

Testimony vs. “Thankamony”

Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently*, pp. 274-275. (Emphasis added.)

There is a great responsibility in bearing *pure testimony*. Sometimes I think *too little of it is done in the Church*. I had an experience in the mission field that taught me much about testimony. In spite of the fact that all seemed to be under control, we were not progressing as we should. It was not something we were doing that we ought not to do so much, I felt, as something we were not doing that we ought to be doing.

We held a series of zone conferences to improve the spirituality in the mission. Rather than schedule instruction on the mechanics of missionary work, we determined to have a testimony meeting.

In the last conference, in the testimony of one of the humble elders, I found the answer to the problem. There was something different about the brief testimony of this frightened new elder. He stood for less than a minute, yet I learned from his experience what it was that was missing.

The testimonies we’d heard from all the other missionaries went something like this: I’m *grateful* to be in the mission field. I’ve learned a lot from it. I have a fine companion. I’ve learned a lot from him. I’m *grateful* for my parents. We had an interesting experience last week. We were out knocking on doors and...

Then the missionary would relate an experience. His conclusion would be something like this: “I’m *grateful* to be in the mission field. I have a testimony of the gospel.” And he would conclude “in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

This young elder was different somehow. Anxious not to spend an extra second on his feet, he said simply, in hurried, frightened words, “I *know* that God lives. I *know* that Jesus is the Christ. I *know* that we have a prophet of God leading the Church. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

This was a testimony. It was *not just an experience nor an expression of gratitude*. It was a *declaration*, a witness!

Most of the elders had said “I have a testimony,” but they had *not declared it*. This young elder had, in a very few words, delivered his testimony—direct, basic, and, as it turned out, powerful.

I then knew what was wrong in the mission. We were *telling stories, expressing gratitude, admitting that we had testimonies, but we were not bearing them*.

Dallin H. Oaks, “Testimony,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 26–29
Knowledge encourages obedience, and obedience enhances knowledge.

A testimony of the gospel is a personal witness borne to our souls by the Holy Ghost that certain facts of eternal significance are true and that we know them to be true. Such facts include the nature of the Godhead and our relationship to its three members, the effectiveness of the Atonement, and the reality of the Restoration.

A testimony of the gospel is **not a travelogue, a health log, or an expression of love for family members. It is not a sermon.** President Kimball taught that the moment we begin preaching to others, our testimony is ended.¹ ...

While there are some “evidences” for gospel truths (for example, see Psalm 19:1; Helaman 8:24), scientific methods will not yield spiritual knowledge. This is what Jesus taught in response to Simon Peter’s testimony that He was the Christ: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not

revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). The Apostle Paul explained this. In a letter to the Corinthian Saints, he said, “The things of God knoweth no man, but [by] the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11; see also John 14:17).

In contrast, we know the things of man by the ways of man, but “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The Book of Mormon teaches that God will manifest the truth of spiritual things unto us by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Moroni 10:4–5). In modern revelation God promises us that we will receive “knowledge” by His telling us in our mind and in our heart “by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 8:1–2).

One of the greatest things about our Heavenly Father’s plan for His children is that each of us can know the truth of that plan for ourselves. That revealed knowledge does not come from books, from scientific proof, or from intellectual pondering. As with the Apostle Peter, we can receive that knowledge directly from our Heavenly Father through the witness of the Holy Ghost...

The first step in gaining any kind of knowledge is to really desire to know. In the case of spiritual knowledge, the next step is to ask God in sincere prayer. As we read in modern revelation, “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal” (D&C 42:61).

Here is what Alma wrote about what he did: “Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit” (Alma 5:46)...

Another way to seek a testimony seems astonishing when compared with the methods of obtaining other knowledge. We gain or strengthen a testimony by bearing it. Someone even suggested that some testimonies are better gained on the feet bearing them than on the knees praying for them.

A personal testimony is fundamental to our faith. Consequently, the things we must do to acquire, strengthen, and retain a testimony are vital to our spiritual life. In addition to those already stated, we need to partake of the sacrament each week (see D&C 59:9) to qualify for the precious promise that we will “always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77). Of course, that Spirit is the source of our testimonies....

We live in a time when some misrepresent the beliefs of those they call Mormons and even revile us because of them. When we encounter such misrepresentations, we have a duty to speak out to clarify our doctrine and what we believe. We should be the ones to state our beliefs rather than allowing others the final word in misrepresenting them. This calls for testimony, which can be expressed privately to an acquaintance or publicly in a small or large meeting. As we testify of the truth we know, we should faithfully follow the caution to speak “in mildness and in meekness” (D&C 38:41). We should never be overbearing, shrill, or reviling. As the Apostle Paul taught, we should speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:15). Anyone can disagree with our personal testimony, but no one can refute it.

In closing, I refer to the relationship between obedience and knowledge. Members who have a testimony and who act upon it under the direction of their Church leaders are sometimes accused of blind obedience.

