

# *Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*

GENE R. COOK

I had to chuckle as President Holland was commenting about ages. This last month I reached my fortieth birthday, and my children were kidding me a lot about being so old, telling me “Dad, you’re just about over the hill; you’re about finished; when are you going to check in?”—those kinds of comments. I was kiddingly telling some of the Brethren about that, and they were quick to say, “You’ll get no sympathy in this audience, Elder Cook.”

I really am pleased to be here, my brothers and sisters. I’m pleased that President Holland is here. We’ve been good friends for a number of years, and he is a great president. I know you know that. I’m impressed with these stake presidents and their wives, whom I’ve had opportunity to meet as well, and particularly with you. I imagine anyone who is the least bit sensitive to the Spirit would be moved by being in your midst. The Spirit of the Lord is here. You brought it here.

I bear testimony to you, my brothers and sisters, in the very beginning of what I want to say tonight, that to the degree you and I are both receptive, we may learn some things that might be of great assistance to both of us.

I appreciate Randy’s prayer and the music that has been rendered—“I Need Thee Every

Hour”—and I hope and pray, my brothers and sisters, that all of you believe that, to the extent that you are continually praying every hour for the Lord to direct your steps, he’ll tell you what to do, what to say, and what not to say; he’ll bless you and prosper you in your relationships with others. I am truly convinced that if you pray continually without ceasing throughout a day, hour upon hour, you will find that you are able to live in this world and yet not be part of it, that you really can have your hand in the Lord’s hand and be directed from on high (see D&C 101:36–38). To that I bear witness.

I debated for some time to determine what I might say this night. I have determined to share with you some ideas, some principles from the scriptures that of necessity I will have to read. I pray that you might be attentive, and that the Spirit might inspire us all.

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### Making Things Happen

Someone said long ago, when great events occur, there are three types of persons manifested: First, the one who doesn't realize that anything great is happening; second, the one who realizes something is going on but doesn't know what it is; and third, the one behind the scenes making it all happen.

How does a person make things happen? How can someone be effective as a young man or woman, as a father, a mother, as a leader in the Church, in schoolwork, in life? I submit that it is by doing things "the Lord's way." This evening I want to center on a basic principle of the gospel—how you make things happen through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of you are concerned about schoolwork and are unable to perform as well as you would like to. Can faith in the Lord mark the way? Some of you are worried about employment opportunities and what will occur after you finish your studies at the university. Can faith in the Lord mark the way? Some of you are concerned about marriage—will I get married? If so, to whom and when? Some are concerned about raising families, sickness, death, personality problems, personal growth. Once again, can faith in the Lord mark the way?

Some people try to answer these difficult questions on their own and hope for the best but still end up making wrong choices. Well might the Lord say to them: "How long will you kick against the pricks? How long will you go along your own way?"

Faithful Latter-day Saints will want to know how to use their faith to cause all things to work for their good (see D&C 90:24), to act and not be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:13, 14, 16–27), and to righteously prevail over self and others and situations (see 3 Nephi 7:17–18). They will want to know the specific will of the Lord concerning themselves and then, in faith, discipline themselves to submit to his will.

### What Faith Is

What is faith? What does the word convey? The following are thirteen descriptive statements to help us define faith:

1. Faith makes men sure and steadfast.
2. After the trial of your faith comes the witness.
3. Faith is evidence of things not seen.
4. Faith is related to hope.
5. Faith is related to belief.
6. Faith is the substance of things hoped for.
7. Faith is not a perfect knowledge.
8. Faith is not associated with doubt and fear.
9. Faith is not physical exertion. It is utilizing words.
10. Faith does not come by signs.
11. Faith is a principle of action in all intelligent beings.
12. Faith is maintained by personal righteousness; and lastly,
13. Faith is power.

To have one last definition of faith, listen to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

*Had it not been [said he] 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. . . . Faith, then, 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 or existence! [Lectures on Faith, Lecture First, 16, 24]*

The simplest definition I know of faith is, "Faith is power."

