



THE
Miracle
OF
Faith

J.L. THOMPSON

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What Is Faith?

After reading, thinking, studying, and thoughtfully praying about the formidable principle of faith for much of my life, I have distilled my understanding of it into an easily comprehended concept.

Faith is trust developed through experience.

We could similarly define faith as *confidence based on one's experience*.

We might say, “I’ve never heard that definition of faith. Is that really what faith is?” This is a definition that one can glean from a thorough reading of the scriptures and the words of all the prophets ancient and modern. Although none of them actually put it in those words, the principles are well detailed in this definition.

We hear of “faith” in varied contexts and must first ask what type of “faith” we are discussing. If we ask diverse people about their faith, they might share their feelings about beliefs that they hold, especially about the existence of God, Christ, angels, miracles, saints, or earth spirits; talismans, spirit guides, crystal energy, and so forth. Is this faith? It is often referred to as faith, but it is not. It is belief—or in these particular cases, a belief system, just as those beliefs outlined in what we call our own Articles of Faith. As we see in our discussion on the following pages, faith is a principle of action, and additionally, it must be founded on truth—we cannot exercise faith in something that is untrue. Therefore, faith is not the object of our worship or veneration. Faith is something we do—and it must be done in the proper manner in order to receive the desired results.

The Prophet Joseph Smith Taught the High Value of Faith

How important is faith in this life and in the world to come? In the School of the Prophets,¹ Joseph Smith taught the then current and future leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the “Church”) that faith is the first principle in revealed religion and the foundation of all righteousness (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:11).² Faith is the very bedrock on which all other principles of salvation and exaltation are developed in time and in the eternities (*ibid.*, 7:5).³ No other principles or ordinances can be established or sustained without it. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the purest form of faith and is essential to any progress beyond our present condition, as explained in the fourth article of faith: “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Extolling the foundational importance of faith, the ancient Apostle Paul provides us a working definition of the principle thus: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things

not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

To comprehend the complete meaning of this definition, we must view its components separately. Before we do so, let us consider its companion scriptures found in the Book of Mormon:

And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true (Alma 32:21).

And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith (Ether 12:6).

These and other scriptural definitions of the principle of faith provide us with a hierarchy of principles—or concepts—which we can list in ascending order of certainty.

1. Belief → 2. Hope → 3. Faith → 4. Knowledge

So, on our scale, the oracles of God tell us that faith is something less certain than knowledge but something more certain than hope. They instruct us that faith is our hope for things that are true (factual or real) that are not visually or otherwise evidenced by outward proof in the moment.

In order to understand the meaning of the ascending grades of certainty, these principles, and the true nature of faith, let us review them in order from lowest to highest, starting with definitions of the concepts of belief and hope.

Belief

Belief is any understanding, tenet, principle, theory, opinion, view, ideology, hypothesis, conjecture, speculation, assumption, premise, presumption, supposition, guess, concept, or precept that a person accepts as being real. There is no requirement of quality of actuality associated with belief. People can believe anything, regardless of its basis in fact or reality. All concepts held by someone to be possible, no matter how improbable or actually impossible, can be believed and constitute belief. To believe in something that is untrue does not in itself necessarily lessen the quality of a person’s belief. To believe in something that is true does not in itself necessarily improve the quality of a person’s belief. Belief can be entirely independent of truth or fallacy. It is merely human acceptance of the status of a thing or concept unrestricted by legitimacy.

Throughout human history people have believed nearly every possible idea. They have believed truth, and they have believed error; foolishness, and lies. Belief can be obtained or developed through any possible thought process or any course of discovery, regardless of its authenticity or suitability. Belief can be based on sloppy and shoddy discovery or thought processes, invariably leading to false beliefs, or it can be based on revealed truth or verified scientific method, often resulting in belief in correct principles or facts. All myths, legends, rumors, and false doctrines are based on someone’s mistaken belief in those tenets. Most of human history has been driven by humanity’s beliefs—mistaken or correct. To the extent the beliefs were invested in truth, humanity prospered. To the extent those beliefs were devoted to erroneous principles, humanity suffered.

Hope

Hope, in the context of our discussion, can be defined as a *desire* for something to be factual. It is of a higher quality and certainty than mere belief because it actively seeks legitimacy. It is of

a lower quality and certainty than faith, because it may seek after something that ultimately turns out to be untrue, or not based in reality. Like belief, hope can vary in its value based on the quality of one's inquiry or the promise upon which it is based. For instance, to hope that one will win a lottery is feeble hope, because its basis is so tenuous—so uncertain. Surely, one may have a *desire* to win the lottery, but the probability of success is so low that it renders the quality of hope very poor in such a case. One cannot develop true confidence in this low quality of certainty. However, the more probable and predictable the outcome of the thing desired, the greater the hope.