Of course, we have leaders, and of course, we are subject to their

decisions and directions in the operation of the Church and in the performance of needed priesthood ordinances. But when it comes to learning and knowing the truth of the gospel—our personal testimonies—we each have a direct relationship with God, our Eternal Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, through the powerful witness of the Holy Ghost. This is what our critics fail to understand. It puzzles them that we can be united in following our leaders and yet independent in knowing for ourselves.

Perhaps the puzzle some feel can be explained by the reality that each of us has two different channels to God. We have a channel of governance through our prophet and other leaders. This channel, which has to do with doctrine, ordinances, and commandments, results in obedience. We also have a channel of personal testimony, which is direct to God. This has to do with His existence, our relationship to Him, and the truth of His restored gospel. This channel results in knowledge. These two channels are mutually reinforcing: knowledge encourages obedience (see Deuteronomy 5:27; Moses 5:11), and obedience enhances knowledge (see John 7:17; D&C 93:1).

We all act upon or give obedience to knowledge. Whether in science or religion, our obedience is not blind when we act upon knowledge suited to the subject of our action. A scientist receives and acts upon a trusted certification of the content or conditions of a particular experiment. In matters of religion, a believer's source of knowledge is spiritual, but the principle is the same. In the case of Latter-day Saints, when the Holy Ghost gives our souls a witness of the truth of the restored gospel and the calling of a modern prophet, our choice to follow those teachings is not blind obedience.

In all of our testifying we must avoid arrogance and pride. We should remember the Book of Mormon rebuke to a people who had such pride in the greater things God had given them that they afflicted their neighbors (see Jacob 2:20). Jacob said this was "abominable unto him who created all flesh" because "the one being is as precious in his sight as the other" (Jacob 2:21). Later, Alma cautioned that "ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another" (Mosiah 23:7)....

Note: 1. See *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 138.

Hartman Rector, Jr., *Conference Report*, April 1974, p. 159. (Emphasis added.)

Bearing testimony has to do with bearing witness to that which we *know* to be *true*. **Much of what we call testimony bearing is not really testimony at all—it is a statement or expression of public thanks.** It is good to be thankful, *but public thanks is not testimony.*

Testimony comes from the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of Christ, which John testifies is "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (Jn 1:9), will lead a man to Christ and help him get a testimony, and if followed will lead to baptism in Jesus Christ's church.

Bruce R. McConkie, "Foolishness of Teaching," (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981. Emphasis added.)

... testimonies that are borne in sacrament meeting—a lot of them will *just be expressions of thanksgiving or of appreciation for parents or this or that.* Sometimes there will be a testimony that says in words that the work is true and that Jesus is the Lord and Joseph Smith is a prophet. And that raises the level.

Henry B. Erying, "Witnesses for God," *Ensign*, Nov 1996, p. 32.

Those who have prepared carefully for the fast and testimony meeting won't need to be reminded how to bear testimony should they feel impressed to do it in the meeting. They won't give sermons nor exhortations nor travel reports nor try to entertain as they bear witness. Because they will have already expressed appreciation [thanks] to people privately, they will have less need to do it publicly. Neither will they feel a need to use eloquent language or to go on at length.

M. Russell Ballard, "Pure Testimony," *Ensign*, Nov 2004, pp. 40-43.

...Personal testimony is the foundation of our faith. It is the binding power that makes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unique in the lives of its members, as compared with all other religious denominations of the world. The doctrine of the Restoration is glorious in and of itself, but the thing that makes it powerful and imbues it with great meaning is the personal testimonies of Church members worldwide who accept the Restoration of the gospel and strive to live its teachings every day of their lives.

A Testimony is a witness or confirmation of eternal truth impressed upon individual hearts and souls through the Holy Ghost, whose primary ministry is to testify of truth, particularly as it relates to the Father and the Son. When one receives a testimony of truth through this divinely appointed process, it immediately begins to have impact on that person's life....

Simply stated, testimony—real testimony, born of the Spirit and confirmed by the Holy Ghost—changes lives. It changes how you think and what you do. It changes what you say. It affects every priority you set and every choice you make. To have a real and abiding testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be "spiritually ... born of God," to "[receive] his image in your countenances," and to experience a "mighty change in your hearts" (Alma 5:14.)

Like almost everything else in life, testimonies grow and develop through experience and service. We often hear some members, and especially children, bear their testimonies, listing things for which they are thankful: their love of family, the Church, their teachers, their friends. For them, the gospel is something that they are **grateful** for because it makes them feel happy and secure. This is a good beginning, **but testimonies need to be much more.** They need to be anchored very early to the first principles of the gospel....

My experience throughout the Church leads me to worry that too many of our members' testimonies linger on "I am thankful" and "I love," and too few are able to say with humble but sincere clarity, "I know." As a result, our meetings sometimes lack the testimony-rich, spiritual underpinnings that stir the soul and have meaningful, positive impact on the lives of all those who hear them.

Our testimony meetings need to be more centered on the Savior, the doctrines of the gospel, the blessings of the Restoration, and the teachings of the scriptures. **We need to replace stories, travelogues, and lectures with pure testimonies.** Those who are entrusted to speak and teach in our meetings need to do so with doctrinal power that will be both heard and felt, lifting the spirits and edifying our people....