How do you exercise faith in the Lord to help you resolve the challenges of life? How do

you learn to use that power to bless yourself and others? May I provide you with six specific suggestions that may be of assistance to you in exercising your faith in the Lord. Listen carefully to the principles from the scriptures. Then later, when I illustrate with some actual experiences, you will understand better your role in exercising faith and the Lord's role in a given set of circumstances.

### **Be Believing**

1. Be believing with desire single to the glory of God. Be believing. How I love these simple but sacred words uttered by Nephi:

*I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, . . . did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers. [1 Nephi 2:16; emphasis added]*

Are you believing? Are you able to exercise faith in the words of your father, your husband, a priesthood leader, with little or no tangible evidence? Remember that unbelief destroys faith. We learn this about unbelieving Laman and Lemuel.

*Laman was angry with me, and also with my father; and also was Lemuel, for he hearkened unto the words of Laman. [1 Nephi 3:28; emphasis added]*

Some of us are confused and deceived and follow strange voices as Lemuel did and believe in unworthy causes or men or untrue principles. Nephi later taught his brethren how one receives most communication from God:

*He hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words. [1 Nephi 17:45]*

As you exercise your faith, my brothers and sisters, you may want to consider how much evidence you require before you are able to act in faith. Do you believe my words or only your works? Are you capable of believing inspired words, or do you have to go through the actual process yourself before you're able to believe?

You will receive spiritual evidence as you go forth believing, but it is whether you require it all in the beginning or not that makes the difference in your faith. Do you need a sign—then you will believe? No, you exercise your faith, and signs will follow those that believe. That is the true principle.

### **Commit Yourself**

2. Commit and discipline yourself totally in word and deed. For many it is harder to make a true commitment than to actually fulfill what the commitment requires.

Many people go through life allowing life to serve up the menu. They seem to be subject to every wind of doctrine and mood of the world. They seem to go forth lost in the world with only a vague idea of what they would have from life.

Some decide what they want, commit themselves to obtain it, and, in righteousness, exercise their faith until they obtain. They keep spiritual priorities ever present in their minds and hearts until they have received that which they righteously desire. Once again, Nephi's sacred commitment and personal discipline in this respect greatly move me. He said:

*As the Lord liveth, and as we live, we will not go down unto our fathers in the wilderness until we have accomplished that thing which the Lord hath commanded us. [1 Nephi 3:15; emphasis added]*

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is fully sustaining. You can pay the price by disciplining yourself and then causing things to happen. Hold your word as sacred to God, to others, and to yourself. Be truly committed, and you

will see the hand of the Lord revealed in your behalf.

Let me tell you of a young man I knew when I was a mission president who knew how to apply these principles. He was a missionary full of faith. He was Uruguayan. He had been in the mission about three or four months when I arrived as the mission president, and I noticed that wherever he served, there were people baptized. In the beginning I thought it was his senior companion because he seemed too young, too new, to be the cause—that was my mistake. He knew how to make things happen.

He was called as a senior companion and a district leader. I sent him into a city that had gained a reputation of being a tough, “no results type” city. Missionaries had not baptized anyone there for nearly a year—not one person! The members were discouraged. Only ten to twelve members were attending the branch. I didn’t tell him anything—I just notified him of the transfer. It took him three weeks, and he and his companion began baptizing. He served there about ten weeks. All of his district also started baptizing, which was most pleasing to them.

It is great to have a missionary who can baptize, but if he can teach others how to do it, his leadership can bless the lives of many.

This missionary never wrote me much in his weekly reports. He would only write, “Dear President, I sure love you. Things are going great. Sincerely,” or “President, the Lord is blessing us greatly. I love the work. Your brother.”

He was called later to serve as a zone leader and sent to supervise the whole upper area of the mission where there were some very challenging cities. As a new challenge, he would have to teach the missionaries to do what he was doing now through the district leaders. He served there two or three months and was responsible for scores of baptisms and literally changed the spirit of the whole zone and many

members and leaders, as well as missionaries—one single man. They very frankly together wrought a spiritual miracle.

