

“The Assurance of Things Hoped For”

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It is an honor to be with you today. When I received the invitation to speak, I thought back on how devotionals have been an important part of my life for more than thirty years. One of the first devotionals I remember was when I was a freshman at the school formerly known as Ricks College. I was raised in a faithful LDS home, and my patriarchal blessing said that I was blessed with a testimony through my earthly parents, which was true. But I was determined to strengthen my personal testimony of the restored gospel before serving a full-time mission.

At age eighteen I also had another gospel-related concern. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, and most of my friends, neighbors, teachers, and coaches were not members of the Church. Using my developing powers of observation, I noticed that many of these people seemed to be happy, and many were interesting characters with a healthy sense of humor. My concern was that, up to that time in my life, my limited observations of senior Church leaders suggested that they were quite formal and proper. As a young man I had this nagging question: Would the highest degree of

glory in heaven be a very nice but humorless place?

The devotional speaker in January 1982 was the oldest living apostle, ninety-five-year-old LeGrand Richards. Elder Richards was seven years old in 1893 and in attendance when President Wilford Woodruff dedicated the Salt Lake Temple.

Elder Richards rarely delivered a message from a written text. He spoke from his heart, drawing upon a lifetime of experience, study, and inspiration. I'd like to share a minute of his remarks so that you can get a sense of Elder LeGrand Richards. At this point in his message he is talking about a Sunday School conference he attended as a boy. The conference was taught by Brothers Karl G. Maeser and George Goddard of the general Sunday School presidency.

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I can remember to this day—and it has been over 80 years—the songs Brother Goddard taught us to sing in that Sunday School conference. And when I didn't know I couldn't sing, I tried to sing with them. I don't do it anymore.

The first song goes like this: "Take away the whiskey, the coffee, and the tea. Cold water is the drink for me." And then it repeats and goes on. That made such an impression on me as a boy that I've hardly been able to drink anything but cold water since that time.

I was riding on the train a few years back—when we used to travel by train—headed for California. I went in the diner in the morning for breakfast, and the waiter said, "Are you ready for your coffee?"

"No, thank you."

"Would you like some tea?"

"No, thank you."

"Will you have some Postum?"

"No, thank you."

"Would you like a glass of milk?"

"No, thank you."

"What do you want to drink?"

I said, "A glass of cold water, please."

He said, "You're the funniest man I ever did see."

[*"His Life Experiences,"* BYU–Idaho devotional address, 19 January 1982]

Elder Richards was a man of wit and good humor. My concerns about fitting in with people who qualified to return to our Heavenly Father simply faded away that day. More important, as I listened to Elder Richards speak from his heart and share his experiences and testimony, my faith in the Restoration deepened. He was a man of unwavering conviction of the truthfulness of the gospel. Here is a typical Elder Richards statement:

I truly love the work more than anything else in this world, and I know it is true. I could live better without the limbs of my body than I could without the testimony of the Holy Ghost and the Spirit of the Lord. [CR, April 1952, 112; quoted in "Elder

LeGrand Richards Dies: Beloved Apostle, Missionary, Friend," *Ensign*, February 1983, 6]

The fact that Elder Richards had personal connections to President Wilford Woodruff, who was a member of Zion's Camp, and to his great-uncle Willard Richards, who was in Carthage Jail with Joseph and Hyrum Smith, made the restoration of the gospel all that more real to me. After the devotional I stood in a long line to shake Elder Richards' hand. I consider that day and the increased faith and testimony I received a tender mercy. I had no doubt that Elder Richards knew the gospel to be true, but I, like you, needed to continue to build my testimony line upon line, precept upon precept.

The Extrarational Process of Obtaining Knowledge

After my mission I attended BYU for a semester, and I would have earned a degree here if it were not for a certain special young lady who later became my wife. Tina was a flight attendant based out of Seattle. After we were married, I transferred to the University of Washington to finish my degree.