How can hope develop into faith? As an example of increasing mere hope, which is little more than desire, a child can “hope” their daddy catches them when he tosses them in the air. Although it's possible that their father may not catch them due to accident or miscalculation, that hope will be of higher quality, because fathers generally have the ability and desire to catch a tossed child, and the child will have already developed a relationship of trust with their father. The child's hope increases in quality and becomes justified in the child's mind as they gain experience in the principle. In this case, the first time a child is tossed in the air, there may be skepticism of their father's ability to catch their fall, resulting in a low level of hope, despite the child having a strong desire. With experience, hope increases, eventually growing into faith. In our example, after the father has tossed the child up and caught them twenty times every day for a year, the child's hope level has risen to a high quality. Therefore, we comprehend that the value of hope is directly affected by the quality of our experience. Experience teaches us reasonable expectation. The quality of hope is based on the value of the underlying promise, which is generally dependent on the quality of the person extending the promise and their demonstrated desire and ability to fulfil their promise. A father can be a reliable person to extend a promise, especially regarding a child's safety in his arms. How much more then is the quality of a Heavenly Father's promise of salvation and eternal life or of divine intervention in troubled times?

In a gospel sense, hope is a precursor of faith. When the tossed child develops strong trust in their father and their confidence is strengthened, their hope will eventually become faith because it is invested in a factual circumstance. The prophets inform us that precursors of hope are humility and charity, charity being the pure, unconditional love of Christ. In Moroni chapter seven, the prophet shares the words of his father, Mormon, regarding the hierarchic relationship of faith, hope, and charity. As we read together, let us keep in mind our ascending order of certainty—belief, hope, faith, and then knowledge.

And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise. Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope. And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart. If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (Moroni 7:40–45).

As we see from these verses, love for God, Christ, and our fellow beings leads to a true perspective of our place in the universe and gives us humility before Christ because of our dependence on Him and His atoning sacrifice rendered in our behalf. When we have humility

and charity, we can develop hope that Christ's Atonement will have a redeeming effect on us and rescue us from the fall. As the quality of our hope increases, it will develop into faith. Therefore, if the appropriate precursors of hope are in place—humility and charity—we are in a position to develop our characters to the level of hope, which is the true desire for something better. When our hope is developed and invested in something that is based in reality, it can become faith.

Faith

Faith is of higher quality and certainty than hope. It is defined as hope combined with or endowed with truth. Again, let us review the scriptural definition of faith: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). And also, "And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true" (Alma 32:21).

Based on these definitions, faith is hope in things that are true, although we can't readily see the tangible proof (or substance) of their truthfulness. If we could see the proof of the truthfulness of things hoped for, it wouldn't be faith, because it would become knowledge. Knowledge comes from witnessing proof. That which we experience directly, we know. We see, hear, touch, taste, and smell that which exists, and we "know" it exists. This is knowledge. If we know a thing is true, we do not have faith in it, because faith exists only when the proof or knowledge is yet absent. Knowledge is wonderful, but the Lord has declared that faith is more powerful than knowledge in our present relationship with Deity.

Christ explained the principle to His apostles of old in this manner:

Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed (John 20:27–29).

The Lord teaches His Apostles, through the doubting Apostle Thomas, that seeing is knowing, but having faith (because they have not yet seen) is more blessed.

The Apostle James further clarified this point when he taught the ancient Saints the necessity of acting on one's faith. In his discussion, he used the example of knowledge, explaining that it is of no particular value to those who reject the truth and benefits associated with that sure knowledge. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). This is such an impactful scripture. It perfectly illustrates the reason that faith is more powerful than knowledge. Like most of the children of the earth before the great flood, these devils know perfectly well that God exists but fail to accept Him as the true God of the universe. They reject Him and His divine authority at their own certain peril. Although they have a desire (less than hope) to overthrow Him and His kingdom through their demonic efforts, they still tremble at the near certainty that He will eventually cast them into outer darkness. Yes, they *know* there is a God but tremble because of their knowledge. It is the action-oriented nature of faith that makes it more powerful than knowledge, but that action must be performed as the Lord has required to have efficacy.

