

# Becoming a Disciple of Christ

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Sisters, and brethren, it is wonderful to be with you in the Marriott Center this morning and bask in the afterglow of last evening's fireside with President Hinckley and yesterday's presentations. We are fortunate to live in a day when prophets walk the earth, a day when the heavens are open and the Lord's kingdom is gathering strength in every country and clime.

I am particularly grateful for this sesquicentennial year in which hearts are turned to pioneer fathers, mothers, and children. With faith in the Almighty, they forsook comfortable homes, farms, jobs, and most of their earthly possessions to find a safe haven where they and their posterity could worship God in peace. Through the freezing cold and mud of Iowa in 1846 and along the hot, dusty trails of Nebraska and Wyoming in the ensuing years, the Saints were of one heart and one mind—to establish and build Zion. They, too, believed in prophets—one recently martyred and another whose wisdom and courage would become legendary. These pioneer ancestors put everything on the altar. Some paid the ultimate price as they finished the journey at Winter Quarters or along the Platte, at Devil's Gate or beside the Sweetwater. There were many who found Zion without reaching the Valley. I pay tribute to them for their legacy of faith, commitment, and sacrifice.

I am grateful for my wife, who preceded me today. She is the bedrock of faith in our family. She is the one who is quiet, steady, and prefers the role of mother and grandmother to that of public person. In spite of preference, she has been willing to share her deep-felt testimony whether in Japan or Korea, England or Africa, or here at home. I pay tribute to her, especially, for the righteous influence she has on our children and grandchildren.

The theme of this conference is taken from Moroni 7:19. In this passage, Mormon describes two steps along the path of life which, if taken, will spiritually transform a person into a begotten son or daughter of Christ. The first is to "search diligently in the light of Christ" so that good may be distinguished from evil. The second is to "lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not." Earlier in the chapter, Mormon notes that every woman and man receives the light of Christ as a gift to differentiate right from wrong. A more common name for this light is conscience, a discerning power by which individuals know

good from evil (Moroni 7:15–17).

Mormon's first step of searching diligently describes the quest for truth, for the good. His second command, to lay hold upon every good thing, means to live every good truth once it is found. In both the searching and the living, diligence is required. The Lord told the Prophet Joseph that the process of learning truth or acquiring knowledge and intelligence comes through "diligence and obedience" (D&C 130:19). Laying hold upon, or living, truth also requires energy or effort in that the Lord expects us to serve with all our "heart, might, mind and strength" (D&C 4:2).

In the Lord's plan, diligent effort involves both the heart and the mind. Diligently seeking truth and living gospel principles with all one's mind and heart opens the door for the Holy Spirit to transform us. We put off the natural woman or man because of the truths we value. With a humble heart, we "[yield] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit," partake of the Atonement, and become the "children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters" as we are spiritually reborn (Mosiah 3:19; 5:7).

For a few minutes this morning I wish to illustrate the process of acquiring truth with heart and mind and then suggest that living and serving faithfully with all one's heart, might, mind, and strength is really a function of steadily enduring, of doing one's best each day, in contrast to great bursts of energy that one tries to prolong.

### *Searching with One's Mind and Heart*

To illustrate the first step of searching for truth through both mind and heart, we turn to the story of Oliver Cowdery's desiring the gift of translation. While acting as scribe to Joseph, Oliver expressed his desire to serve as translator. Joseph took the matter to the Lord, and Oliver was granted permission. Through revelation, Oliver was told the conditions upon which he could translate and the process by which the meaning of the characters would come. If Oliver would "ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that [he would] receive" the Lord would confirm the thoughts of his mind and heart through the Holy Ghost (D&C 8:1–2). The procedures for learning sacred truths outlined for Oliver are consistent with the procedures described by other prophets (Luke 24:32; 1 Corinthians 2:9–11). Oliver would learn the meaning of the characters not only through the thought processes of his mind but also through the feelings of his heart. Oliver was to study out the meaning of the characters in his mind and then ask the Lord if his thoughts were right; if a confirming burning in his bosom occurred, he would feel and know the correctness of his thoughts.

Having had little prior experience, Oliver misunderstood the process. After Oliver failed to translate the characters, the Lord explained that Oliver had not been diligent. He had not tried to work out in his mind the meaning of the characters before praying for help. Instead, he asked the Lord to give him the answers (D&C 9:7–9). Oliver had not "search[ed] . . . in the light of Christ" (Moroni 7:19). He took no thought except to ask the Lord.

