

He Does Not Take Counsel from His Fears

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This life experience is a wonderful, exciting time. It is given to us by a loving Father that we might “have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25). Life is full of many things bright and beautiful and things that bring us challenges and difficulties. Many of our experiences—both the wonderful and the hard—come to us simply because they are part of this earth life. Some things that we experience are brought upon us by others. These can be blessings we receive through no effort of our own, or challenges inflicted when we have no choice in the matter. And some of our experiences are of our own making as we use our agency. All of our experiences, both the positive and the negative, if used wisely, can bring us closer to Heavenly Father in this life and closer to an eternal relationship with Him. All of them are part of His plan of happiness. Basically, this means that as we partake of the good things life has to offer, we can find great joy and fulfillment. It also means that as we have to face the hard things, we have choices to make. We can choose to turn away from the Father in fear, anger, weariness, bitterness, rebellion, or discouragement, or we can choose to embrace all of what life brings with a determination to stay close to our Father in Heaven. We can choose to be strong as we endure and trust in His love and in His Atonement. We can choose to follow Him in faith.

Our beloved prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, is a wonderful example of a man of faith. President Thomas S. Monson said of him, “He’s a man that does not take counsel from his fears”¹ When you think of all that President Hinckley is responsible for, and who he is responsible to, it’s not hard to imagine that fear, doubt, and feelings of being overwhelmed might creep into his mind and heart. But always we see him as an example of optimism, love, encouragement, strength, and hard work. Rather than taking counsel from his fears, he never lets them enter. He does not give them equal time in thought and energy. He is proactive and diligent in his service to the Lord. We see him as a man of faith.

Living in faith is the opposite of taking counsel from our fears. Let’s talk for a few minutes about this first principle of the gospel—faith. The Bible Dictionary says, “Faith is to hope for things which are not seen, but which are true.” And “to have faith is to have confidence in something or someone.”² Our question might be: “Who and what should we have faith in?” Of course, first and

foremost we must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in His Atonement. In *Preach My Gospel*, the wonderful book that our missionaries are now using, we read this beautiful explanation: “When you have faith in Christ, you believe in Him as the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father in the Flesh. You accept Him as your Savior and Redeemer and follow His teachings. You believe that your sins can be forgiven through His Atonement. Faith in Him means that you trust Him and are confident that He loves you.”³

Faith must be our foundation. Our very salvation depends on whether we have faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. We must seek through study and prayer to know this truth. We must accept His Atonement into our own lives as we work to overcome our weaknesses. We must accept His forgiveness and forgive ourselves. But the last sentence of this statement is the part that I believe can take each of us from having a basic testimony of the Savior and His Atonement to hoping and then trusting that it really will work for me—and that He loves me enough to know me, to help me, and to forgive my sins, no matter how large or small. Listen to this sentence again: “Faith in Him means that you trust Him and are confident that He loves you.”

This kind of faith makes it possible for us to face life and all of its complexities, both positive and negative.

So, let’s talk about real life for a moment—my life, your life. Do you ever find yourself wondering if you have enough faith? Do you ever feel that life is just too hard? Do you ever begin to get discouraged, to worry and doubt? I think all of us can answer yes to one or all of these questions. But I do not believe that this necessarily means that we don’t have any faith. This is because developing faith is a process. It is because we are learning and growing every day of our lives. It is because our faith increases over time and with use. It is because as our faith is tested, we may struggle. Let me give you an example. Years ago, one of our sons was diagnosed with cancer. At first I was downright fearful. Then I began to worry like crazy. I worried about his life, because the prognosis was not good. I worried about his little family. I worried about his finances. I worried about his future. I worried about everything. At first, this worry and fear made me physically sick. I became ineffective in my duties and responsibilities as a wife and mother.

However, this fear and worry took me to my knees and to the scriptures. I sought for direction, comfort, and strength. I began to feel the stirrings of faith. I found that the scriptures became a living thing for me. Every time I opened them I found something that brought peace to my soul. I found that my prayers became more heartfelt than ever before. I prayed for faith sufficient to accept His will. I determined what I needed to do in my life to become more worthy to receive the blessings I sought. I learned where I could turn for peace. Through this experience, I also found that while one day my faith would be strong, the next day, when a negative test result would come, my faith would be shaken. Each experience would take me to my knees again, to the scriptures again, to the Lord again. I learned that to have faith is a process—an ongoing process. We have to always work at it. But I also learned that the Lord does love us; He is in charge. He will always answer our prayers for our best good. This does not mean the answer will always be yes, or that the answer will come now. Accepting this can strengthen our faith.