The lesson, I believe, is clear: having a testimony alone is not enough. In fact, when we are truly converted, we cannot be restrained from testifying. And as it was with Apostles and faithful members of old, so is it also our privilege, our duty, and

our solemn obligation to “declare the things which [we] know to be true” (D&C 80:4).

Again, please keep in mind that we are talking about sharing real testimony, **not just speaking generally about the things we are thankful for**. While it is always good to express love and gratitude, **such expressions do not constitute the kind of testimony that will ignite a fire of belief in the lives of others**. To bear testimony is “to bear witness by the power of the Holy Ghost; to make a solemn declaration of truth based on personal knowledge or belief” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Testify,” 241)....

Although we can have testimonies of many things as members of the Church, there are basic truths we need to constantly teach one another and share with those not of our faith. Testify that God is our Father and Jesus is the Christ. The plan of salvation is centered on the Savior’s Atonement. Joseph Smith restored the fullness of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Book of Mormon is evidence that our testimony is true.

“**Prepare a Testimony,**” *Church News*, September 23, 2006, 16.

... In a May 2, 2002, letter, the First Presidency stated: “Parents and teachers should help children learn what a testimony is and when it is appropriate for them to express it. It may be best to have younger children learn to share their testimonies at such times as family home evening or when giving talks in Primary until they are old enough to do so in a fast and testimony meeting.”

Similar encouragement can be found in the Church Handbook of Instructions and Church publications (see “When Children Want to Bear Testimony,” Elder Carl B. Cook, *Ensign*, December 2002)....

... the testimony is a true and natural expression of one’s own feelings and convictions, rather than a prepared message, repeating phrases from a prompting family member or an exercise to seek the approval of others.

But the preparing of one’s testimony and understanding exactly what a testimony is and how it is best expressed in a public gathering such as fast and testimony meeting is something all can apply and appreciate.

It is not a “thank-you-mony” in which individuals focus on expressing gratitude to others. It is not a “travelogue-mony” to alert others where we’ve been and what we’ve seen.

A public testimony is not a time for the preaching of sermons or lengthy narratives, the unveiling of personal challenges and sacred experiences nor the collection of repetitious statements.

In short, members should avoid anything that detracts from the spirit of a worship service.

In the same May 2002 letter, the First Presidency—expressing concern that some expressions in fast and testimony meeting were precluding the opportunities for all members desirous to bear testimony—suggested that we “learn to express a brief, heartfelt testimony of the Savior, His teachings and the Restoration, so that more members may have the opportunity to participate.”

“Testimony Tips”

The New Era, October 1993, pp. 34-35

- DO tell what you know about the gospel.
- DO talk about the things you are striving to gain a testimony of.
- DO pray for support and confirmation of your testimony before you bear it, even if it’s just a small prayer in your heart.

DO take bearing your testimony seriously and sincerely. Peer pressure shouldn’t influence you.

DO keep your testimony short and to the point.

DON’T tell long stories, whether they are about yourself or someone else. If you have a good story, it might be best to save it for the next time you are asked to give a talk.

DON’T describe the details of past sins and bad conduct.

DON’T take up too much time. Others may be waiting for their turn.

DON’T talk only about friends and family. Testimony bearing is a time to say what you know about the gospel.

DON’T be embarrassed if you get emotional.

DON’T be critical of others’ testimonies—we’re all learning. Plus, you won’t be able to feel the Spirit if you focus on the negative.

“Bearing Pure Testimony”

Robert L. Millett

(The Religious Educator, vol. 1, Spring 2000, [Provo: The Religious Studies Center, BYU], pp. 26-45.) I have been interested over the years in the manner in which testimonies are borne. While serving in a stake presidency a number of years ago, I had the responsibility for the youth programs of the stake. One year I worked closely with the stake Young Men’s and Young Women’s presidents in the planning of a youth conference. Because the young people of the stake were so spread out, because they saw one another so seldom, we wanted this two-day conference to be just right, to combine the elements of sociality and spirituality in such a way as to really make a difference in the lives of the youth. All of the events of Saturday morning and evening (including a dance) had gone so well. And now we wanted more than anything for the testimony meeting, held early Sunday morning, to be the highlight of the conference. Special musical numbers were arranged. The setting was prepared. I asked that the Young Men’s and Young Women’s presidents stand at the first of the meeting and bear brief, heartfelt testimonies, to set the tone of the meeting and to model what we hoped would come to pass.

There was a brief pause after the Young Women’s president had expressed her testimony. Then the youth became involved. A young lady from one of the distant branches spoke: “I want to stand and bear my testimony. I want to tell Laura (a young woman to whom she pointed) how much I love her. I want her to know how much she means to me.” The speaker was very emotional, but managed to spend about ten minutes telling stories about herself and Laura. She closed. At that point Laura stood up, came to the pulpit, and said: “I want to bear my testimony. I want to tell Stephanie how much I love her.” She cried and cried, told stories about how the two of them had romped and played as little children, and about how close they were. Before she sat down she added: “Oh, I also need to tell Bill what a difference he has made in my life. He’s been a wonderful friend to Stephanie and me. We love you, Bill.” As we might guess, Stephanie was followed by Bill, who was followed by the person about whom Bill spoke, and so on for about forty-five minutes.