We know that faith requires action, but what other elements are necessary for us to have and exercise faith? To help us better understand the full nature of faith, we can express it as a simple equation:

$$\text{Faith} = \text{Hope} + \text{Truth}$$

As we discussed, hope is a thing desired. We can desire many things, but we cannot have faith in things that are untrue. To hope that the bus will go to Havana from Seattle will never rise to

the level of faith because it is not based in truth. Our lottery example illustrates that to desire a thing of a tenuous nature will not result in real faith. But to hope that Daddy catches the child when he tosses them *can* result in faith. The more experience the child cultivates with their father's actions, the more their hope grows into faith, until faith blossoms and becomes undeniable. But what do the prophets mean when they say faith is the *substance* of things hoped for and the *evidence* of things *not seen*? Let's list those elements. Faith is something higher than hope (desire) in that it is hope imbued with "substance." What is the substance that transforms hope into faith? It is truth. If it is truth, then why isn't it knowledge? It isn't knowledge, because at this point in the exercise of faith, we haven't yet witnessed the result, or outcome. This is why the prophet Alma says, "Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things," but faith is to "hope for things which are not yet seen, which are true." Faith can only be exercised before the outcome is "known," although we can have tremendous confidence in the eventual outcome.

This "yet unseen" nature of faith is present in our example of the child being tossed in the air by his father, because although the child has developed tremendous trust in his father's willingness and ability to catch him, he never sees the actual outcome of the next toss in advance. Therefore, regardless of how much trust and confidence the child has in his father's willingness and ability, based on the year of experience being tossed and caught, the "truth" of the matter will become evident at the time of the present toss and fulfilled safe landing. In this example, we have our experience with the integrity of the promise, or in this case, the father's ability and will to catch the child, as our "evidence of things not [quite yet] seen."

Our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Savior, have made certain promises to us. It is our goal to exercise faith in their promises, and obtain the desired results. Our ability to obtain those blessings depends on the quality of our faith. Our faith must develop from mere belief and then hope, growing into something of substance that has the ability to produce results. This is the most important task we have as mortals, which is why the prophets have repeatedly taught us that faith is the foundation on which all else is built.

The prophet Alma taught the principle of developing from a mere "desire to believe" into faith and then knowledge in his example of nurturing a good seed.

Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an **experiment** upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words (Alma 32:26–27).

Alma says that if we begin with just desire, or hope, and allow it to grow within us, it will blossom—as long as it is rooted in truth.

Is it becoming clear how listing the levels of certainty and the elements of faith help us understand what the prophets have taught us about faith? Alma continues his explanation of how faith in the word of God grows:

Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me (Alma 32:28).

Like the seed that is planted in our heart, the principle upon which we exercise faith must be rooted in truth. The bus does not go to Havana, but it does go to Springville. One destination is

an untruth, and one is a truth. A “good seed” is one that is based on truth. If it is true, it will begin to grow and provide your life with greater light and understanding. It will inculcate a desire for more light and understanding in your life.

The prophet next asks us the question, “Now behold, would not this increase your faith?” (Alma 32:29). He declares that this is the very process that expands our faith, but reminds us that faith is not “perfect knowledge.” The process of growing our faith toward knowledge is essential, however, and he describes how we can learn for ourselves that the information or principle is true.

But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good . . . And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow (Alma 32:30).

Recognizing the validity of the process of developing faith and its tangible results is essential to building confidence in the principle or trust in the person or concept. Because it grows within us, it changes our very nature and becomes part of our internal constitution. As faith grows, we literally become a person of faith.

The prophet Alma also explains how we can test the truthfulness of principles or information in which we wish to develop abiding faith.

And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness. Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away (Alma 32:31–32).

Of course, Jehovah declared in the beginning, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.”⁴ He expanded on this principle during His earthly ministry, saying,

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.⁵

The prophet Alma uses this eternal principle to provide us with a test, wherewith we can check the validity of the information or principle we are considering. “And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment,” he explains, “and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good” (Alma 32:33).

It is interesting that the ancient prophet chooses the term “experiment” to describe the process of checking the validity of the principle under examination. In modern times we might think of it as an experiment where we carefully control the elements and environment to see what naturally occurs when we apply certain organic materials and control the conditions. In this case, will the seed we plant turn out to be a good seed? Will it bring forth a good plant after its own kind? Will it increase our enlightenment and understanding? If the answers all turn out to be yes, then we can be confident that this is a good choice for us, and we can exercise trust in it and invest ourselves and our lives in the principle.