I had an interesting experience in one of my first classes at the University of Washington. It was a large general education class, and the professor was obviously very smart and accomplished. He and his graduate teaching assistant had an exchange during one class in which they seemed to be criticizing religion. I went up after class and, based on my improving powers of observation, I said to the professor that it seemed to me he was criticizing people with religious beliefs.

As an aside, do you know what Yogi Berra, the famous baseball player, said about observation? He said, "You can observe a lot by watching" (see Yogi Berra, *You Can Observe a Lot by Watching: What I've Learned About Teamwork from the Yankees and Life* [Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2008]).

I don't remember much from that college class, but I do remember the professor's response that day. He said, "Yes, we find that the more education people get, the less they need the crutch of religion."

That sounds similar to a warning in the Book of Mormon:

O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. [2 Nephi 9:28]

I have met people who were once active members of the Church but who had set religion aside as they obtained additional learning. However, we know that education and learning are not inherently bad. The next verse in 2 Nephi 9 states, "But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God" (verse 29).

After completing my undergraduate degree, I worked in Seattle for a few years and then returned to the university to pursue a PhD. In graduate school I was trained in the scientific method, which is a rigorous and careful approach to gaining knowledge.

My area of professional specialty involves procedures and techniques used by professional accountants to evaluate the fairness of financial statement information. Financial statements tell the story of the performance of the company and its management. Professional accountants verify the fairness of what management reports by gathering and evaluating relevant and reliable information. They gather enough evidence to provide a high degree of assurance that the statements are fair. I will come back to the word *assurance* later.

This method of obtaining evidence and knowledge, like the scientific method, is similar

to your academic work. In an excellent speech, former BYU president Rex E. Lee called this method of knowing "the rational process."

He said:

*The rational process is the one that you are accustomed to using in your academic work. Its tools should be familiar to all of you: reading, analysis, research, criticism, and, generally, problem resolution by thoughtful inquiry. Properly applied, it is a strenuous, taxing, and frequently frustrating experience [that] results in the strengthening of our ability to use these processes. ["By Study and Also by Faith," in *Educating Zion*, ed. John W. Welch and Don E. Norton (Provo: BYU Studies, 1996), 133]*

Through your past and present academic efforts, you are becoming increasingly expert in acquiring knowledge using the rational method. Our Church leaders have repeatedly reminded us of the importance of this method. Modern-day revelation emphasizes we are to seek learning "by study and also by faith" and wisdom "out of the best books" (D&C 88:118).

There is another method of knowing. President Lee called it "the extrarational process," which comes through contact with godly things and revelation. He said: "The methods are not the same [as the rational process]. The results are much surer, though they are not as susceptible to our own control. . . . Extrarational learning takes a great variety of forms" (*Educating Zion*, 133, 136–37). It is this extrarational process that I want to explore further with you today.

President Lee noted that there is a tendency for those who become strong in rational processes to downplay the importance of the extrarational. Perhaps people believe that being excellent in rational processes compensates for being weak in extrarational processes.

The Bible Dictionary states: "Knowledge of divine and spiritual things is absolutely essential for one's salvation. . . . Knowledge is

not obtained all at once, even by revelation, but line upon line, precept upon precept” (s.v. “knowledge,” 721).

I have observed people fall away from the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ. At least one of the reasons is that their rational skills seem stronger than their extrarational skills. One young person who has distanced himself from the Church said he recognizes the many good aspects of the Church and the gospel, but he currently doesn’t see a need for organized religion. Another who has been out of the Church for several years said he wouldn’t be surprised if he returned to church someday; he is just waiting for the right feeling that he should return. These comments seem to reflect a misunderstanding of important elements of the extrarational process.

In Hebrews 11:1 we read, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

If you look to the Joseph Smith translation of this verse, it reads, “Now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (JST, Hebrews 11:1; emphasis added).

There is that word—*assurance*. Recall that for professional accountants, obtaining a high degree of assurance involves a systematic process of gathering and evaluating evidence. I realize that there is a small chance that when you read the word *assurance* that you don’t initially or automatically link it to the work of professional accountants.