Most of us are grateful that Oliver tried. The lesson he learned is now part of the record and benefits all of us. Contrast Oliver's experience with Nephi's preparation to

understand his father's dream of the tree of life. First Nephi 11:1 outlines the preparatory process: "For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain."

Both Oliver and Nephi desired to know truth. Both believed that the Lord was able to make truth known to them. The difference was that Nephi spent time searching the meaning of the tree in the light of Christ until he was caught away by the Spirit. The meaning of the word *ponder*, as defined by the dictionary, is to "weigh mentally, consider carefully, . . . to think deeply about something" (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* [New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1969], s.v. "ponder"). Nephi spent time thinking, weighing, and deliberating on the meaning of the dream and the tree before inquiring of the Lord. This is in contrast to Oliver, who took no thought. In the end, Nephi was shown not only the dream and its meaning but received much information regarding the destiny of his people.

Another wonderful example of the power inherent in connecting the heart and mind while searching for truth is related by another Nephi at the time the resurrected Savior appeared to the people in the land Bountiful. Approximately twenty-five hundred people were gathered near the temple, marveling at the changes associated with the three days of darkness. They were also discussing the sign given concerning the Redeemer of the world (3 Nephi 11:1–2). While conversing with each other, they heard the Father's voice introduce his Son on three separate occasions. They did not understand the voice the first two times, but they did feel the power of the Spirit piercing their hearts to the center. The Spirit was so strong that it caused their frames to quake and their hearts to burn. They knew something special was about to take place, but their minds did not grasp the meaning of the Father's words. Moreover, the feeling in their hearts registered the importance of the message but not its content (3 Nephi 11:1–4).

On the third occasion, the scripture relates, the Nephites opened their ears and understood the voice, which said, "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Nephi 11:5–7). The events that follow suggest that even though they understood the words spoken on the third occasion, they did not comprehend their full meaning. They looked into the heavens and saw a Man descending, clothed in white. Upon reaching the ground, he is encircled by the Nephites, who are speechless, believing they are in the presence of an angel (3 Nephi 11:8). The thought processes of the mind and the spiritual witness in the heart have not yet combined to help them understand in whose presence they are.

The Savior then introduces himself as Jesus Christ, the light and life of the world. The Nephites learn that he has "drunk out of that bitter cup" given to him by the Father and has "glorified the Father in taking upon [himself] the sins of the world" (3 Nephi 11:11). As the Savior's words register in their minds and hearts, awe and wonderment change to worship as the multitude falls to the earth. Prior to the Savior's introduction, the thoughts and feelings of the people are disjointed. In spite of the Son being introduced by the Father,

the people are confused as to the personage descending out of the heavens. Even though the spiritual communion to the soul suggests the importance of the personage, their thoughts are not clear and their reaction is one of awe rather than one of humility. The power that comes with a clear message in the mind combined with the spiritual burning in the bosom is illustrated by the change in their demeanor as they lie prostrate, knowing they are in the presence of Deity.

Searching diligently in the light of Christ can have that same effect on each of us as we put off the natural woman or man, humble ourselves, yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, become submissive as a child, and receive the fruits of the Spirit. Like King Benjamin's people, we too may have a mighty change of heart come to us, and we will "have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2). Spiritual rebirth requires us to search diligently in the light of Christ that we may know truth. Sacred truths come when both the heart and the mind are active participants in the process.

Before leaving the Savior's visit to the Nephites, we may learn another important lesson by examining the next event. The lesson concerns the way in which the Lord works with us and his desire and ability to help each person. In the fourteenth verse of 3 Nephi 11, Jesus invites the multitude to arise and approach him "one by one," to thrust their hands into his side and feel the print of the nails in his hands and feet. Remember there are twenty-five hundred people. How long would it take for each person to approach the Savior, feel the print of the nails, touch his side, and perhaps receive a brief embrace? Suppose it took fifteen seconds per person. The time required would exceed ten hours for the multitude to fulfill the invitation.

Why did Jesus do it one by one? Would it not have been just as effective for him to show the multitude all at once? The answer is no! Salvation is an individual process. Ordinances are conducted one by one. Every individual's faith counts.

Can you imagine the extraordinary feelings you would have felt had you been there that day? Suppose you were invited to approach the Savior, feel the wounds in his hands and feet, see your hand disappear into his side, and hear him quietly say how much he loves you. That would be a spiritually transforming experience.