Knowledge

The level of certainty above faith is knowledge. How do we acquire knowledge? How do we come to know something? How do we gain certainty of anything? We use our five senses in our daily lives to comprehend the reality around us. We see, hear, taste, smell, and touch, and that is how we inform ourselves about the actual nature of the things in our environment. I see my child

drop a book on the floor, and I know she dropped the book. I don't believe it. I don't hope it. I don't have faith that she dropped the book. I know she dropped it, because I witnessed the event with my own eyes. I have knowledge. Likewise, I hear the smoke alarm go off as I'm cooking dinner and stepped out to take a call. I don't have a belief that the alarm has activated. I don't have hope or faith. I hear it. I have knowledge—personal knowledge of something I witness with my ears. I rush to the kitchen and stub my toe on the cabinet corner. I know I stubbed my toe, because I feel the crippling pain in my foot. This is how we come to know things in our lives—by witnessing them with one or more of our five senses. There is another sense that we can develop, of course, which also provides us with knowledge and understanding. This is connected to our spirit, which receives communications from God through the Light of Christ and from the Holy Ghost.

The prophet Alma speaks of arriving at the level of knowledge certainty by following the instructions he provides. After we have performed the experiment suggested by Alma and cultivated a “good seed” within our hearts, have tested its validity and encouraged its growth, and have finally witnessed the eventual truth of the matter being tested, the prophet speaks about attaining this ultimate level of certainty—knowledge—which supersedes the faith we had attained.

And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because you know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand (Alma 32:34).

The prophet then addresses the “reality” of the result of this testing process and begins teaching about the correlation of light with truth and knowledge.

O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good (Alma 32:35).

We note in this verse that Alma is instructing us in the use of the sixth sense we introduced a moment ago—our spiritual sense.

It is at this point in the prophet Alma's discourse that he speaks to the limits of knowledge. As we've discussed briefly, the certainty level of faith appears to have greater power than actual knowledge. This seems counterintuitive as we think about it, so he teaches us a little more about the concept. He continues,

And now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good. And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit (Alma 32:35–37).

Knowledge has its limitations when it comes to invoking the power of God, and those who seek knowledge as a substitute for faith quickly find themselves in opposition to God. “Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe” (Alma 32:17). However, Alma instructs,

Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it. And now, how much more cursed is he that knoweth the will of God and doeth it not, than he that only believeth, or only hath cause to believe, and falleth into transgression? Now of this thing ye must judge. Behold, I say

unto you, that it is on the one hand even as it is on the other; and it shall be unto every man according to his work. And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true. And now, behold, I say unto you, and I would that ye should remember, that God is merciful unto all who believe on his name; therefore he desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on his word (Alma 18–22).

Again, the key is, “If ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” In this there is power.

By letting belief or the desire to have faith grow into something more through experimentation and nurture, our hope develops into faith and eventually into knowledge. It is through this process that we develop power to affect our temporal and eternal lives through our own efforts, coupled with the opportunities and the Atonement provided by God and the Savior.

God Supplies the Truth

Therefore, faith is hope (desire) combined with truth (the desired thing must be based in fact or reality).

We are responsible to provide the belief and desire, but God is responsible to supply the truth. In other words, we mortals have no control over what is true or what is false. The best we can do is exercise our faculties to discover what is real, tangible, factual, and true. We can pray for the Lord to bless us in a particular matter, and we can hope that He will intervene. That is not exercising faith, however, but merely having hope. This appears to be the level at which most of us operate in our relationship with our Heavenly Father—we exercise hope.

Faith is something more than hope in quality and effect. In order for us to exercise faith, the object of our faith must be true or based in reality. If anyone asks God to perform a miracle that is contrary to the will of God, they cannot ask in faith, because the truthfulness of the object of their hope is nonexistent. Truth is the exclusive domain of God, and mortals are powerless to create truth from their own will or desire. We may create favorable circumstances through our efforts and manipulations, and that in itself may create opportunity for fulfillment of desired results, but ultimately, truth, especially eternal truth, is the exclusive domain of Deity, and the best we can do is seek out that truth and then align ourselves with it in exercising our faith.

A Principle of Action and Power

In his updated translation of the New Testament, Joseph Smith rendered Hebrews 11:1 as “NOW faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” substituting “assurance” for the word “substance.” He then explained, “From this we learn that faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen, and the principle of action in all intelligent beings” (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:9).

The prophet used this concept to demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of the principle of faith, showing that it is 1) a principle of action, and 2) a principle of power. As a principle of action, the School of the Prophets was taught:

If men were duly to consider themselves, and turn their thoughts and reflections to the operations of their own minds, they would readily discover that it is faith, and faith only, which is the moving cause of all action in them; that without it, both mind and body would be in a state of inactivity, and all their exertions would cease, both physical and mental (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:10).