Then came a spiritual struggle for me, a restless feeling about him. The impression was that he should be sent to Paraguay! At that time, the work was very slow in Paraguay—an average of only 20 to 25 baptisms a month in the whole country. I wrestled with that and thought to myself, “He has really proved himself here, but to put him in that situation might drag him down in discouragement as it has so many of the others. He may have a hard time sustaining his faith there.” I had to struggle with my faith to convince myself that he really ought to go, but the promptings were obeyed.

He was sent a telegram transferring him to Asuncion, Paraguay, as a zone leader and telling him that he should leave the very next day. When he came in to Montevideo, he didn’t even come to see me. He was modest and always a little embarrassed and seemed always to avoid “the president.”

He departed from the mission home, but he left a letter, which was the first that I ever received from him. It said, in effect, “Dear President Cook, I received a telegram today telling me to go to Paraguay, and I thought you ought to know a few things: (1) You can’t baptize in Paraguay. I have had at least ten to fifteen elders tell me of their experiences there. (2) The members are not helping at all. (3) There are some real morality problems among the non-members there. (4) Many people live together unmarried, (5), (6), (7), (8) . . .” And he went through and listed ten to twelve of the most negative things I have ever heard in my life.

I thought to myself, “Oh, no, unbelieving people have gotten to him.”

But as he finished the list, he said, “I just want you to know, President, that I don’t believe any of those things.” Talk about faith! Then he committed himself, after expressing his faith, saying, “I want you to know, President Cook, that on Christmas Day (and the date of the letter

was December 1), we are going to baptize 25 people.”

When I read that I prayed for him and thought, “The Lord bless you, Elder. You have a tremendous amount of faith, and the Lord will sustain you. You don’t know the country. You haven’t ever been there. You don’t know where you are going to live. You don’t know your companion, the leaders, or the members. You don’t know anything, and yet you, in faith, believe and are willing to commit yourself to baptizing 25 people in 25 days.”

Well, this young man was full of faith and was a real example of a great Latin leader. On December 25, he and his companion baptized 18 people. They hadn’t reached the 25, only 18, which was just about all that the whole country baptized in a normal month. It was a great privilege two weeks later, when I was in Paraguay, to participate in a baptismal service where he and his companion baptized 11 more. His district baptized about 30 that day altogether. Can you see how one righteous man can turn around a whole set of circumstances? He believed, he made the commitment, and he and the Lord did it.

You never forget that. Whether it be a General Authority, like President Kimball, who turns around the world and sets us on a different course, or a bishop, or a father, or a student, or a fine young woman—you can literally cause things to work for your good both in your life and in the lives of others if you are full of faith in the Lord.

*All things are possible to him that believeth.* [Mark 9:23]

Commit yourself in advance to what you righteously desire. The righteous exercising of faith will bring it about.

### **Do Your Part**

3. Do all in your power to fulfill your part. Men falter and expect the Lord to do more than

his part. It is evident in all of scripture that, unless a man does do all in his power, the arm of the Lord will not be revealed in his behalf.

After a man truly has sacrificed and done all in his power, God will come and save him in his time of need. As James taught us:

*By works was faith made perfect.* [James 2:22]

Man must search not only to pay the price the Lord requires but to understand in what currency it will be required. Many times it helps to have the attitude, “What price is attached to this blessing? How much must I pay, and in what currency?”

The sacrifice most often required by the Lord is your own personal sins. He desires you to sacrifice those to him and obtain this broken heart and contrite spirit which he requires of all people.

Do all in your power to do your part.