The invitation extended to the righteous Nephites was unusual in that the resurrected Christ was physically present. And yet each person has an invitation to "come unto Christ" (Moroni 10:32), to become his sons and daughters through a spiritual rebirth. In a different way, we may feel the print of the nails in his hands and feet and thrust our hand into his side by experiencing the cleansing and refining power of the Atonement. The Savior knows each of us intimately through his experience in the garden and on the cross. Alma states that he took upon himself our pains, afflictions, temptations, sicknesses, and infirmities that he might know how to succor us (Alma 7:11–12). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, in a recent CES fireside, pointed out that the word *succor* in old French means literally "to run to the aid of." Elder Holland suggested that "even as [Christ] calls us to come to him . . . , he is unfailingly running to help us" (*Come unto Me*, Brigham Young University [Provo, 2 Mar. 1997], 7).

When you believe in Christ strongly enough to believe that he knows and cares about you and will respond to your prayers and needs, you will lay hold on good things.

### *Lay Hold Upon Every Good Thing*

The second step along Mormon's path of discipleship is to lay hold on every good thing, to incorporate sacred truths into our lives. This involves faith, repentance, participation in sacred covenants, companionship of the Holy Spirit, and enduring to the end. It does not mean laying hold on every good thing all at once. The principle is "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" (2 Nephi 28:30). Also, the command to serve God with "all your heart, might, mind and strength" (D&C 4:2) should leave one exhausted at the end of life, not midway through the journey. The Lord expects us to pace ourselves, to "run and not be weary, and . . . walk and not faint" (D&C 89:20).

The prophet Nephi explains what it means to serve God with all one's heart. He states that the objective is to serve with "full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception, . . . but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism . . . then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost" (2 Nephi 31:13).

To serve with all one's heart is to serve with full purpose of heart. The concern is with direction, not speed. The process allows for repentance. What counts is one's desire and determination, not an extraordinary burst of energy. Although the Lord expects us to do our best, he is looking for steady candlepower on a hill and not bright flashes in the sky which briefly illuminate but then fade.

The woman who touched Christ's garment and was healed is a wonderful example of faith, determination, and resoluteness. Her motives were pure. There was no hypocrisy or deception as she hoped her actions would go unnoticed. She did not want to inconvenience the Master or disturb those listening to him. The woman had spent all her income on physicians, expecting to be cured of a blood disease but to no avail. With great faith, this sister disciple sought out Jesus and in the midst of a crowd "came behind him, and touched the border of his garment" and was healed. Jesus experienced the withdrawal of spiritual power. He inquired of his disciples, "Who touched me?" The disciples pointed to the multitude thronging him and suggested that it could be any number of persons. Jesus persisted, sensing the special person in his midst and the nature of the event. The woman then came forward, "trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:43-48).

The story teaches at least two lessons. One concerns Christ's spiritual sensitivity to the individual woman. In the midst of the multitude pressing against him, he was aware that one person not only had touched him physically but had made contact with the garment of his soul. The other lesson is the depth of the woman's faith. Because of her faith, she was healed both physically and spiritually. The phrase "thy faith hath made thee whole" often

refers to a spiritual healing. It is the same phrase Christ used to bless the one leper who returned to express thanks. All ten lepers were cleansed of leprosy, but only one was made whole—only one was cleansed from within (Luke 17:11–19). It is also the phrase used by the Lord in answering Enos's question regarding forgiveness of sin. When the voice said, "Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed," Enos inquired as to how it was possible. The answer was "thy faith hath made thee whole" (Enos 1:5–8). Enos's spiritual cleansing came through faith. His faith had the power to produce humility, repentance, and a baptism of water and fire. The woman's faith brought the same power enjoyed by Enos and the leper. Her faith produced a spiritual rebirth in addition to solving her physical problem. Her faith and determination allowed her to lay hold on two good gifts.

As mentioned earlier, the race is not necessarily to the swift but to those who endure—those who continue in the quest to lay hold on good things, those who are facing in the right direction, those still striving to eliminate a few discordant notes in their lives. In the tenth chapter of Moroni, the prophet states that Christ's grace is sufficient, that we will be "perfected in him" if we deny ourselves of ungodliness (v. 33). The sufficiency of the Atonement is symbolized by the twelve baskets of broken bread which remained following Christ's feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Jesus spoke of the infinite nature of the Atonement as he addressed the multitude on the hillside following the meal. He stated: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 5:1–14, 32–35; 6:35). The capacity of the Atonement is more than sufficient to wash our garments white though they be as scarlet, to lift and change us from mortality to immortality, from corruptible to incorruptible beings (Isaiah 1:18; 1 Corinthians 15:42–44). For most of us, this spiritual rebirth process stretches across a lifetime and into the next, as we are refined one step and one principle at a time.