Can we not suppose that this is the very design of heaven? We have to endure trials, we have to

submit our will to our Heavenly Father, and we have to trust and labor with our weaknesses in order to become strong—to become like Him, to come to Him. Each experience we have that tests our faith, if we pass it well, accepting the will of the Lord, will strengthen us in preparation for the next such experience. Elder Richard G. Scott talked about this concept in April 2003 general conference:

“The Lord . . . doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.” . . .

“. . . As you walk to the boundary of your understanding into the twilight of uncertainty, exercising faith, you will be led to find solutions you would not obtain otherwise. . . .

“. . . Every time you *try your faith*—that is, act in worthiness on an impression—you will receive the confirming evidence of the Spirit. Those feelings will fortify your faith. As you repeat that pattern, your faith will become stronger.⁴

I have found this to be true. Each time a trial comes, I have to go through the process of building up my faith. But as each new experience strengthens me, I seem to be able to start with a stronger foundation of knowledge and faith.

There are some other principles concerning faith that I would like to mention. One is that faith is a principle of power. The power of God is accessed by faith. It is the power to endure, the power to overcome, the power to accept the Lord’s will.

We have all heard of the faith of a mustard seed having the power to move mountains. Well, what are the mountains in our lives? Maybe you have a really big mountain in your life right now. Maybe you just have lots of little molehills. Our lives as women in the Church are so full and rich, and yet full of stress. I remember looking down the bench in sacrament meeting one Sunday and seeing my children struggling to behave appropriately. Their dad was the bishop and was on the stand. The speaker was talking about the blessings of having families. I was exhausted and I thought to myself, “My greatest blessings are my greatest trials!”

Wherever you are in your life, as a mother, wife, sister, daughter, friend—woman—there are things that will be better met if they are met with faith. Jesus taught, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain [or this molehill], Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt. 17:20). Our molehills, conquered with faith, prepare us for moving the mountains in our lives.

Another principle of faith is that it must lead to action. We read in James 2:17-18: “Even so, faith, if it hath not works, is dead. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” Some of the actions of faith are repentance, obedience, and dedicated service. Our faith is manifest through diligence and work. Just professing that we have faith is not enough. Faith is not an abstract principle. It is living, breathing, acting. Our faith has to be in motion for the Lord’s blessings to come. We must pray as if everything depends on the Lord, and then get up and work as if everything depends on us. When I was called to be the Primary general president, President Hinckley told me that he wanted me to take care of all the children of the world. Then he asked me if I thought I could do

that! Well, you can imagine what fear that put in my heart. But he didn't leave it there. He opened the door to faith as he instructed me to rely on the Lord and to just work at it. Fear brings inertia into our lives and then a gradual decline of our testimony and faith. To have faith is to face forward, take positive action, find peace, and feel the confidence of the Spirit as we go to work.

Faith also means to endure. There are some things in our lives that we cannot change. Our hearts must be open to the Lord and we must be willing to accept some of the challenges that come, even as we have faith in future blessings. Let me give you an example. My dear mother lost her sweetheart, my father, over four years ago. He had suffered from Parkinson's disease. She spent her strength as she nursed him and cared for him with great love and with great faith in the plan of our Father in Heaven. When Dad died, I wondered how Mom would go on. He had been her whole life. It was then that her faith really became clear to me. She has been lonely, yes, and there have been hard days, but she has never really felt the despair of deep grief because she knows where he is, what he is doing, and that they will be reunited again. She does get anxious to join him, but she is sweet and peaceful and happy while she is here, blessing all who know her with her faith. She endures, but more than that she rejoices in knowing what the waiting will bring. She simply waits upon the Lord.

Now, how can we come to the point that we can demonstrate that kind of faith? It begins by believing, by opening our hearts to the Lord. We must trust in the Lord. In Alma 36:3 we read: "Whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day." As was mentioned before, faith is the opposite of fear. We must get rid of our fears. We read in Doctrine and Covenants 6:36: "Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not." Joseph Smith said it this way: "For where doubt is, there faith has no power. For doubt and faith do not exist in the same person at the same time; so that persons whose minds are under doubts and fears cannot have unshaken confidence; and where unshaken confidence is not there faith is weak . . . and they will grow weary in their minds, and the adversary will have power over them."⁵ That is an interesting concept. Without faith we become weak and weary, beaten down by all the challenges in our lives. It is at that point that Satan begins to gain power over us. It is so important that we turn to the Lord for His help before we get to this point, recognizing where our strength comes from.

