

11 The Foundation of Testimony

Bruce H. Porter

Testimonies are not inherited. Children will not have the same testimony their parents have, nor will the rising generation have the same knowledge of truth the previous generation had. The experiences that build and strengthen testimony are different for every generation and are individually acquired. Opportunities for learning, the pool of friends and peers, and the community where one is raised can all influence the strength of a testimony. The testimony of one spouse may be different than the partner because of learning and education. The experiences of a mission or service, even the friends and social circles can make a difference within a marriage. The time period in which one is born, and the young men and young women that our children may grow up with, will influence the testimonies of our youth. One age group in a ward may all go on missions while few or none will go in the next year.

The scriptures teach over and over that the gospel is new to each generation. They also teach that faith is individually acquired, the same as a testimony of the gospel of Christ and His Atonement. Parents should not expect children to have the same testimony and faith that they have. A testimony is not genetic, nor can it be wrapped in boxes to be presented to children on their eighth birthday. Therefore, parents should seek to provide an environment where their children can have the spiritual experiences that will be the basis of their own testimony. As children have experiences that help them recognize the difference between spiritual feelings and emotions, they will develop a confidence in their own testimony that will help them stand strong in the face of opposition and doubt. As the youth grow mentally and spiritually they will have questions that are unique and specific to their personal spiritual needs and problems. They will always seek answers to their questions in their quest and search for faith and truth. Just as there is a period of growth physically, there is also a time for spiritual growth and the development of their faith and testimony. The gospel is new to every generation, and the parents, adults, and priesthood leaders need to be ready for it.

The strength of a testimony is only revealed in the face of challenges and opposition. Someone who basks in the security of 'borrowed light' will not have developed the spiritual strength to stand strong under spiritual attack. For the youth to survive the wickedness and calamities of the last days, it will require more than just making sure they are in church every Sunday. Parents and teachers will need to put more energy into the youth's spiritual upbringing than even they received. The second law of thermodynamics is alive and well in all aspects of one's faith and testimony.

Because of entropy (a gradual decline in order) in today's world of greater temptation and distraction, the parents should be more exact in keeping the commandments, and more committed to living the gospel than the previous generation. If not, entropy wins, and all could lose ground. An increase of energy, example, faith and testimony is the only way to offset the decay of entropy. If parents are telling their children what to do while modeling something contrary, they are in effect pointing their children toward heaven while leading them to hell.

There are reasons that righteousness (and wickedness) only lasts until the third and fourth generations (D&C 98:30). An example from the Book of Mormon adds insight about how the decline in obedience and faith in the rising generation even had a negative and contaminating effect on the faith of the older generation.

29 And there was also a cause of much sorrow among the Lamanites; for behold, they had many children who did grow up and *began to wax strong in years, that they became for themselves*, and were led away by some who were Zoramites, by their lyings and their flattering words, to join those Gadianton robbers.

30 And thus were the Lamanites afflicted also, and *began to decrease as to their faith and righteousness, because of the wickedness of the rising generation.* (3 Nephi 1:29-30)

The righteous Lamanites had been raising their children in the Gospel. However, when the “rising generation” became the new leaders and started making their own lifestyle choices, they were led away by the popular views of an organization that promised progressive thinking and freedom from the old norms and morals of their parents. With the support of an organization that promised to provide all they would need without honest work, the rising generation was seduced into accepting the Gadianton agenda.

This Gadianton philosophy and government is described in scripture:

38 And it came to pass on the other hand, that the Nephites did build them (the Gadianton robbers) up and support them, beginning at the more wicked part of them, until they had overspread all the land of the Nephites, and had *seduced the more part of the righteous until they had come down to believe in their works and partake of their spoils*, (entitlements) and to join with them in their secret murders and combinations.

39 And *thus they did obtain the sole management of the government*, insomuch that they did trample under their feet and smite and rend and turn their backs upon the poor and the meek, and the humble followers of God.