Faith then is the moving cause of all action, the sole impetus of anything that is done. The hundreds of brethren in attendance for this series of lessons on the nature of faith were taught:

Were this class to go back and reflect upon the history of their lives, from the period of their first recollection, and ask themselves what principle excited them to action, or what gave them energy and activity in all their lawful avocations, callings, and pursuits, what would be the answer? Would it not be that it was the assurance which we had of the existence of things which we had not seen as yet? Was it not the hope which you had, in consequence of your belief in the existence of unseen things, which stimulated you to action and exertion, in order to obtain them? Are you not dependent on your faith, or belief, for the acquisition of all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence? Would you exert yourselves to obtain wisdom and intelligence, unless you did believe that you could obtain them? Would you have ever sown if you had not believed that you would reap? Would you have ever planted if you had not believed that you would gather? Would you have ever asked unless you had believed that you would receive? Would you have ever sought unless you had believed that you would have found? Or would you have ever knocked unless you had believed that it would have been opened unto you? In a word, is there anything that you would have done, either physical or mental, if you had not previously believed? Are not all your exertions of every kind dependent on your faith (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:11)?

Any exertion of energy in any manner is based in temporal faith—our desire to obtain something by an effort. Without the belief and desire that we will obtain, we are not spurred to act. We see men planting fields only when they have a predictable hope (which is yet unseen evidence, or assurance, based on their experience or another reliable promise) that the crop will grow and provide food. Conversely, we do not see men planting crops in the middle of Death Valley. This is because the “truth” or “assurance” factor is absent in that scenario. Experience tells us that there is no promise of a crop planted in such harsh conditions. Therefore, we do not see men pursuing this action, because they have no faith, or even hope, under those circumstances.

Faith is the motivating factor in more mundane matters as well. Would a parent dress their child and send them to school if there was no expectation (confidence, based on prior experience) that someone would be at the school to open it and teach? The answer is found in the number of children that are dressed and sent to school on Saturday. Would anyone take their car to the gas station if they didn’t believe there would be gasoline to purchase? Would a child throw a ball against a wall and await its return if there wasn’t faith that the laws of physics would return the ball to their expectant glove? Would a carpenter lay a foundation and frame up walls without an expectation that a roof would be put on the house? Would a farmer arise early and go to the hen house if there was no faith that eggs would be present to gather? Millions of examples surround us daily of the principle of faith in action. We live by faith, whether we realize it or not. We live by expectation, or confidence, based on our own experience with the matter.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught,

As faith then is the moving cause of all temporal actions, so it is the moving cause of all spiritual actions. Or may we not ask, what have you, or what do you possess, which you have not obtained by reason of your faith? Your food, your raiment, your lodgings, are they not all by reason of your faith? Reflect, and ask yourselves if these things are not so. Turn your thoughts on your own minds, and see if faith is not the moving cause of all action in yourselves; and if the moving cause in you, is it not in all other intelligent beings?

And as faith is the moving cause of all action in temporal concerns, so it is in spiritual; for the Savior has said, and that truly, that “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). As we receive by faith all temporal blessings that we do receive, so we in like manner, receive by faith all spiritual blessings that we do receive (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:11–13).

The principle is clear—we must *act* to set things into motion. As long as we act in the appropriate or prescribed manner based on true principles and on proven methods, we exercise a reasonable expectation that the predictable result will occur based on prior experience with similar matters. This is the very process of exercising faith and receiving the “promised” or predictable results. As the Prophet taught, this applies in both temporal and spiritual pursuits.

Ask, and You Shall Receive

The scriptures are replete with the admonition that we do certain things to obtain certain promised blessings. “And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (Doctrine and Covenants⁶ 130:21). We must note that the scripture is clear that specific laws are associated with specific blessings, and we must obey the law associated with a particular blessing in order to receive the blessing we seek. This was quite a surprising concept to the world of Joseph Smith’s day, but as we contemplate the model, it becomes clear in our minds that it is a universal law that is applicable at all times. *For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.* Humans often painfully discovered this law through experience and observation. We have tested it, and tested it, until we have concluded that it is always applicable. There are many universal laws governing how things react and interact. We can’t break the laws with any degree of success, so we find ways to obey the laws while getting the things we desire. There are laws associated with all of the commandments. Receiving blessings in countless forms requires us to 1) discover the underlying law, and 2) fulfil it. One of the main reasons that our Heavenly Father commanded the ancient prophets to write their experiences is to provide subsequent generations with a record of how they obtained blessings in this way. In general conference we likewise hear talks from seasoned veterans of life, sharing wisdom of how to obtain the blessings of a loving Father in Heaven.