My daughters, who are sitting here in the front, will tell you that while not all accountants are boring, they can get pretty excited about seemingly boring things.

So “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Is there a systematic way to apply extrarational processes to obtain a high degree of assurance of things hoped for? By applying these processes, could we someday even reach the level of assurance obtained by someone like Elder LeGrand Richards?

A Sincere and Humble Desire

A number of years ago our family moved to the beautiful little township of Basking Ridge, New Jersey. I was on a two-year professional development leave from BYU while I worked for a large firm headquartered in New York City. Our neighbor, the town historian, was surprised to learn we would be driving twenty-five minutes to attend the LDS Church when our township had three perfectly good and beautiful historic Christian churches.

After a couple of weeks in our new ward, the bishop extended a home teaching assignment to me to visit John and Nancy Ferderber. John was a retired business executive, and it looked to me like he was probably a former bishop. I was surprised to learn that he was not a member of the Church. His wife, Nancy, and children were members, and he had been very supportive of his children’s Church involvement, missions, and temple marriages. He even attended sacrament meeting with Nancy. John had also always been supportive of the youth and Scouting midweek activities. He shared his enthusiasm for sports with the youth, and he was the longtime Young Women basketball coach. He was particularly skilled at starting with Beehives and, through instruction and practice, turning them into ball players.

John described himself as a dry Mormon and said he always felt welcomed by the members but had difficulty accepting all that went along with being a Mormon.

I remember our early visits with John and Nancy. John was quite interested in the business reasons for our move to New Jersey. I explained that when we came on home teaching visits, in addition to catching up and finding out how they were doing, we would be sharing a brief gospel message. John agreed. However, I quickly learned that he knew the home teaching drill very well. One time my lesson apparently wasn’t brief enough, and before I was done he simply turned to my young companion and said, “How about that

closing prayer?" which meant he had had enough for the day.

As we were teaching lessons of the Restoration, I asked John what his religious beliefs were. He said, "Steve, I'll tell you. I was baptized Catholic. I wasn't all that religious as a younger man, and now I choose to attend the Mormon Church." Then he said, "So you see, Steve, I've already been baptized."

I smiled and reminded him that we believed he would need to be baptized again by one holding the priesthood.

To which John said, "I understand, and maybe one of these days I'll take care of that."

Nancy, who had never given up hope, looked over at John and said, "What do you mean, one of these days? You are not getting any younger."

A year or so went by, during which time the full-time missionaries checked in on John and reported back that he was the nicest man but was not ready to accept the gospel. He kept attending sacrament meeting and accepting our home teaching visits, and as long as it was good-natured, he let me talk of how someday he would be joining the Church.

Then John had very serious health challenges that required several surgeries. After we gave him a blessing in the hospital, John told us he had been impressed that this life is the time to carefully and seriously consider the things of heaven. He told me that if he made it through the surgery, he would commit to retaking the missionary lessons.

After the surgery he said he felt watched over and realized he had been granted another chance. There were health complications and months of recovery, and through it all John's heart continued to soften. The prayers of his wife, children, grandchildren, ward members, and loved ones were heard, and he started to openly discuss the possibility, even the likelihood, of being baptized. Our two-year leave from BYU came to a close, and John's health situation was such that he was still months away

from being well enough to be baptized. We returned to BYU and promised that we would travel back to New Jersey for his baptism.

When he was ready that following October, John walked up to the full-time missionaries at church and asked them what he would need to do in order to be baptized in early November.

It was a beautiful service. Imagine the scene as John entered the baptismal font with a large group of loved ones standing by—including Nancy and his children and many grandchildren—who had prayed for this day for so many years. When John came up out of the water, he smiled and raised his hands in celebration, and then, spontaneously, there went out a loud cheer from all those beautiful grandchildren and family members. It is the first and only time I have attended a baptism at which such a loud and joyous cheer went out, but, under the circumstances, it was totally appropriate.

