

Nourish the Roots, and the Branches Will Grow

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The branches of your testimony will draw strength from your deepening faith in Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son.

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An Old Chapel in Zwickau

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The year 2024 is something of a milestone year for me. It marks 75 years since I was baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Zwickau, Germany.

My membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is precious to me. To be counted among God's covenant people, with you, my brothers and sisters, is one of the greatest honors of my life.

When I think about my personal journey of discipleship, my mind often goes back to an old villa in Zwickau, where I have cherished memories of attending sacrament meetings of the Church of Jesus Christ as a child. It is there where the seedling of my testimony received its earliest nourishing.

This chapel had an old air-driven organ. Every Sunday a young man was assigned to push up and down the sturdy lever operating the bellows to make the organ work. I sometimes had the great privilege of assisting in this important task.

While the congregation sang our beloved hymns, I pumped with all my strength so the organ would not run out of wind. From the bellows operator seat, I had a great view of some stunning stained-glass windows, one depicting the Savior Jesus Christ and another portraying Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove.

I can still remember the sacred feelings I had

as I looked at those sunlit windows while listening to the testimonies of the Saints and singing the hymns of Zion.

In that holy place, the Spirit of God bore witness to my mind and heart that it was true: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. This is His Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith saw God the Father and Jesus Christ and heard Their voices.

Earlier this year, while on assignment in Europe, I had the opportunity to return to Zwickau. Sadly, that beloved old chapel isn't there anymore. It was torn down many years ago to make room for a large apartment building.

What Is Eternal, and What Is Not?

I admit that it's sad to know that this beloved building from my childhood is now just a memory. It was a sacred building to me. But it was just a building.

By contrast, the spiritual witness I gained from the Holy Ghost those many years ago has not passed away. In fact, it has grown stronger. The things I learned in my youth about the fundamental principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ have been my firm foundation throughout my life. The covenant connection I forged with my Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son has stayed with me—long after the Zwickau chapel was dismantled and the stained-glass windows were lost.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away," Jesus said, "but my words shall not pass away."

"The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord."

One of the most important things we can learn in this life is the difference between what is eternal and what is not. Once we understand that, everything changes—our relationships, the choices we make, the way we treat people.

Knowing what is eternal and what is not is key to growing a testimony of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Don't Mistake the Branches for the Roots

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ, as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "embrace[s] all, and every item of truth." But that doesn't mean that all truth is of equal value. Some truths are core, essential, at the root of our faith. Others

are appendages or branches—valuable, but only when they are connected to the fundamentals.

The Prophet Joseph also said, “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”

In other words, Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice are the root of our testimony. All other things are branches.

This is not to say that the branches are unimportant. A tree needs branches. But as the Savior told His disciples, “The branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine.” Without a connection to the Savior, to the nourishment found in the roots, a branch withers and dies.

When it comes to nourishing our testimonies of Jesus Christ, I wonder if we sometimes mistake the branches for the roots. This was the mistake Jesus observed in the Pharisees of His day. They paid so much attention to the relatively minor details of the law that they ended up neglecting what the Savior called “the weightier matters”—fundamental principles like “justice and mercy and faith.”

If you want to nourish a tree, you don’t splash water on the branches. You water the roots. Similarly, if you want the branches of your testimony to grow and bear fruit, nourish the roots. If you are uncertain about a particular doctrine or practice or element of Church history, seek clarity with faith in Jesus Christ. Seek to understand His sacrifice for you, His love for you, His will for you. Follow Him in humility. The branches of your testimony will draw strength from your deepening faith in Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son.

For example, if you want a stronger testimony of the Book of Mormon, focus on its witness of Jesus Christ. Notice how the Book of Mormon testifies of Him, what it teaches about Him, and how it invites and inspires you to come unto Him.

If you’re seeking a more meaningful experience in Church meetings or in the temple, try looking for the Savior in the sacred ordinances we receive there. Find the Lord in His holy house.

If you ever feel burned out or overwhelmed by your Church calling, try refocusing your service on Jesus Christ. Make it an expression of

your love for Him.

Nourish the roots, and the branches will grow. And in time, they will bear fruit.

Rooted and Built Up in Him

Strong faith in Jesus Christ doesn't happen overnight. No, in this mortal world, it's the thorns and thistles of doubt that grow spontaneously. The healthy, fruitful tree of faith requires intentional effort. And a vital part of that effort is making sure we are firmly rooted in Christ.

For example: At first, we may be drawn to the Savior's gospel and Church because we are impressed by the friendly members or by the kind bishop or the clean looks of the chapel. These circumstances are certainly important to grow the Church.

Nevertheless, if the roots of our testimony never grow deeper than that, what will happen when we move to a ward that meets in a less impressive building, with members who aren't so friendly, and the bishop says something that offends us?

Another example: Doesn't it seem reasonable to hope that if we keep the commandments and are sealed in the temple, we will be blessed with a large, happy family with bright, obedient children, all of whom stay active in the Church, serve missions, sing in the ward choir, and volunteer to help clean the meetinghouse every Saturday morning?

I certainly hope that all of us will see this in our lives. But what if it doesn't happen? Will we stay bound to the Savior regardless of circumstances—trusting Him and His timing?

We must ask ourselves: Is my testimony based on what I hope to happen in my life? Is it dependent on the actions or attitudes of others? Or is it firmly founded on Jesus Christ, "rooted and built up in him," regardless of life's changing circumstances?

Traditions, Habits, and Faith

The Book of Mormon tells of a people who "were strict in observing the ordinances of God." But then a skeptic named Korihor came along, mocking the Savior's gospel, calling it the "foolish" and "silly traditions of their fathers." Korihor led "away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness." But others he could not deceive, because to them,

the gospel of Jesus Christ was much more than a tradition.

Faith is strong when it has deep roots in personal experience, personal commitment to Jesus Christ, independent of what our traditions are or what others may say or do.

Our testimony will be tested and tried. Faith is not faith if never tested. Faith is not strong if never opposed. So don't despair if you have trials of faith or unanswered questions.

We should not expect to understand everything before we act. That is not faith. As Alma taught, "Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things." If we wait to act until all of our questions are answered, we severely limit the good we can accomplish, and we limit the power of our faith.

Faith is beautiful because it persists even when blessings don't come as hoped for. We can't see the future, we don't know all the answers, but we can trust Jesus Christ as we keep moving forward and upward because He is our Savior and Redeemer.

Faith endures the trials and the uncertainties of life because it is firmly rooted in Christ and His doctrine. Jesus Christ, and our Father in Heaven who sent Him, together constitute the one undeviating, perfectly reliable object of our trust.

A testimony is not something that you build once and it stands forever. It's more like a tree that you nourish constantly. Planting the word of God in your heart is only the first step. Once your testimony starts to grow, then the real work begins! That's when you "nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit." It takes "great diligence" and "patience with the word." But the Lord's promises are sure: "Ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you."

My dear brothers and sisters, my dear friends, there's a part of me that misses the old Zwickau chapel and its stained-glass windows. But over the past 75 years, Jesus Christ has led me on a journey through life that is more thrilling than I could ever have imagined. He has comforted me in my afflictions, helped me to recognize my weaknesses, healed my spiritual wounds, and nourished me in my growing faith.

It is my sincere prayer and blessing that we

will constantly nourish the roots of our faith in
the Savior, in His doctrine, and in His Church.
Of this I testify in the sacred name of our Savior,
our Redeemer, our Master—in the name of Jesus
Christ, amen.