This approach to things was broken suddenly by one young lady striding up to the stand and with much confidence saying: “I’ve been thinking about this meeting for some time, wondering what I should speak about, and so I went to my Mom and asked her what I should say. My mother suggested that I tell you what

her Catholic priest taught her: ‘Every time we sin, we drive the crown of thorns deeper into the skull of Jesus.’” She then encouraged us as a congregation to avoid sin. At this point the stake president, who sat two chairs from me, let out with a quiet groan which indicated his disappointment with the meeting. But frankly, things had been going fine when I consider where they would head for the next little while! A young man from one of the local wards came up to the pulpit carrying a folder. He opened the folder, took out several legal-size sheets of paper, and began: “My talk today is on the Sacrament.” This person then delivered an eleven minute sermon on the importance of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, on the need for being worthy to take the bread and water each Sunday morning, and on the meaning of taking upon us the name of Christ. It was really quite good.

At about the midpoint of the meeting, a young man came to the stand and took charge for about twenty-five minutes: he began by telling a few jokes, told a number of sad stories, and then (having elicited both laughter and tears) said: “Hey, I’m pretty good at this. I think I’ll be an entertainer!” The congregation roared. At least most of them did. The stake president groaned again. (He slipped me a note which said simply: “This meeting is a disaster.” I nodded to him my agreement of his assessment.) I sweat. The Young Women’s president wept. The Young Men’s president sighed. I wasn’t sure what to do, whether to close the meeting, cast out the strange spirit there, or simply get up and explain what was wrong. The stake leaders, all of us, knew that this was a sensitive time, that feelings were delicate, that persons are easily hurt or their efforts easily stifled. So we did nothing. We sat. And we sat. Painfully, we sat.

After about two hours, a young man came to the pulpit, a boy we didn’t recognize. He was extremely nervous, so much so that he dared not even lift his head to look at the congregation. He stammered: “My friends or, uh ... brothers and sisters, I ... uh ... would like to ... uh ... share some of my feelings. I am not a Mormon, not a member of your church, and so I don’t really know how to bear testimony.” The stake president, one of the most Christlike men I have ever known, whispered gently: “He should relax. He’s in great company!” The young man continued: “The missionaries have been teaching my family about your church for a couple of weeks now. I just wanted to let you know that I really believe in God. I feel a lot of love for Jesus, who died for me. Something inside me tells me that what the missionaries have said about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon and the Mormon Church is true. I’m happy that in a short time we will be baptized. Thank you for being so nice to me.” Then he sat down. Here was a testimony, a real testimony, and it came from the only person in our group who was not of our faith.

The meeting did finally come to an end. Mercifully, after almost three hours, it came to an end. I sat in despair. So did the other stake leaders. The stake president looked at me, shook his head in disbelief, and sighed. He then left. I turned to the stake youth leaders and said: “I’m too depressed to talk about it now. Could we meet this Wednesday evening in my office?” They agreed that we would face the music then. It was clear from the looks on their faces on Wednesday that they had spent a great deal of time in ponderous and solemn thought. So had I. Interestingly enough, each of us had had occasion on Sunday to return to our own wards and participate in the monthly fast and testimony meeting. And so I asked: “Is this a youth problem?” The Young Women’s president quickly spoke up: “No, it’s a Church problem.” She continued: “The kids do basically the same things the adults do. Perhaps the grownups are a bit more dignified and formal about it.” The

Young Men’s president nodded in agreement. I indicated that those were my feelings as well.

We sat for a long time that night, asking questions like: What’s supposed to happen in a testimony meeting? What is appropriate and what is inappropriate? Are there some expressions that are perfectly right and good in one setting but not quite right for a testimony meeting? Why was the spirit of the youth meeting so strange? **Why did so many of the youth feel it was inspirational?** Are we the ones who are out of it, insensitive to what we ought to feel? And so on. It was a sober occasion for the three of us, a vexation of the soul, painful searching after truth. We felt the need thereafter to express our concerns to the stake president and to suggest that a message be prepared and delivered by him (or whomever he recommended) on the matter of acquiring and bearing testimony, a message for the whole stake membership. As a stake presidency we first instructed the bishops and high council, turning to the scriptures and the words of living Apostles and prophets for our pattern. We stressed the need for being delicate and sensitive, of never indicating that there was one “approved” way of bearing witness, a “proper” approach to sharing one’s testimony. Rather, we strove to speak in terms of correct principles. I think some good came from the whole thing.

