, are so overwhelming that we should be thrust profoundly to the next step. That next step is to place our personal trust firmly in God. Here we find an interesting paradox. We have examined our faith; the assurances and evidences are compelling. It should be an easy matter to place our trust in someone who is omnipotent and omniscient. But we are reluctant, and we struggle. We struggle because of our pride. We

struggle because of our imperfections. The great prophet Nephi understood perfectly.

There is no more eloquent statement of that struggle and resulting trust than that found expressed by Nephi in chapter 4 of 2 Nephi. I commend it to you for a complete reading. He begins by describing in verse 17 feelings that we have all had. He says:

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works [in other words, Nephi is rehearsing the evidence of things unseen], my heart exclaimeth: O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. . . .

And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.

My God hath been my support: he hath led me . . . ; and he hath preserved me. . . .

He hath filled me with his love. . . .

He hath confounded mine enemies. . . .

. . . He hath heard my cry . . . , and he hath given me knowledge by visions. . . .

Awake my soul! . . . Rejoice, O my heart. . . .

Do not anger again. . . . Do not slacken my strength. . . .

Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation. . . .

[Then we read this passage with such beautiful visual imagery:] *O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! . . .*

[Nephi then finishes with these final thoughts:] *O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh. . . .*

Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever

ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen. [2 Nephi 4:17–35]

What an inspiring expression of trust in the Lord. Nephi rehearses his experience with the Lord and reaffirms his trust.

We would do well to ponder at length on this extraordinary passage. I call to your attention one particular phrase found in verse 34. Nephi says, “I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh.” That same thought is found in section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This section constitutes the Lord’s preface to the doctrine, covenants, and commandments given in this dispensation—at a time when “every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world” (D&C 1:16). In one long sentence in which the Lord speaks plainly of his grand design, he says, “Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven” (D&C 1:17). In other words, the Lord did what he has done in all generations past. He called a prophet to speak to the people, so that all might be fulfilled,

that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—

But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world;

That faith also might increase in the earth.
[D&C 1:19–21]

Here is a direct admonition from the Lord that the answers to our problems, the solace we seek, will not be found in the philosophies of men but through increasing faith and reaffirming our trust in him.

The words of a favorite hymn are so appropriate:

*Be still, my soul: The Lord is on thy side;
With patience bear thy cross of grief or pain.*

*Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In ev’ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: Thy best, thy heav’nly Friend
Thru thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

*Be still, my soul: Thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as he has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: The waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.
[“Be Still, My Soul,” Hymns, 1985, no. 124]*

How we wish we could see into the future to know the outcome of every troublesome decision—to arrive at the destination without having to make the journey. Many of you pay your tithing, read the scriptures, keep yourselves morally clean, and pray with real intent. And yet you fail tests, your cars break down, you don’t have enough money to pay the rent, and you strike out with someone you hoped you had a chance with. These are the normal experiences and challenges of life. Your faith is not misplaced. Remember the words of the song, “Be still, my soul: Thy best, thy heav’nly Friend Thru thorny ways leads to a joyful end.”

The journey does have a joyful end. That is the message of the plan of redemption. Christ said, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).”

Faith in the plan of redemption and its outcomes leads to keeping the commandments. Faith and trust provide the foundation for a happy and productive life. There isn’t anything more important that you could learn here. You can’t begin to imagine all the experiences you will have in your lifetime. You will be grateful for a full reservoir of faith and trust to see you through.

My dear young brothers and sisters, put away your fears, put away your anxieties, put away your sins and your pettiness. Believe in his plan; trust in God. Put not your trust in the arm of flesh. Lean not on your own

understanding. But be believing; come desiring that the Lord will encircle you about in the robe of his righteousness. Study to increase your faith, study the Atonement, study the Resurrection, study the plan of redemption, study the relationship between faith and trust and humility.

With faith and trust firmly in place, a wonderful thing can happen. You can set aside your self-absorption, quiet your anxieties and fears, and fill your souls with love. The Savior's message is clear—understanding the doctrine should lead to practical application. Practice serving, practice lifting and building and strengthening others, provide assurances, rehearse the evidence one to another.

What a remarkable transformation takes place when we allow our faith to lead to trust. Our combined faith and trust rekindles *love*—love of the Savior, love of our fellowman, love for those near and dear to us; love that provides sweetness, true joy, the giving of one's self for others.

And you know, the most amazing thing will happen. You'll wake up one day with a career and another day with a companion and a third day with a family—and then a mortgage, lower back pain, and a stack of bills from your orthodontist!

Please know that we believe in you, we have confidence in you, we trust you, and, oh, how we love you and how we pray for your happiness. I witness to you that God's plan of redemption is a true plan of happiness. I add my assurance to those who have come before that Jesus Christ is our Savior. He is our Redeemer. He fulfilled his role as the Messiah, the Anointed One, the one who atoned for our sins. The Resurrection is a reality. We can live eternally with a loving Heavenly Father.

May we increase our faith, reaffirm our trust, and rekindle our love, I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.