One of the key commandments we have received associated with obtaining blessings from God is the need to ask Him for the blessing we seek. We are instructed, even commanded, to ask for the assistance of God in our pursuit of such desired results in both spiritual and temporal realms. With the commandment comes a promise that He is faithful in giving us what we ask. God shares the formula thus: “But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally” (D&C 46:7). Asking God for a blessing is a key element in receiving something from Him. And, in truth, all things, temporal and spiritual, come from Him, because they are under His control. In the same way that we might exercise our faith by planting seeds in the spring, asking God for His blessing is the exercise of our faith in spiritual matters, spiritual meaning things beyond the physical or worldly restrictions of our temporal existence. Surely, as we lift our eyes above the carnal and decaying landscape that makes up our daily lives and look to heavenly realms for higher learning and purpose, we find that we are far from our heavenly home and that the distance must be bridged with means not readily at our mortal disposal. God has informed us of the great gulf that separates us. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

Because of this great disparity between mankind and God, between our ways and His ways, our thinking and His thinking, He has put systems, methods, mechanisms, and devices into place to enable us to bridge that gulf. He builds the bridge halfway to us and has provided us with means to overcome the remainder of the distance and differences, and those means are spelled out in the scriptures and elucidated by His earthly representatives, the prophets. The mechanics of how we can bridge that gulf and how we can employ the means provided by Him are based on systems and methods that He has devised. He has instructed us that strict adherence to these systems and methods is required if we are to obtain what we seek from Him. His declaration that “when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated”⁷ is His gift of love and compassion to His children to ensure that we are not left alone as we walk through this sometimes lone and dreary world.

By following the system that our Heavenly Father has put into place, and by obeying the governing principles as He has established and outlined them for our understanding, we are able to obtain blessings from His hand through our own efforts. The principle of obedience as illustrated in the above scripture is defined by the Lord as adherence to a system or set of instructions as outlined in the following scripture.

Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same (D&C 132:3).

By following the prescribed instructions or the formula that the Lord has given us, we may fulfil the law that He has established and thereby obtain any sought-after blessing.

Faith Is Power

Not only is faith a principle of action, temporal and spiritual, but it is also a principle of power. Joseph Smith taught quite clearly that all things of a miraculous or spiritual nature performed by man or God are accomplished through faith.

But faith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth. Thus says the author of the epistle to the Hebrews 11:3, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” By this we understand that the principle of power, which existed in the bosom of God, by which the worlds were framed, was faith; and that it is by reason of this principle of power existing in the Deity, that all created things exist—so that all things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth, exist by reason of faith, as it existed in Him. Had it not been for the principle of faith, the worlds would never have been framed, neither would man have been formed of the dust. It is the principle by which Jehovah works, and through which he exercises power over all temporal, as well as eternal things. Take this principle or attribute (for it is an attribute) from the Deity, and he would cease to exist. Who cannot see that if God framed the worlds by faith, that it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and that faith is the principle of power? And that if the principle of power, it must be so in man as well as in the Deity? This is the testimony of all the sacred writers, and the lesson which they have been endeavoring to teach to man (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:13–17).

Here is the value of faith. Without it, nothing happens, and all things cease to exist, including God Himself—at least in the role of God. Even we mortals live by faith, and it is the foundation of all that we seek and accomplish, just as it is with Deity. Here is the problem, however: although we accomplish all that we do by faith, we often lack faith necessary to accomplish more than the mundane. We are, by and large, a faithless people when it comes to conscious faith. We are sometimes unable to call upon God to receive His specific blessings and favors through our faith. Most of us look at others, those of greater spiritual prominence or of ancient reputation as being more capable of obtaining the promised blessings of the Lord. We generally do not account ourselves as capable to do the same. We believe that we have faith but are reluctant to call upon God to intervene or to perform His miracles for our benefit or that of others. This is nothing new, either. It has always been the state of men to reflect upon better times when miracles seemed plentiful and the Spirit of the Lord was had among people in greater abundance.

Even great prophets of antiquity have lamented that things in their times were not so spiritually grand as in former times. Nephi, the son of Helaman, returned to the land of Zarahemla from the land northward where the people had rejected his testimony and gospel

message. He, like many of us, lamented that he had not been born in the good old days.

Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity; and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord—Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren. But behold, I am consigned that these are my days, and that my soul shall be filled with sorrow because of this the wickedness of my brethren (Helaman 7:7–9).

Also, like many of us, this prophet Nephi nurtured a view of the past that would probably have surprised his ancient father Nephi. The former Nephi, with those who chose to follow him, suffered great afflictions and lived a life of isolation and deprivation. They were hunted and despised by those of their brethren who hated and persecuted them. He spent a great deal of his time and energy comforting his people in these sore afflictions with recitations of the Lord's dealings with ancient Israel, reminding them of God's former kindness and mercy to His children and of His willingness to do the same for them if they would be obedient and seek His righteousness. The first Nephi had nothing of an easy, cheerful life filled with the constant outpourings of blessings from on high. He struggled, just as the later Nephi, who wished he had lived in those fonder, earlier times. The lesson is clear—these are the times the Lord has allotted to us, and we must make of them whatever we will and make of our lives whatever we will with the Lord's assistance and blessings.

