

Truth

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I have prayerfully selected my topic for today with the desire that it benefit both student and missionary on this campus. I know what I would communicate but find it difficult to choose appropriate words to underline the principles I would share with you. Therefore, I appreciate most sincerely the prayer that was offered in my behalf at the beginning of this session. I would speak on the topic: “How to find and confirm truth, and how to gain the courage to apply that truth in our lives.”

Each one of us wants to be a self-sufficient self-starter in life. We realize that to avoid undue dependence on others we must have a platform of absolute truth, something unshakable that provides a foundation when all things whirl and conspire about us. In our university careers, and later on in our professions, we find so many people who would counsel us to take this path or another path; and often that counsel is at variance with teachings we have learned in the Church. Theories of science are proposed that seem at variance with gospel principles. How, then, can we find for sure that which is true? I have found in my life two ways to find truth—both useful, provided we follow the path and the laws upon which they are predicated.

The first let us call the scientific method. That involves a group of facts and statistics, combined and analyzed, from which is distilled a theory or a postulate or what might be called a principle. Often the reverse is true: we advance a principle, then perform experiments to establish its validity. The scientific method is a sound and most valuable way of arriving at truth. There are two limitations, however, with that method. First: We never can be sure we have absolute truth, though we often draw nearer and nearer to it. Secondly: Sometimes, no matter how earnestly and sincerely we apply that principle, we come up with the wrong answer.

I recall years ago as a university student reading about Nils Bohr, who first postulated an atomic explanation of matter—a nucleus of neutrons and protons surrounded by spinning particles called electrons. As scientists and experimenters tested that theory they

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developed great contributions in the field of chemistry, and the periodic table was organized using that theory as a key; but further investigations proved that it was not a satisfactory explanation of the truth. More scientific endeavor has brought us nearer and nearer until now there is a tremendously expanded understanding of matter. Yet anyone would admit that we are far from the essence of truth.

Sometimes mistakes are made. Let me give you an example of a professor from a well-known Eastern university who spent two years of his time researching basic documents in the Church to discover information about the documentation of Mormon history. He was sincere and honest and invested much of his time; yet what do you think of these two conclusions, among others, that he reached? "It is not possible for a loyal member of the Mormon Church to write an objective history of Mormonism because of inherent restrictions that require the views of ecclesiastical leaders to be accepted totally," and "It is not possible to develop a true scholar or gifted intellectual from the ranks of loyal Mormons because each is required to follow the views and counsels of the Church leaders." You and I know that this is false. Yet he was sincere. He applied the scientific method and got the wrong conclusion because he lacked the insight that you and I share: that inspiration is what provides the commonality of feeling in the Church and not the dictum of its leaders.

Some deny the fact that there is any method of finding truth other than the scientific method. I remember, early in the days of nuclear engineering, when we were experimenting to confirm some of the hypotheses. One day I was in an area where a swimming pool had been built, and down deep in it were aluminum plates with uranium-aluminum contents arrayed. Three of us were taking turns at the controls, and I remember the thrill of excitement that came to me as we moved the control rods. I happened to be at the control

panel when the count-rate meter indicated that the reactor had gone critical; and as I looked down into the pool I could see that shirinkoff radiation, the iridescent blue indicating that in fact there was a controlled chain reaction. That may not appear much to you now with today's familiarity with physics, but it was a scientific thrill for me.

Later, we experimentally measured cross-sections of materials to determine their nuclear constants. We used a beam of high-energy neutrons from one of the graphite pile reactors, deflecting it with a crystal into experimental apparatus. A young janitor approached the experiment evidencing total disdain for what we were doing. He did not understand it nor did he want to understand it. In kind of an accusatory way he indicated that we were just wasting time, kidding people, doing that which had no real meaning. To show his disdain he reached up to touch the crystal that deflected the beam and to whirl it. Had he not been stopped, that powerful, dangerous beam of high-energy neutrons would have sprayed the room. His if-you-can't-see-it-taste-it-smell-it-feel-it-hear-it-then-it-doesn't-exist attitude is all too prevalent in the world today when we talk about things of God, things that really matter.

That brings me to the second way of finding truth, and that is simply to go to the origin of all truth and ask. This differs from the scientific method in that certain principles must be applied. You have observed that scientists who in their private lives may do anything but follow gospel standards can be successful in the scientific method of evaluation. This is not so when we talk about finding truth—pure truth—directly from the source. Two ingredients are essential: first, faith—unwavering faith; second, obedience—a willingness to apply true principles and to keep God's commandments, that we may open the avenues of clear communication with God. Through such communication we can receive a positive, certain knowledge about a decision with which

we have labored, about which we have asked, and for which we have sought confirmation from the Spirit. Such communication can so powerful as to be undeniable. We can be certain that it is true as private inspiration comes directly from the Lord.