Next, we must recognize that when we pray to our Heavenly Father for blessings we need, having faith that He can help us is not enough. We must qualify ourselves by becoming worthy to receive the blessings we seek. As President Lee taught: "If you want the blessing, don't just kneel down and pray about it. Prepare yourselves in every conceivable way you can in order to make yourselves worthy to receive the blessing you seek."⁶ This means really looking at our lives and making choices about what is most important. Are the things we are spending our time doing bringing us closer to Jesus Christ, or are they merely taking up space and time? Many of our choices in this life are between good and good. Sometimes we have to accept that we cannot do everything. We have to set priorities. We must make sure we are choosing wisely, using an eternal perspective. Elder Bednar said:

"If we put essential things first in our lives—things such as dedicated discipleship, honoring covenants, and keeping the commandments—then we will be blessed with inspiration and strong

judgment as we pursue the path that leads us back to our heavenly home. If we put essential things first, we ‘cannot go amiss.’ ”⁷

This seems to instruct us as to what we need to choose to do, but it also implies that as we make good choices, we will see more clearly what choices we need to make in the future.

Then we must seek to have the Holy Ghost with us, and learn to hear His quiet, gentle whisperings. The still, small voice brings thoughts, inclinations, and impressions into our minds and confirms them in our hearts. If we are watchful, we will be able to tell when it is the Holy Ghost because of the good that will come of it. As we learn to listen and discern the voice of the Holy Ghost, we must act on what we receive.

As we turn to the scriptures, we see all of these things illustrated in the life of young Nephi when he was given something really hard to do. He was asked to go back to Jerusalem and get the records. It was a long way. It would take a long time and a lot of effort. It was dangerous, and there was no guarantee that they would be successful. And to make matters worse, his two older brothers were against going. But what was Nephi’s response? He said something that we can all quote: “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Ne. 3:7). Here is a declaration of great faith. But the part of this story that I love best comes in the next chapter. “And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. Nevertheless I went forth” (1 Nephi 4:6–7). Nephi’s faith in the Lord, his willingness to listen to the Spirit, and his courage to do what he was asked to do qualified him in the sight of the Lord. Things were not always easy for him—in fact, we don’t know of much that was easy for him. We know that he was a man of faith.

We too can rely on the Lord to guide us. We may not be able to see the end from the beginning, but we can follow the impressions of the Spirit, and eventually we will see what it is that the Lord had in mind for us all along. We can go forth.

Lastly, I would like to mention having faith in the Lord’s timing. So much of the time, when I petition the Lord, I want it right now. When this doesn’t happen or when the answers aren’t exactly what I thought they should be, I must remember that the Lord requires us to have patience along with faith. We often must wait for the Lord’s promised blessings to be fulfilled. This act of waiting is a trial to our faith in and of itself. It can strengthen us, or it can throw us right back into the cycle of doubt and fear. If we do not understand some of the ways that the Lord answers our prayers, our faith may be shaken. He may answer yes. He may give us answers a little at a time over a long period of time. He may say no, or we may feel as though we are not getting any answer at all. We must just have the faith that the Lord knows what is best for us. He wants what is best for us.

Sometimes, with our limited vision, we are not able to understand. But as our faith in Him grows, we can come to realize that we do not always need to understand. Our understanding does not change a thing. We can put our hand in His, not taking counsel from our fears, and move forward in our lives, with freedom born of faith and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ.

President Hinckley said: “When I discuss faith, I do not mean it in an abstract sense. I mean it as a living, vital force with recognition of God as our Father and Jesus Christ as our Savior. When we accept this basic premise, there will come an acceptance of their teachings and an obedience which will bring peace and joy in this life and exaltation in the life to come.”⁸

I am grateful for our beloved prophet, who teaches and testifies of our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. I know that Jesus Christ is our Savior, that He lives, He loves us, and He waits for us to come to Him in faith. I know that faith is a real, vital force in our lives and that as we live in faith, rather than in fear, we can be happy, we can serve others, we can become what our Father in Heaven would have us become. I know that it is through faith that we can return to Them.

Notes

1. Thomas S. Monson, comments at anniversary of current First Presidency, March 2005.
2. Bible Dictionary.
3. *Preach My Gospel*, 116.
4. Richard G. Scott, “The Sustaining Power of Faith in Times of Uncertainty and Testing,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 76-77.
5. *Lectures on Faith* [1985], 71.
6. *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee* [1996], 129.
7. David A. Bednar, *A Reservoir of Living Water* (CES fireside for young adults), February 4, 2007; D&C 80:3.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “With All Thy Getting, Get Understanding,” *Ensign*, August 1988, 5.