40 And thus we see that *they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction.* (Helaman 6:38-40)

The Gadianton agenda succeeded because of a sure-fire formula: First, teach their philosophy of wealth distribution, taking from those who have, and giving it to themselves; and Second, getting the righteous to “partake of the spoils” through promises and entitlements. Being taught to believe in this kind of progressive and popular way of thinking, it was just a matter of time before the rising generation was in “an awful state.” *The one and only requirement for the law of entropy* (see page 130) *to work its destructive force is the dimension of time.*

A question often asked is: Why have there been changes in the Temple presentation? I am not privy to the actual answers—and therefore any answer I give is nothing more than guess work. Some have suggested that many of the changes were the result of the complaints people had over particular movements that seemed disturbing or strange, as well as the personal contact required in some ordinances. If this is the case, there now exists more than one generation that does not know what a penalty is (an integral part of oath making). There is a whole generation now living who have lost light and truth, which made some passages of scripture clearer and more understandable. Once truths are lost they may never return. Just as the testimony of the generation that personally knew the prophet Joseph passed away, those experiences in the temple are now

only second hand and are soon to be forgotten. Why do the changes take place? Could it be because there is “a rising generation” that decided they didn’t like the old ways; that progress requires being more sensitive to personal feelings than doctrinal insights, light, and truth? There may not be another generation who will have the information that has been lost; in fact, we might well plan on losing more. Thus light, truth, and understanding once offered in the Temple has already been lost to the “rising generation.”

30 For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; *for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.* (2 Nephi 28:30)

The Lord has a *perfect will* and a *permissive will*. For example: The Lord’s *perfect will* was not to give the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript to Martin Harris. *His permissive will* was just that: permission contrary to His *perfect will*. The same is true regarding the Law of Consecration: there is a *perfect will* and a *permissive will* in this dispensation. The important question to ponder is: To which *will* are the blessings “irrevocably decreed”? The blessings come to those who are “willing *and* obedient”, not just to those who are willing. Because of agency we will receive that which we are *willing to receive*; it may be more, or less. The hinges are well oiled on the wondrous windows of heaven and they are always primed to be easily opened, or quickly closed. The Lord awaits our preparation and decision. There is no stirring in the heavens above *until* there is a stirring in the hearts below.

After the Children of Israel came into the Land of Canaan and began to have children that “became for themselves,” the generational lack of testimony made itself manifest during the time of the Judges:

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and *there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord*, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel *did evil in the sight of the Lord*, and served Balaam:

12 And they *forsook the Lord God of their fathers*, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, *and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them*, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. (Judges 2:10-12)

The Book of Mormon also explains why the gospel is new to every generation:

1 Now it came to pass that there were *many of the rising generation that could not understand the words of king Benjamin, being little children at the time he spake unto his people; and they did not believe the tradition of their fathers.*

2 *They did not believe* what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ.

3 And now *because of their unbelief they could not understand the word of God*; and their hearts were hardened.

4 And they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church. And they were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after, even in their carnal and sinful state; for they would not call upon the Lord their God. (Mosiah 26:1-4)

Each generation must discover its own faith and testimony. As the scripture above makes clear, unbelief was and is the reason many people may not understand the word of God. Alma teaches that a particle of faith must be injected to begin the process of understanding:

27 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 32:27)

Alma explains how the unbeliever may begin to discover light and truth, faith and testimony. Faith is meaningless unless founded in something that cannot fail. Scripturally speaking, the only thing that cannot fail is Jesus Christ, His gospel and the Atonement. He is the Lamb *slain before the foundation of the world*. His Atonement is the sacrifice *that was, is, and shall be infinite and eternal*, a sacrifice that “cannot fail.” Thus, if an individual’s faith is placed in a man or an organization, they will eventually fail, and that person’s faith will have been in vain. Since a testimony should be grounded in the substance of one’s faith, it must also be placed in that which cannot fail.