Sometimes the Lord reveals truth to us when we are not actively seeking it, when we are in danger and know it not. I remember that on one occasion I had been driving for long hours alone on high Bolivian mountain roads a single lane wide. As I approached a sharp turn an impression came into my mind: "If my wife were here she would tell me to honk the horn." I did, and as I turned the corner I saw a jeep skidding to a halt; it had heard the warning sound. Had I not done it I would have been in trouble. Not two hours later the same thing happened, this time with an ambulance.

The Lord gives us truth when we live righteously. Sometimes it comes in response to an urgent, sincere prayer for help when we need guidance. I remember one night in the mission field, after kneeling in prayer with my lovely wife, having thanked the Lord for the blessings of the day, I had a strong impression that one of the missionaries was in trouble. I tried to think who it could be but could not. I excused myself from my sweet companion and went up onto the flat part of our mission home roof. All night long I labored, reviewing in my mind each companionship, everything I knew about every missionary, and pled with the Lord that he might let me know where that missionary was that needed help. Finally, as the dawn began to break, I was impressed to know in which part of the mission he lived. That, of course was all I needed. I went there and through appropriate interviews found and helped the individual the Lord wanted to help. Yes, God answers prayer and gives us truth when we live obediently and exercise the requisite faith.

Let me summarize: The scientific method is useful, but it does not guarantee obtaining pure knowledge and could possibly lead us

down blind alleys. I find a combination of the scientific method and that of seeking pure truth by prayer to be a tremendously effective way of solidifying a foundation of knowledge in our lives.

May I share with you some of the comments made by other Brethren on this topic? Elder Hugh B. Brown said on one occasion:

There is dawning upon this age what might be termed a scientific spirituality, a new type of mind that studies the truth of faith with the care and caution and candor of science, yet keeping the warmth and glow and power of faith.

Spiritual insight is as real an insight as scientific insight. Indeed, it is but a higher manifestation of the same thing. [Conference Report, April 1967]

Remember that we do not attempt to understand the laws of physics by rejecting all previous effort to explain and record them and then set about to develop our own theories about everything. We search out that which is already established, learn the existing laws, and conscientiously apply them as instructed. The same applies to spiritual laws.

There are sources of pure truth other than direct prayer. Examples are pure testimony from righteous friends, parents, or relatives; insight and inspiration given to a stake president, bishop, or mission president when we are in need; and the scriptures—oh, what a powerful source are the scriptures!

With regard to the scriptures, President Romney has given us this excellent counsel.

So I would suggest that you do study the gospel and study it every day. You should never let a day go by that you don't read it.

. . . I do not know much about the gospel other than that which I have learned from the standard works. When I drink from a spring, I like to get the water where it comes out of the ground, not down the stream after the cattle have waded in it.

... I appreciate other people's interpretation, but when it comes to the gospel we ought to become acquainted with what the Lord says and we ought to read it. You ought to read the gospel; you ought to read the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants; and all the scriptures with the idea of finding out what's in them and what the meaning is and not to prove some idea of our own. Just read them and plead with the Lord to let us understand what he had in mind when he wrote them.

After we have done that, you have to live it. You can't learn the gospel without living it. Jesus did not learn it all at one time. He went from grace to grace (see D&C 93: 12–14). [Coordinators Convention, April 13, 1973]

A knowledge of truth is not sufficient—we must find the courage and strength to apply that knowledge. Consider for a moment a man, heavily overweight, approaching a bakery display. In his mind are these thoughts: *The doctor told you not to eat any more of that. It's not good for you. It just gives momentary gratification of appetite. You'll feel uncomfortable the rest of the day after it. You've decided not to have any more. "I'll have two of those almond twists and a couple of those doughnuts and two of those chocolate ones." One more time won't hurt. I'll do it just once more and this will be the last time.* Truth is of little value in our lives if we do not apply it.

We gain the courage and strength to apply truth as we live close to our Father in heaven and as we form a personal relationship with him. President David O. McKay once said, "The greatest comfort in this life is having a close relationship with God" (*Conference Report*, April 1967). Truth and its application bring peace and satisfaction and stimulate self-reliance.

May I share with you some other observations from the Brethren on this subject of how we gain truth and how prayers are answered? The Lord has said, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in

your heart" (D&C 8:2). That is the vehicle through which pure truth is transmitted. Every soul in the world can benefit temporarily from the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, but only those who are obedient to the gospel, who are baptized, and who receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by confirmation have that companion as a right eternally. One of the best sources of counsel from the Lord regarding prayer is found in section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 7 through 9.