Seldom in my life have I spent as much time in serious reflection on a matter as I did in the weeks and month that followed that youth testimony meeting. Seldom in my life have I pondered and searched to understand the meaning and purpose of a meeting. I thought back of a thousand testimony meetings I had attended, and of the unusual things that had taken place there. I thought of my Sunday School teacher when I was twelve, a lovely young woman who loved the Lord and lived his gospel. It showed. I distinctly remember that every month in Fast and Testimony meeting she would stand up and say: “I’d like to read a message from the *Improvement Era*.” She would then read an article to the congregation. I thought it was what she was supposed to do, perhaps her church assignment or something! She did that month after month, year after year. I thought back of a middle-aged woman standing up in a testimony meeting and, with fire in her eyes and voice, saying to all of us: “You hypocrites! You phonies! You claim to be Christians. That’s a joke!” She went on to tear apart the ward for not being more helpful in fellowshiping her non-member husband. I reflected on a man standing up in testimony meeting and startling us with the following: “As many of you know, I teach the fourteen-year-olds in Sunday School. I wasn’t able to finish my lesson in time today, and so I’d like to do that now, if it’s okay with the rest of you.” He then took about fifteen minutes to complete his Sunday School lesson.

A few years ago in one of my Book of Mormon classes at Brigham Young University, after I had finished a discussion of Alma 4:19 and of the matter of bearing pure testimony, a student spoke to me after class. He said: “Brother Millet, I wanted so badly to bear my testimony in yesterday’s fast meeting in my BYU ward, but I knew that I didn’t have anything original to say. I didn’t have a special message to deliver.” This experience highlights a problem we sometimes see in the Church: the presumption that one has to deliver a message, preach a sermon, or make some original contribution to the meeting. The general handbook of instructions simply indicates that members of the Church are to be invited to bear brief, heartfelt testimonies and, where appropriate, share faith-promoting experiences. There really is no need for the members of the Church to worry one tenth of a second about coming up with something to say, about leaving the congregation with a lasting message, about giving a talk.

I frequently ask groups of returned missionaries the following questions: "Did you every have any inspirational testimony meetings on your mission?" They inevitably respond: "Oh yes. We had some great ones!" I continue: "I'll bet they were spiritual feasts because every elder or sister said something different. Right?" "Not usually," they answer. "I'll bet they were unusual spiritual experiences because each missionary came with a prepared sermon, delivered it effectively, and set the other missionaries back on their heels with the power of their oratory. Right?" "Not really," they respond. "Well then, what did the missionaries say as part of their expressions?" After a few moments' reflection, the class relates that most of the elders and sisters said about the same thing—they bore testimony of God, of Jesus as the Christ, of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, and of the guiding hand of the Lord in the Church today. Very little original stuff. But powerful. There's a lesson there.

As I understand it, the purpose of a testimony meeting is for the bearing of personal testimony. **Expressions of gratitude and love, so much a part of the lives of followers of the Christ, take a backseat to the bearing of testimonies** if in fact the meeting has been set aside for the bearing of testimonies. Letting others know how thankful we are for our blessings, as well as how much we love the Lord and one another—these expressions can and should accompany our testimony, but we are asked primarily to stand and bear witness of what we know to be true. President Spencer W. Kimball counseled a group of young people gathered in a testimony meeting: "*Do not exhort each other; that is not a testimony. Do not tell others how to live. Just tell how you feel inside. That is the testimony. The moment you begin preaching to others, your testimony ended. Just tell us how you feel, what your mind and heart and every fiber of your body tells you.*" [*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 138, {italic} emphasis added {by Millet}.] On another occasion, President Kimball said to a similar group:

Now, you are going to give your testimonies this afternoon. I hope that you'll just open your hearts and let us look inside ... will you? Just open them up wide and turn on the lights and let us see your hearts,... how you feel. *A testimony is not an exhortation; a testimony is not a sermon; none of you are here to exhort the rest. You are here to bear your own witness.* It is amazing what you can say in thirty seconds by way of testimony, or in sixty seconds, or one hundred and twenty, or two and forty, or whatever time you are given, if you confine yourselves to testimony. We'd like to know how you feel. [Unpublished address delivered in Los Angeles, California, 2 January 1969, 9, as cited in *Testimony*, comp. H. Stephen Stoker and Joseph C. Muren (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 139, emphasis added.]

I've thought back many times of the amount of **emotion** that was evident in the youth testimony meeting. I've been concerned over the years that too often our youth (and, unfortunately, some of our more experienced members) are **prone to confuse sentimentality with spirituality, tears with testimony**. Let me illustrate. One Mutual night as I came out of my bishop's office, I noticed that the Laurel class was huddled in the hall in the midst of what seemed to be quite a fascinating discussion. They appeared to be talking about one of the young women in their class who had during the last year slipped into inactivity in the Church. I heard one of the girls say, with some enthusiasm: "Well, I can tell you this much—she doesn't have much of a testimony." One of the others challenged her: "How can you say that? How do

you know?" The first replied: "Well, you think about it for a minute. I've seen her bear her testimony many times, and I've never seen her cry once!" There was a pause, a moment of reflection on the part of twelve young ladies, and then a rather visible concurrence. Most of them nodded in agreement and said: "She's right about that." I was flabbergasted.