Our present prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, recently delivered an inspiring general conference address in which he shared that these are the times of great blessings and manifestations of the power of the Lord.

I assure you that our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, love you. They are intimately aware of your circumstances, your goodness, your needs, and your prayers for help . . . In coming days, we will see the greatest manifestations of the Savior's power that the world has ever seen. Between now and the time He returns "with power and great glory," He will bestow countless privileges, blessings, and miracles upon the faithful. Nonetheless, we are presently living in what surely is a most complicated time in the history of the world. The complexities and challenges leave many people feeling overwhelmed and exhausted.⁸

The prophet Joseph Smith told the brethren of his time that all things are accomplished through our faith, and that if we fail to accomplish anything, it is because of our lack of faith.

The Savior says Matthew 17:19–20, in explaining the reason why the disciples could not cast out the devil, that it was because of their unbelief: "For verily I say unto you," said he, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

Moroni, while abridging and compiling the record of his fathers, has given us the following account of faith as the principle of power: He says, [Book of Mormon] page 746 [Ether 5:14], that it was the faith of Alma and Amulek which caused the walls of the prison to be rent, as recorded on the 356th page [Alma 10:77–85]; that it was the faith of Nephi and Lehi which caused a change to be wrought upon the hearts of the Lamanites when they were immersed with the Holy Spirit, and with fire, as seen on the 747th page [Ether 5:15; also Helaman 2:79–118]; and that it was by faith that the mountain Zerin was removed, when the Brother of Jared spake in the name of the Lord. See also 748th page [Ether 5:30–31].

In addition to this we are told in Hebrews 11:32–35, that Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, and that women received their dead raised to life again, etc.

Also, Joshua, in the sight of all Israel, bade the sun and moon to stand still, and it was done Joshua 10:12–13.

We here understand that the sacred writers say that all these things were done by faith. It was by faith that the worlds were framed—God spake, chaos heard, and worlds came into order, by reason of the faith there was in Him.

So with man also—he spake by faith in the name of God, and the sun stood still, the moon obeyed, mountains removed, prisons fell, lions’ mouths were closed, the human heart lost its enmity, fire its violence, armies their power, the sword its terror, and death its dominion; and all this by reason of the faith which was in them.

Had it not been for the faith which was in man, they might have spoken to the sun, the moon, the mountains, prisons, lions, the human heart, fire, armies, the sword, or to death in vain (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:18–22)!

“Faith then,” the Prophet Joseph concludes,

. . . is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things; by it they exist, by it they are upheld, by it they are changed, or by it they remain, agreeable to the will of God. Without it, there is no power, and without power there could be no creation, nor existence (*Lectures on Faith*, 1:23–24)!

We have seen that faith is twofold in its nature, or that it has two aspects—a principle of action, and a principle of power. In daily living it is a motivating principle reflected in the law of the harvest. We reap what, where, and how we sow. It spurs us to act that we may obtain the natural fruits of our efforts. In higher living, faith empowers us on a much higher level. It enables us to obtain what we desire for ourselves, our loved ones, and the good of humanity by employing the systems and mechanisms put into place by our Heavenly Father for those very purposes. Even Christ learned “obedience”² and thereby achieved power to acquire desired “higher than mundane” results through employing “the finger of God,” as he explained it, to perform miracles during His earthly ministry.¹⁰ Most of us assume that Christ was born to His innate abilities and powers. We tend to believe that His extraordinary manifestations and accomplishments were unique to Him and came to Him naturally as if He were imbued with superhuman influence and abilities from His birth. Although Christ was the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh literally and was born with higher innate abilities, He told His Apostles, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12).

Although the Lord told us that His followers would do even greater things than He did, we somehow tend to discount the statement. However, history has recorded quite clearly that many mortals, from the first man to the present time, have performed all of the same miracles that Christ performed, save His Atonement. So, can we, mere humans of these latter days, perform those same miracles in the same manner as the Christ? We may parrot a perfunctory *yes* thinking upon the question academically, but do we truly believe it? If we do, then why are our lives not filled with miraculous interventions from on high? Why do we not employ the “finger of God” frequently as the prophet Enoch did and as Melchizedek did as well as many others? Is there some power or ability that we lack? Is there some understanding that we still require?