For prayer to be answered we must first formulate a decision and then present it to the Lord for ratification. Specifically the Lord has told us that

If it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong. [D&C 9:8–9]

As you study that scripture and others that apply to the principles of prayer, you will find that nowhere does it say when the Lord will answer. Some of us misunderstand. We urgently plead for an answer. We pray with sincerity, following the steps outlined—and nothing happens. Permit me to share something with you that I feel is sacred. I have found by personal experience and have had confirmed so repeatedly that I know it is true that when we follow the laws of prayer given us of God one of three things happens. First, we will feel that peace, that comfort, that assurance, that certainty that our decision is right; or second, we will feel that uncomfortableness, that stupor of thought, and we know that what we have chosen is wrong; or third—and this is the difficult one—we feel nothing.

What do you do when you do not feel an answer? I have come to thank the Lord with all my heart when that occurs, for it is an evidence of his trust. I positively know that as we apply

our decision as though it were confirmed powerfully from on high, one of two things will certainly occur at the appropriate time: either the stupor of thought, or the peace—the confirmation.

May I share two experiences to demonstrate what I mean? One day a very close friend came to my home. He was a bishop very much enjoying his calling. He had an opportunity for employment in another part of the country and was undecided about whether or not to go. We discussed the principles just reviewed. He went home and made a decision to move. He felt no confirmation of the correctness of that decision, but moved to the new job anyway. His employment was good and his family comfortable, yet he continued to feel somewhat ill at ease, not knowing for sure whether he had made the right decision. A week passed, then a month, then additional months. One day one of the Brethren was assigned to reorganize the stake in the area where he now lived. He received his confirmation from the Lord when he was selected to be the new stake president.

The other experience came as I followed, as carefully as I knew how, the principles we have discussed. One of the most sacred responsibilities of a mission president is the assignment of companionships, for it must be done through inspiration. On one occasion, having carefully followed the same procedure as always, I invited a missionary into my office and said, “Elder, you’re going to be thrilled with your new assignment.”

His eyes lit up with enthusiasm. Then, just as I was about to give him his assignment, a powerful impression came to my mind: “No, not there; you can’t send him there.”

The more he stared wide-eyed at me the more uneasy I became. I said, “Just a minute, elder; I’ll be right back,” and, of course, I went to another room and prayed to find out where he should go.

I know that when we live righteously, exercise faith, and supplicate the Lord, using the

proper principles, if we feel no confirmation immediately we should act on our decision. If that decision is consistent with gospel principles and our other teachings one of the two feelings will surely come. First a scriptural statement from President McKay.

“It is true that the answers to our prayers may not always come as direct and at the time nor in the manner we anticipate but they do come, and at a time and in a manner best for the interests of him who offers the supplication” (*Conference Report*, April 1969). I find great comfort in that statement of the prophet.

During a general conference session President McKay told of a personal experience from his life that illustrates this point. He said that he was out hunting cattle and while climbing a steep hill he stopped his horse to let it rest. In his words,

An intense desire came over me to receive a manifestation of the truth of the restored gospel. I dismounted, threw my reins over my horse’s head, and there, under a serviceberry bush I prayed that God would declare to me the truth of his revelation to Joseph Smith. I am sure that I prayed fervently and sincerely and with as much faith as a young boy could muster.

At the conclusion of prayer I rose from my knees, threw the reins over my faithful pony’s head, and got into the saddle. As I started along the trail again, I remember saying to myself, “No spiritual manifestation has come to me. If I am true to myself I must say I am just the same ‘old boy’ that I was before I prayed.” I prayed again when I crossed Spring Creek near Huntsville (with the same result). [Conference Report, October 1969]

Then he added that much later on, when he was in the mission field, a singularly spiritual experience came during the equivalent of a zone conference today. A powerful, unmistakable witness came in answer to his supplication. It came when he needed it, when it was

more important to confirm other promptings of the spirit.

Knowledge is power, and the glory of God is intelligence. Permit me now to share from our current prophet some comments about this matter of gaining pure knowledge. President Kimball calls it spiritual knowledge.

Knowledge is that power which raises one to new and higher worlds and elevates him to new spiritual realms.

The treasures of both secular and spiritual knowledge are hidden ones. But hidden from those who do not properly search and strive to find them. The knowledge of spirituality will not come to an individual without effort, any more than will the secular knowledge or college degrees. Spiritual knowledge gives the power to live eternally and to rise and to overcome and to develop and finally to create.