More than twenty years ago I taught several classes of eleventh graders in seminary. My fourth period class was a remarkable group. During the first part of the year, however, I noticed something a bit unusual. Day after day for about three weeks I noticed that every devotional (to start the class and set the spiritual tone) involved some kind of death story. Somebody was dying or giving their life or blood or something. I pulled the class president aside after the third week and asked: "Fred, what's the deal with the devotionals?" He didn't follow me. "I mean, why all the morbid stories in our devotionals? Why are we so hung up with death?" Fred responded verbally in a polite manner, but the look on his face betrayed the fact that my question had totally mystified him. "Brother Millet," he came right back, "how else are we going to get the kids to cry?" I said, "Oh, I understand." I didn't follow up on the conversation at the time, but felt it was best to wait until I had thought through my response.

There's no question that when we have a genuine spiritual experience we may be touched emotionally. Tears come easily for some of us, and there should never be the slightest embarrassment about such a thing. **And yet we do ourselves and our youth a tremendous disservice if we begin to believe that an emotional experience is always a spiritual experience.** Tears may come, but they should never be **manipulated or elicited or sought for**. In the classroom, for example, there is plenty for the gospel teacher to do by way of study, prayer, preparation, organization, and presentation; **he or she must not seek to usurp the role of the Holy Ghost**. He is the Comforter. He is the Revelator. He is the Converter. He is, in reality, the Teacher. We strive to be an instrument. **We may seek and pray for an outpouring of the Spirit, but we must never attempt to manufacture the same.** President Howard W. Hunter, in speaking to Church Educational System personnel, said:

In one of the most basic revelations of this dispensation, the Lord said, "And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach" (D&C 42:14).

I take this verse to mean not only that *we should not* teach without the Spirit, but also that we really *cannot* teach without it. Learning of spiritual things simply cannot take place without the instructional and confirming presence of the Spirit of the Lord....

Let me offer a word of caution on this subject. I think if we are not careful as professional teachers working in the classroom every day, **we may begin to try to counterfeit the true influence of the Spirit of the Lord by unworthy and manipulative means**. I get concerned when it appears that strong emotion or free-flowing tears are equated with the presence of the Spirit. Certainly the Spirit of the Lord can bring strong emotional feelings, including tears, but that outward manifestation ought not to be confused with the presence of the Spirit itself.

I have watched a great many of my brethren over the years and we have shared some rare and unspeakable spiritual experiences together. Those experiences have all been different, each special in its own way, and such sacred moments may or may not be accompanied by tears. Very often they are, but sometimes they are accompanied by total silence. Other times they are

accompanied by joy. **Always they are accompanied by great manifestations of the truth, of revelation to the heart.**

Give your students gospel truth powerfully taught; that is the way to give them a spiritual experience. Let it come naturally and as it will, perhaps with the shedding of tears, but perhaps not. If what you say is the truth, and you say it purely and with honest conviction, those students will feel the spirit of the truth being taught them and will recognize that inspiration and revelation has come into their hearts. That is how we build faith. That is how we strengthen testimonies — with the power of the word of God taught in purity and with conviction. [“Eternal Investments,” address given to CES personnel, Salt Lake City, 10 February 1989, 3, {italic} emphasis in original.]

Though President Hunter’s remarks were directed primarily to full-time religious educators, the principles he enunciated certainly apply in our discussion of the bearing of pure testimony. There is something remarkable that takes place when the Latter-day Saints bear pure testimony. There is a spiritual presence that accompanies such expressions that can be felt in no other way, and there are outcomes which attest to the power and validity of doing so. Because of the growing waywardness of his people, Alma the younger determined to leave the office of chief judge or governor and devote himself to the work of the ministry. Of this occasion, Mormon wrote:

And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, *seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them.* (Alma 4:19, emphasis added [by Millet].)

There is, on the other hand, something missing when the Latter-day Saints fail to bear pure testimony. Something is lost. Elder Boyd K. Packer spoke of a time when he presided over the New England Mission. [See excerpt at the beginning of this collection. Millet quotes from it.]

A Witness Properly Rooted

I was asked some years ago by a mission president to speak to his missionaries at a zone conference. We had a lovely gathering and a fine exchange of ideas. I was invited to stay for lunch and visit with the missionaries. I did a great deal of listening and learned much. One of the most interesting conversations revolved around a young couple who were being taught by the missionaries but who were not progressing. “They’re golden people,” one elder said, “ripe and ready for membership in the Church. They just won’t commit to be baptized.” Several suggestions were made by the missionaries listening in—fasting with them, having the bishop meet with them, intensifying the friendship effort, etc., to all of which the first elder said, “We’ve tried that.” After a long pause, one elder spoke up: “Have you given them the Scrolls Discussion?” The first elder responded: “No, do you think this would be a good time for the Scrolls Discussion?” “Sounds like a perfect time to me,” the first [second?] came back.