### **Pray**

4. Pray as if all depended upon the Lord. Will the Lord not honor the sacrifice of his servants who have tried to do all in their power if they will now ask it of him? Sometimes you may arrive at this point and do not actually come to ask the Lord for the gift of faith or for power in the priesthood. The Lord taught:

*Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* [D&C 4:7]

The initiative rests with the man. The Lord said,

*It [shall] be granted unto them according to their faith in their prayers.* [D&C 10:47]

*And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith.* [D&C 42:14]

*You have supposed that I would give it to you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. [D&C 9:7]*

If you exercise great faith in your prayers and fast as needed, your loving, all-knowing Father will provide you with that which you righteously desire. Pray, believing you will have your righteous desires, and they will, in the Lord's time, be given to you.

### **Expect Trials of Your Faith**

5. Prepare for constant and intense trials of your faith. Tribulation is a refiner of faith. The Lord said,

*For after much tribulation come the blessings. [D&C 58:4]*

The Lord will never tempt you, but *he will* try you. Tribulations and problems are what this earthly school is made of. Life is all upstream—all uphill. You may at times desire to remove yourself from the swift current to rest a while, but you must go on. If you are on a plateau, you need to be on your way. You are not praying fervently and receiving trials in the right spirit.

Challenges and difficulties that many of us resist are the very elements which refine us and make godly men and women. The Lord will try you in every attribute possessed by man and at all stages of development in your life. He will try you again and again until you know that you are able and will serve him at all costs.

How comforting the words of Moroni:

*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]*

### **Expect the Lord to Act**

6. Expect the Lord to perform according to his holy will and your faith. The Lord will

perform. The Lord's arm will be revealed. He will take care of his Saints. He has great desire to see you cause other people to learn how to exercise faith by your own example.

He desires you to be one who causes things to happen. He desires you to draw upon the all-powerful arm of God and the power which resides in you to do things in God's own way. He desires you not be deeply involved or absorbed by worldly, temporal, superficial, or secondary things. These things must be dealt with, but even they must be handled spiritually.

To enrich and accelerate the growth of your faith, you may wish to measure it by the number of your predetermined righteous desires that are fulfilled. However, you must always remember that, when you pray and exercise faith in something that does not occur the way you hoped it would, your only object in view must then be to redouble your faith the next time.

Prayers that appear on the surface not to be answered, my brothers and sisters, are often the very ones that are answered most meaningfully. One must double one's faith in these apparent trials lest it be lost.

Be sure to receive whatever the Lord gives to you with a thankful heart. Alma said,

*There are some among you who would humble themselves, let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might. [Alma 32:25]*

The same could be said of those who have a thankful heart: "There are some among you who would have a thankful heart, let them be in whatsoever circumstances they might."

Remember the heartfelt response of Job after losing all he possessed. He said,

*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. [Job 1:21]*

Be submissive, humble, and patient, and the Lord will deliver to you that which will always be for your best good.

I would like now to relate one last very personal experience in faith that demonstrates, to a degree perhaps, these six suggestions I have tried to describe. Consider the six suggestions as you listen to this example. This is the first time, in a totally public sense, that I have ever shared this account.

On 29 July 1977, Sister Cook and I had just finished visiting in the Bolivia Santa Cruz Mission and were stalled in the Cochabamba, Bolivia, airport for some five hours. I recall that we were very tired, having had few hours of sleep the night before. We were both delighted in reality to have a few hours in which we might be able to rest in the airplane. As I was drifting off to sleep, I had a very strong feeling that I should awaken and write down some ideas. The desire to sleep was strong, but the promptings of the Spirit were more powerful. I did write; in fact, I wrote for nearly three hours, solving some organizational problems I had struggled with for a number of years previously concerning priesthood leaders and their roles. I felt a great outpouring of the Spirit on that day and excitedly wrote down each inspired thought. The experience took most of the time of the delay.

We were then off to La Paz, Bolivia. We were graciously met by President and Sister Chase Allred at the airport and driven in their van to the mission office. The mission president informed us that he needed to take care of a small item of business in the office and then we would be on our way to his home. We determined that we ought to go in with him to see the mission office. We locked the car and left our luggage and briefcase in the van, and Sister Allred asked an elder to keep his eye on the car.