Spiritual knowledge is not available merely for the asking; even prayers are not enough. It takes persistence and dedication of one's life. The knowledge of things in secular life are of time and are limited; the knowledge of infinite truths are of time and eternity.

Of all the treasures of knowledge the most vital is the knowledge of God; his existence, powers, love, and promises.

. . . God and his program will be found only in deep pondering, appropriate reading, much kneeling in devout humble prayer and in a sincerity born of need and dependence.

. . . Desirable as is secular knowledge, one is not truly educated unless he has the spiritual with the secular. The secular knowledge is to be desired, the spiritual knowledge is an absolute necessity.

[Now listen as President Kimball explains how we gain this knowledge:] *It is my prayer that we learn to master ourselves by obedience to the Lord's commandments, by the control of our physical appetites, and by placing first in our lives service to God and our fellowmen so that the hidden things of the spirit may come to us and that we may attain perfection with the Father and the Son. Many*

have seen God in the course of history. All of us may do so eventually through our righteousness. [Conference Report, October 1968]

In discussing these principles with you today I have had one desire: that somehow in the mind and heart of each of us there might be generated, as though we were talking to ourselves, this sort of conviction: "I am truly and deeply loved of the Lord. He will do all in his power for my happiness. The key to unlock that power is in myself. While others will counsel, suggest, exhort, and urge, the Lord has given me the responsibility and the agency to make the basic decisions for my happiness and eternal progress. As I read and ponder the scriptures daily and with sincere faith earnestly seek my Father in prayer, peace will envelop my being. This, coupled with full obedience to the commandments of God and selfless service to and genuine concern for others, will purge fear from my heart and condition me to receive and to interpret the divine aid given to mark my path with clarity. No friend, bishop, stake president, or General Authority can do this for me. It is my divine right to do it for myself. I will be at peace; I will be happy; I will have a rewarding, productive, meaningful life."

As you prepare for your future in the academic and professional worlds, or as you embark now to serve the Lord, remember that God will grant truth as we live to merit the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in our lives. I know this. I know that pure truth flows from God.

Last Friday President Kimball, his counselors, and the Quorum of the Twelve announced to the world a new revelation. I know positively that that revelation came from God. I know that because of the application of the principles that I have discussed. I know positively that the Lord gave that revelation to the President. Now countless spirits who otherwise would not have had the blessing of the priesthood—those who are beyond, those who

are here, those who are yet to come—will enjoy the blessings that only can be obtained in the temple because a prophet so lived his life as to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring new truth to His children on earth.

I am grateful for this privilege to be with you today. It is a sacred responsibility to come to this choice institution where truth is taught through the medium of the Holy Ghost and where one can expand the testimony and instruction in the laboratory and classroom by quiet pondering and meditation. I know that God lives. I know positively that he lives. I know that God answers prayer. He answers prayer so clearly and concisely that we can write his counsel down as though it were dictated to our mind and heart, for I have done that. I know that God answers urgent prayer when there is a need. One example will illustrate.

One day I was interviewing a young lady for an assignment in the mission—a choice young lady, a recent convert to the Church. As I reviewed her personal history and asked her the questions about her personal life, she answered as though she were reviewing her personal history page by page. Then, it seemed, she skipped several important chapters. Nothing she said told me that, but I had that strong impression in my heart that she was leaving something important out.

I went back to ask questions about that area, but no matter how I phrased the question I got the same result—no comment on that area. As I anxiously tried to communicate with her, a very powerful impression came to me—

to my mind and to my heart. I knew specifically what had happened to her. She had been betrayed by a trusted doctor who had taken away the most precious gift: her chastity. Being a new member of the Church she had not known what to do as you and I do. She had sought the Lord, asked for help, anguished over her efforts to repentance without fruition.

I began to feel impressions to counsel her, and she became nervous and turned her head to the wall so that all I could see was the back of her hair. Yet specific counsel flowed forth, and I gave it to her. Finally an impression came which I communicated. “I don’t need to talk to you any more, do I? You have made a decision.”

She whirled around and asked, “How could you possibly know that? I want to bear to you my testimony.” And as she poured out her love for her Father in heaven and her conviction of the Church’s truthfulness, there flowed between us a power, a real power and a strength. Neither she nor I wanted that moment to end. I discovered again how the Lord could use a servant as an instrument to answer the urgent desires of someone who wanted to do right but had no idea of how to proceed. He answered her prayers unequivocally.

Yes, the scientific method is worthwhile when combined with spiritual insight based on faith and obedience. We do have a source of pure truth to edify, to clarify, and to ease our way. Of this I bear solemn witness in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.