Now I had never heard of the Scrolls Discussion. I was dying to know what it was so I blurted out: “What’s the Scrolls Discussion?” The second elder looked quizzically at me and said: “Surely, Brother Millet, you’ve heard of the Scrolls Discussion?” I indicated that I had not. “The Scrolls Discussion,” he said,

“involves showing the people how the Dead Sea Scrolls proves the truthfulness of the Church!” I asked: “How do you do that?” “Well,” he replied, “as you know, the Dead Sea Scrolls contains information about a group of Christians out in the deserts of Judea.” I said, “No, it doesn’t. The Dead Sea Scrolls were written by a group of hyperreligious Jews.” He said: “Oh, I didn’t know that.” Then the elder followed up: “Well, you do know that they had three presiding high priests at the head of their Church.” I indicated that the leaders of their group were Aaronic priests, not Melchizedek. He went on: “Well, there’s much doctrine within the Scrolls which proves ours to be true.”

I commented that the Scrolls were interesting historical documents but did very little for us doctrinally. This exchange went on for about ten minutes, the elder providing what he thought to be airtight “proofs” and me trying to gently let him know that most of what he understood about the Dead Sea Scrolls was simply untrue. I could see the frustration in his eyes. He breathed a sigh and then concluded the debate with, “Well, I’ll just say this—the Scrolls Discussion has always worked perfectly for me!” I thought then (and have since) about all the people who may have come into the Church as a result of what they learned in the famous Scrolls Discussion. I shuddered.

This is the Lord’s Church. It is built upon divine precepts and principles, founded on diamond truth and God-given authority. It needs no props. We need not stretch for sensationalize nor intellectualize the message of the Restoration in order to make it more palatable. It will stand on its own. Joseph Smith taught that truth cuts its own way. [*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), 313.] Our witness of the truth—a sign of our spiritual maturity in the faith—must be grounded in substance, in true doctrine, in that which will endure the test of time. We may have a testimony of many things—of the programs and procedures and policies of the Restored Church — and yet not be settled in truth.

There are some things that we must come to know, know with an assurance born of the Spirit, if we are to endure the tests spoken of earlier. We need to know that there is a God in heaven, that he is infinite and eternal, and that he is our Parent, the Father of the spirits of all men and women. We need to know that Jesus is the Christ, that he is literally the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh, and that salvation comes by and through him and in no other way. We need to know that Joseph Smith was and is a prophet of God, that he is a revealer of truth and a legal administrator, that knowledge and authority have been delivered to earth in this final gospel dispensation through his instrumentality. We need to know that the revelations and translations given through Joseph the Seer, especially the Book of Mormon, are true and from God, that they contain the mind and will and voice of the Almighty to those who live in this last age of the earth’s history. Finally, we need to know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, in the language of the revelation, the only true and living Church on the face of the earth (D&C 1:30), is the kingdom of God on earth, is in the line of its duty, and is preparing a people for the Second Coming of the Son of Man. These things matter. They matter a great deal. Our testimonies will be intact and solid to the degree that they are grounded in these essential verities.

Though we may begin simply in the development of our witness, the Lord expects his servants to search and study and grow in understanding, to acquire a reason for the hope that is within them (see 1 Peter 3:15). Simply stated, the Spirit bears witness of truth, of substantive realities. “The sanctity of a true

testimony,” President Joseph F. Smith counseled the Church, should inspire a thoughtful care as to its use. That testimony is not to be forced upon everybody, not is it to be proclaimed at large from the housetop. It is not to be voiced merely to “fill up the time” in a public meeting; far less to excuse or disguise the speaker’s poverty of thought or ignorance of the truth he is called to expound.... Of those who speak in his name, the Lord requires humility, not ignorance. [*Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971), 205-6.]

In this day we have been commanded to be true and loyal to the Restoration, to bear testimony of those things which have come by and through Joseph Smith (see D&C 31:4; 49:1-4). Indeed, the Lord has warned us as a people of the condemnation, scourge, and judgment—surely the lost spiritual privileges and opportunities — which rest upon the Church because of our near neglect of the Book of Mormon and modern revelations. The Savior has also instructed us as to how we may extricate ourselves from the spiritual plight: “I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you” (see D&C 84:54-61).

Occasionally we hear people complain that they hear too few testimonies of Christ and too many of Joseph Smith. To be sure, we worship the Father in the name of the Son; Christ our Lord is the way to the Father and his is the only name under heaven whereby man can be saved. And yet the dispensation head is the preeminent revealer of Christ to the world in his day. Thus to bear witness of Joseph Smith is to bear witness of Jesus Christ who sent him, just as to bear witness of Christ is to bear witness of the Eternal Father who sent him. I have observed that there is a power — an unusual spiritual endowment from that Lord we worship — associated with the bearing of a pure and fervent testimony of Joseph Smith and the Restoration. Such outpourings surely signify heaven’s approbation.

President David O. McKay’s father learned, as a young missionary, of the importance of bearing testimony of the Choice Seer. After laboring in a town in Scotland he had decided, because of persecution, to speak of Christ and Christian principles and to postpone for the time being his discussion of the Restoration. He thereafter experienced a gloom and darkness of soul that he had never known, a pall of bitterness so intense that he concluded either he would have it removed or he would leave his labors and return home. In pleading and sober prayer he called upon God for deliverance. The Spirit spoke: “Testify that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.” The darkness was lifted and Elder McKay’s ministry continued. [See *Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 21-22.]