### *The Blessing of Enduring*

Almost thirty years ago I met a wonderful sister who, in the intervening years, demonstrated the power of enduring to the end. Her name is Virginia Cutler. She is now deceased, having passed away four years ago. Virginia and I met in West Africa during the summer of 1969. At the time, she was serving as a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Ghana, developing a home economics department for the university. I was a member of a World Bank team advising the government on economic matters. The two of us plus one other were the only members of the Church in the country at the time. We met on occasion to discuss the gospel, our common interests, and our work. Anyone acquainted with Virginia will remember her infectious personality, her wonderful laugh, her quick mind, her acceptance of all people as brothers and sisters, and her generosity.

During the summer we became good friends, and I learned the story of her life. She was born in humble circumstances in Park City. Her family later moved to Murray, where she completed high school. She entered the University of Utah on a four-year scholarship, graduating in 1926. She taught for a short time and then married Ralph Cutler. They settled in Salt Lake County, where he farmed. Within two years of the marriage, her husband came in from the farm one day deathly ill. Within a few hours he was gone. At the time, she had one little boy and another soon to be born. It was 1931, the depths of the Depression. She

returned to teaching in order to provide for herself and her young family. Within a short time, however, she had a strong desire to improve her circumstances. Not sure of the path to take, she visited with her bishop. He encouraged her in her desire to seek more education. She visited her former faculty members at the University of Utah. They encouraged her to apply for a scholarship at Stanford, where, through a number of miracles and the help of many people, she completed her master's degree. Then she went on to Cornell, where she received her Ph.D. It took fifteen years from the time she entered Stanford until she finished at Cornell, but it was deliberate: She managed the programs so that the two boys were an integral part of her life.

In 1946, she returned home to head the Home Economics Department at the University of Utah. Within a few years, the boys had matured, and she accepted an appointment with the U. S. State Department as an education advisor in southeast Asia with assignments in Thailand and Indonesia. Seven years passed, and then she returned to Utah to become dean of the College of Family Living at Brigham Young University. Near the end of her career, she was now a Fulbright Scholar, establishing a program to train young women to become better mothers, teachers, and homemakers in West Africa.

Toward the end of the summer, as both of us were preparing to return to the United States, she shared one regret that had occupied her thoughts for some time. For most of the years following her husband's death, she had lived in places where LDS populations were sparse and temples did not exist. Consequently, temple worship had not been a significant factor in her life. She believed that there was one more good thing she should lay hold upon. She then told me of her plan. A new temple had been announced for Provo, Utah. She would return to her small Provo apartment, and when the temple opened she would begin serving. Her goal was to perform as many endowment ordinances as there had been weeks since receiving her first recommend as a young woman. It had been almost fifty years, and the goal was twenty-five hundred.

Upon our returning to the United States, our paths did not cross for another eleven years. In 1980, I was called as stake president of the Provo Utah Sharon East Stake. One of the first members to seek renewal of a temple recommend was my friend, Virginia, a member of the stake. Following the interview, as we were reminiscing about our African odyssey, she said, "President Bateman, do you remember our conversation in which I shared my temple goals with you?"

### ***I remembered! How could I forget?***

She then said, "I have almost completed my goal. May I share with you a special experience I had in the temple recently? During one of the sessions I was thinking about the sisters for whom I had performed vicarious ordinances. I began wondering if they were aware of the work I had done. Was someone on the other side helping them? I wondered if my husband was aware of my efforts and if he was preparing the sisters to receive their blessings." Typical of Virginia, she then said, "He better be!" She continued, "As those thoughts passed through my mind, I suddenly saw a man's hand pierce the veil of mortality from the other side. I recognized the hand. It was my husband's. I had not seen it in sixty

years. I knew he was there. I knew that he knew of my work and that he was assisting sisters on the other side of the veil. I was so glad to be in the temple that day. I can hardly wait to greet him and the sisters he will introduce to me."

Sister Virginia Cutler was faithful to the end. By laying hold upon one more good thing, she took hold of her husband's hand and became his partner in the work beyond the veil. One more good thing brought much happiness to her in her later life. Today, she counts twenty-five-hundred women among her best friends. From my association with her, I confirm that she has the capacity for many more friends.

Sisters, I am grateful for a Savior and Redeemer. I appreciate his teachings and the great plan of happiness. I am grateful to know that we are spirit sons and daughters of an Almighty Father and that we can become begotten daughters and sons of the resurrected Lord through diligently searching in his light and applying his truths in our lives. May each of us continue the quest for eternal life by "laying hold upon every good thing" (Moroni 7:19), in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.