Upon entering the office, the president was confronted with a difficult case of a woman whose husband was dying, and it necessitated

an interview by both of us in order to properly calm her and assist with her needs. In the meanwhile, Sisters Cook and Allred left for the mission home.

When the president and I returned to the van, I realized immediately that all our goods were gone but assumed that Sister Cook had taken them with her to the mission home. While we were driving toward the home, I discovered that the right front small window-wing had been damaged and began to fear the perhaps our goods had been stolen.

Upon arrival at the mission home, it was quickly determined that all our luggage, our briefcase, and all our goods had been stolen. The loss of a substantial amount of money and of all our clothing created an immediate but only temporary problem. What was more disheartening than all that was my scriptures were in the briefcase together with the inspired ideas I had just received in Cochabamba. The overwhelming sensations of discouragement, anger, and inability to do anything about the situation were overpowering.

My wife and I prayed alone. We prayed with those present. We tried to enjoy our dinner but could not. Who could know of the great loss I personally felt? The scriptures had been given to me as a young man by my parents, a sacred inscription placed in one of them by my mother and in the other by my father before he died. I had spent literally thousands of hours marking, cross-referencing, and loving every moment of it in the only tangible earthly possessions I had ever considered of much value. I had on many occasions instructed my wife, if there were ever a fire in our home, to be sure to remove the children and, if there were time, to take my scriptures and not to worry about anything else.

The president and I had much to discuss as we were to be together only that evening. However, I felt a strong impression that we must do all in our power in order to attempt to recover the scriptures. After supper, all present

knelt in a circle in prayer once again. We determined to search the immediate area near the mission office and a nearby field, hoping that the thief or thieves might have taken the salable items and discarded the English books.

In the prayer the pleadings were that the scriptures would be returned, that the persons who had taken them would be led to know of their unrighteous act and repent, and that the return of the books would be the means of bringing someone into the true church.

Eight or ten of us then loaded into the van with flashlights and warm clothing and drove up to the mission office in the central city. We scoured vacant lots across the street and adjacent streets and alleys; we talked with guards and anyone else we could find, exhausting all possibilities. No one had seen or heard anything. Finally we returned home, dejected, to be able only to pray individually and wait. President Allred and I were able to finish our business late that night, and the next day Sister Cook and I flew back to Quito, Ecuador, where we lived.

The mission, in the meantime, during the next few weeks searched the lots again. They looked in the hedges and garbage cans, searched a nearby park, placed a sign on a wall where the books were stolen requesting their return, and kept a watchful eye to see if the books might show up in an unexpected place nearby. In sheer desperation, trying to do all in their power, the missionaries decided to place an ad in two daily newspapers, offering a reward and giving explicit information concerning the books.

In Quito, Ecuador, I began a personal spiritual struggle that was a very difficult one for me. After nearly three weeks, I had not studied the scriptures at all. I had tried on numerous occasions, but every time I read a verse I recalled only a few of the many cross-references that had been made over twenty years. I was disheartened and depressed and had no desire whatsoever to read. I prayed many

times telling the Lord that I had never tried to use my scriptures for any purpose other than glorifying his name and trying to teach others the truths that he had taught me. I pleaded with the Lord that he would do anything that had to be done in order to have them returned. My wife and little children prayed incessantly as well for the same blessing. After two or three weeks they continued praying every day, “Heavenly Father, please bring back Daddy’s scriptures.”

After about three weeks, I felt a strong spiritual impression, “Elder Cook, how long will you go on without reading and studying?” It seemed to me to be a test or a trial and to have something to do with the “cost” of the blessing I desired. The words burned, and I determined that I must be humble enough and submissive enough to start all over again. I began to read Genesis in the Old Testament and, with the permission of my wife to use her scriptures, to mark and cross-reference once again.

On 18 August, a friend, Brother Ebbie Davis, arrived in Ecuador from Bolivia, and laid both sets of my scriptures on my desk along with a manila folder which contained the papers that I had written in Cochabamba and some recently prepared mission budgets that were also stolen. He indicated that they were the only things recovered, that the mission president had given them to him in La Paz as he boarded the plane, and that he did not know how the books were found, but that I would be told when I arrived there in the next few days to tour the mission.