In this same spirit, Elder Matthew Cowley, prior to leaving on his first mission, was given the following counsel from his father: “My boy, you will go out on that mission; you will study; you will try to prepare your sermons; and sometimes when you are called upon, you will think you are wonderfully prepared, but when you stand up, your mind will go completely blank.” Young Elder Cowley asked what he should do in such circumstances.

He said, “You stand up there and with all the fervor of your soul, you bear witness that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the living God, and thoughts will flood into your mind and words to your mouth, to round out those thoughts in a facility of expression that will carry conviction to the heart of everyone who listens.” And so my mind, being mostly blank during my five

years in the mission field, gave me the opportunity to bear testimony to the greatest event in the history of the world since the crucifixion of the Master. [*Matthew Cowley Speaks: Discourses of Elder Matthew Cowley of the Quorum of the Twelve of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971), 298-99.]

The Impact of Pure Testimony

There is no way, given our limited perspective in this life, that we can measure the eternal impact of pure testimony. Perhaps only when we are able to look back on the whole of our existence, able to see things as they really are, from God Almighty’s point of view, we will be able to sense and feel the powerful coalescence of circumstances, the divinely-contrived orchestration of people and events. Perhaps then we will be in a position to measure just how much difference has been made by human testimony. Some testimonies shake the earth.

I remember very well the feeling of deep, personal loss when I learned of the passing of David O. McKay in January 1970. He had been the prophet of my youth, the only president of the Church I really remembered. I worried about my ability to shift allegiance and commitment to President Joseph Fielding Smith, his successor. I prayed and prayed to have the same witness as to President Smith’s call that I had felt in regard to President McKay. By the time the April 1970 conference convened, I still had not received what was to me a sufficient confirmation that the will of the Lord had been done. Things changed dramatically for me, however, as I heard President Smith speak the following words at the close of the conference:

I desire to say that no man of himself can lead this church. It is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ; he is at the head. The Church bears his name, has his priesthood, administers his gospel, preaches his doctrine, and does his work.

He chooses men and calls them to be instruments in his hands to accomplish his purposes, and he guides and directs them in their labors. But men are only instruments in the Lord’s hands, and the honor and glory for all that his servants accomplish is and should be ascribed unto him forever.

If this were the work of man, it would fail, but it is the work of the Lord, and he does not fail. [Conference Report, April 1970, 113.]

Something happened to me as a result of hearing that sweet but direct testimony, something which has affected my life permanently. I saw the power of God resting upon President Joseph Fielding Smith; that witness went down into my heart and burned like fire. It has happened in like manner on subsequent occasions as new prophets have been chosen and appointed.

I remember also some two and a half years later when a new Apostle was called at the October 1972 conference. The newly sustained Apostle declared:

As members of the church and kingdom of God on earth, we enjoy the gifts of the Spirit—those wonders and glories and miracles that a gracious and benevolent God always has bestowed on his faithful saints. The first of these gifts listed in our modern revelation on spiritual gifts is the gift of testimony, the gift of revelation, the gift of knowing of the truth and divinity of the work. This gift is elsewhere described as the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy. This is my gift. I know this work is true.

I have a perfect knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. I

know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God through whose instrumentality the fulness of the everlasting gospel has been restored again in our day. And I know that this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on earth.

[Bruce R. McConkie in Conference Report, October 1972, 21.]

I was moved and strengthened by that witness in ways that I cannot explain. I knew, with a knowledge more powerful than sight, that he knew.

Over twelve years later that same Apostle delivered his last testimony to the Church, one that has and will yet touch the hearts of millions of people across the globe. “And now,” he affirmed, in speaking of the redemption of Christ,

as pertaining to this perfect atonement, wrought by the shedding of the blood of God—I testify that it took place in Gethsemane and at Golgotha, and as pertaining to Jesus Christ, I testify that he is the Son of the Living God and was crucified for the sins of the world. He is our Lord, our God, and our King. This I know of myself independent of any other person.

I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears.

But I shall not know any better than I know now that he is God’s Almighty Son, that he is our Savior and Redeemer, and that salvation comes in and through his atoning blood and in no other way. [Bruce R. McConkie in Conference Report, April 1985, 12.]

Who among us that heard this final apostolic witness of Elder Bruce R. McConkie will ever be the same? Indeed, the witness of the Brethren provide not only sustenance and support for our own developing testimonies, but they also stand as a pattern and a guide as to how the Lord expects his Saints to bear pure testimony.

As we develop in line upon line fashion, as we grow here a little and there a little in our appreciation for and witness of the work in which we are engaged, we are becoming steadfast and immovable in the faith. Like Jacob, son of Lehi, because of our experience with the Spirit of the Lord we will be unshaken in the faith when we encounter antichrists and the doctrine of devils (Jacob 7:5). And, like Enos, his son, because we will have heard the word of the Lord and have come to treasure above all else those matters of eternal import, our faith will begin to be unshaken in the Lord (Enos 1:11). We will have begun to mature in our convictions.