This is the very mission of this work—to examine the question of faith as a principle of action and power and how it *should* and *can* work in our lives. The Lord’s instructions are extremely clear to us in this regard. Yet, most of us appear to lack faith sufficient to accomplish those things that the Lord has commanded us to do. We seem to shrink from the tasks that he has required at our hands, resulting in a famine of the blessings that He has prepared for us. Those blessings and gifts await our “obedience” to His commands. He is powerless to do anything until we exercise our faith. Even the Lord Jesus found it difficult to call upon the powers of heaven when those around Him lacked appropriate faith. “And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief” (Mark 6:5–6).

God stands ready to bless us, yet we have failed to bridge the gulf that separates us from Him and His blessings. God has not changed. The fault is ours, as demonstrated so eloquently by the prophet Moroni, who had thought that he would no longer be spared to write anything additional to us but was allowed to add the following testimony before his demise.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven, and hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men? For he hath answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men; and he dwelleth eternally in the heavens. And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men. And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me (Moroni 7:27–33).

We learn some important principles related to the exercise of faith to obtain the blessings of God in these passages. First, we learn that Christ claims and advocates those who have faith in Him, and such people cleave to every good thing. It also clarifies that even though Christ left the earth to dwell in the presence of the Father, the miracles that He performed have not ceased, and angels continue to minister to people on Earth. It additionally informs us that God prepares a way for us to have “faith” in Christ, which is facilitated by the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost. In this, the Lord gives us a tripartite formula for receiving miraculous blessings:

1. If we will have faith in Christ
2. We shall have power to do whatsoever thing
3. But the thing must be expedient in Christ

Of course, having faith in Christ is the very object of our course of study. As we come to better understand it, we will also come to discover that we are fully capable of developing such faith in Him through the confidence that we cultivate based on our experience. With that faith in Christ, we will be capable and have the “power” to do what Moroni terms as “whatsoever thing.” We divide “whatsoever thing” from “is expedient in me” for a moment to facilitate a better understanding of the two steps involved. “Whatsoever thing” denotes a range of things from the

mundane to the divine. Through faith in Christ, I can prepare the sacrament for blessing and distribution to my ward. Through faith in Christ, I can open my mouth and my heart and ask my neighbor if they would like to know about the Restoration of the gospel. Through faith in Christ, I can counsel a daughter whose heart has been disappointed, or lay my hands on her head to give her a father's blessing of comfort and guidance. Is that where the range of possibilities ends? Sadly, for most of us, this is the highest level of "whatsoever thing" we accomplish. What about higher things? What about healing the sick? What about defying the armies at our borders, as did Enoch and others? What about diverting rivers from their courses with a word? The answer is number 3—so long as the thing is expedient in Christ. Discerning the will of the Lord is of utmost importance in our quest to exercise tremendous faith in this life and in the world to come. We discuss it in depth below. For now, let us remember the simple formula the Lord provides for achieving great things with the Lord's help and blessings: Have faith in Christ to accomplish anything that is expedient in Him.

Continuing his discussion on faith, Moroni quotes his father, Mormon, who asks the test question: *If miracles have ceased, and God is unchangeable, what happened to cause their cessation?* He lays out his argument carefully.

And who shall say that Jesus Christ did not do many mighty miracles? And there were many mighty miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles. And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not; if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles. And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief, and depart from the right way, and know not the God in whom they should trust (Mormon 9:18–20).

There are many promised blessings and unfulfilled covenants awaiting our obedience. Angels are waiting to come to men and women to fulfill all that the Father has decreed and promised. When will miracles fill our lives and the windows of heaven be opened and pour out great blessings upon us as a church, families, and individuals? It is entirely up to us.

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1. In the early days of the restoration of the gospel, the School of the Prophets was a select group of early leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who began meeting on January 23, 1833, in Kirtland, Ohio under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith for both theological and secular learning. The *Lectures on Faith* publication was presided over by Joseph Smith, and some of the lectures therein were personally written and delivered by him; but all will be attributed to him herein by reference, because they all received his personal approval.
 2. "Faith being the first principle in revealed religion, and the foundation of all righteousness, necessarily claims the first place in a course of lectures which are designed to unfold to the understanding the doctrine of Jesus Christ."
 3. "... then faith is truly the first principle in the science of Theology . . ."
 4. Genesis 1:11.
 5. Matthew 7:15–20.
 6. Hereafter, D&C.
 7. D&C 130:20–21.
 8. "Overcome the World and Find Rest," October 2022 general conference, Sunday morning session.
 9. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;" Hebrews 5:8.
 10. "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you." Luke 11:20.

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