The joy I experienced in that moment and later that day is indescribable. To realize that the Lord, in some miraculous way, could lift those books out of a city of 700,000–800,000 people like La Paz from the hands of thieves and return them intact, not one page removed, torn, or soiled, is still beyond me. How the faith of our family and many Bolivian missionaries was rewarded! That day I promised the

Lord that I would make better use of them and my time, as instruments in his hands for teaching the gospel, than ever before.

On Sunday, 21 August, I flew to Guayaquil, Ecuador, and on to La Paz, Bolivia, arriving on 22 August, Monday. Upon arrival in Bolivia I was given the following account:

A lady had been in a marketplace, one of the hundreds that there are in La Paz. She was a member of the Protestant church. She indicated that she saw a drunk man waving around a black book. She had the strongest spiritual impression that something holy was being desecrated. She approached the man and asked him what it was. He did not know, but showed her the book. She asked if he had anything else. He pulled out another black book. She asked if there were more. He removed a folder full of papers that he said he was going to burn. She then expressed the desire to purchase those things from him, and he agreed, for the price of 50 pesos or about \$2.50, U.S. currency.

After she made the purchase, she felt totally taken aback by the fact that she had purchased the books. She realized they were in English—she didn't speak, read, or understand English—and she had no desire to have any English books. It would have been like one of us, my brothers and sisters, paying nearly 10 percent of our monthly income to buy some books in Chinese, which we could not read. For what purpose she knew not except that she knew she had the inspired feeling to buy that which was being desecrated. She immediately began a search for the church that was named in the front of the books. Fortunately, it translated from English into Spanish accurately, and after approaching a number of other churches, she finally arrived at the mission office in La Paz, directed by the hand of the Lord. She was only a block away from the mission office when she was told where the office was. She had never heard of the reward nor of the ad in the newspaper which was to appear that very

day. She did not ask for any money, not even to reclaim the 50 pesos that she had paid. The elders received the books and greatly rejoiced and paid her the reward anyway.

She told the missionaries she was associated with a Pentecostal sect but listened very intently as they unfolded the gospel to her. She recalled reading something about Joseph Smith from a pamphlet she had picked up in the street two or three years earlier. After their first discussion with her, they reported, "She is a golden contact." After the second discussion, she agreed to be baptized in two weeks. Two weeks later, 11 September 1977, on a Sunday afternoon at Branch 1 in La Paz, Bolivia, Sister Maria Cloefe Cardenas Terrazas and her son, Marco Fernando Miranda Cardenas, age twelve, were baptized into the true church of Jesus Christ by Elder Douglas Reeder.

Who could describe the deep, discouraging, depressing, disheartening, overpowering feelings of helplessness when the scriptures were lost? Who could describe the great feeling of joy and rejoicing to see the hand of the Lord revealed in as miraculous a way as many accounts recording in Holy Writ? Our Heavenly Father does hear and answer the prayers of his sons and daughters if they exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord said:

*For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.*

*Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. [Mark 11:23–24]*

My brothers and sisters, today is a day of miracles. We believe in miracles. The Latter-day Saints may expect miracles according to their faith. As a member of this Church, you

have an authorization to take a leading part in the development of the kingdom of God on earth within your respective responsibilities. Pray fervently. Actively seek to increase your faith, and with that great gift from God, you can cause great things to occur in your life and in the lives of others.

May the Lord bless you that that responsibility may rest squarely upon you. Remember, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is fully sustaining. Will the Lord mark the way in your schooling, in your employment, in your future marriages,

in your families? He will. The Lord is full of mercy, forgiveness, patience, and longsuffering, and he is desirous of unlocking his treasure house of blessings to you who are full of faith.

I testify that the Lord is all-powerful and will perform according to his promises. Jesus is the Christ, the one in whom we exercise our faith, the only Being under heaven whereby we and all people may be saved, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.