John and Nancy were sealed in the temple a year later, and that was more than ten years ago now. John said he was so pleased to fulfill the promise in Nancy's patriarchal blessing that she would be married to an elder in the Church. Together they served as workers in the Manhattan New York Temple, and they have served two Church service missions. We are honored that John and Nancy are here with us today.

What lessons from John's experience do we learn about gaining assurance from extrarational processes? We certainly see the power of a loving and faithful wife and family who offered countless prayers in John's behalf. John also felt welcomed by the Saints. In the Book of Mormon Alma taught that the extrarational process often begins with a humble and basic desire to believe. As the word of God is planted like a seed in our hearts, it will begin to swell, provide enlightenment, and enlarge the soul (see Alma 32:28). John was humble, he had a desire, and he acted upon the spiritual promptings he received.

I remember talking to John on the phone in the weeks that followed his baptism. He was learning so much about the gospel and was surprised and a little nervous to be invited to teach the priesthood lesson. What was clear is that even though John had sat through hundreds of sacrament meeting talks, without the benefit of the gift of the Holy Ghost, he had not retained much of that teaching.

To apply extrarational processes, we must have a sincere and humble desire to gain knowledge, and we must act in response to spiritual promptings. The Holy Ghost is the great facilitator in obtaining assurance of spiritual things. If we ever find ourselves just going through the motions of attending Sunday meetings or offering prayers without a sincere and heartfelt desire, we need to recognize that this is not an effective application of our extrarational processes.

As a teenager David O. McKay desired to obtain his own witness of the truth. He described riding his horse into the hills to a secluded place to offer a fervent prayer, asking God for a testimony of the gospel. He expected that there would be a manifestation that would remove all doubt. As he was riding home after his prayer, he pondered on the events:

*I remember rather introspectively searching myself and involuntarily shaking my head, saying to myself, "No sir, there is no change; I am just the same boy I was before I knelt down." The anticipated manifestation had not come. ["Testimony . . . the Most Precious Gift," *Treasures of Life*, comp. Clare Middlemiss (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1962), 229–30; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 164]*

Even though President McKay did not receive right away the manifestation he had expected, he continued to apply extrarational processes of humbly seeking with sincere

desire and choosing to live a righteous life. He said, "The spiritual manifestation for which I had prayed as a boy in my teens came as a natural sequence to the performance of duty" ("The Prayer of Youth," *Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay*, comp. Clare Middlemiss, rev. ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 7; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents: McKay*, 164).

Answers to our prayers may not always come in an immediate and direct response to prayer or at the time or manner we anticipate, but they do come as we continue to do the will of God, and they come at a time and in a manner that is in our best interest.

Taking Action to Receive Assurance

My great-great-grandfather, Morris David Rosenbaum, was born in Germany in 1831 to a Jewish family. At eleven years old he asked the rabbi why there were no more prophets or temples. The rabbi explained that those things were no longer needed because the Old Testament was complete and contained all the necessary patterns. At age nineteen Morris traveled to New York City for business, and some years later he traveled to San Francisco. In his travels he heard about a Mormon settlement and was impressed to visit. His religious discussions with the Mormon settlers made little impression on him, although he recorded in his journal that the Mormons were the best people he had come into contact with.

Morris applied an important principle in obtaining assurance of things hoped for when he described the Mormons as the best people he had come into contact with. He recognized the fruits of the gospel. The Savior taught, "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:17, 20).

As you apply extrarational processes, use your powers of observation to look around and examine the fruits of the gospel of Jesus Christ

and His restored Church. Do you see the blessing it can be in people's lives and in their families? Do you see the peace and joy that comes, under any circumstance, to those who faithfully live the gospel? I know I have.

When the settlement of Mormons relocated to Utah, Morris decided to travel with them to spend the winter in Utah. He then planned to return to Germany. In Salt Lake City he heard Elder Heber C. Kimball speak, and he recorded in his journal that it seemed he had heard that sermon before because he could anticipate what Elder Kimball was going to say.

Morris then met Brother Neibaur, a member of the Church who was from Germany and also of Jewish descent. Morris and Brother Neibaur had several discussions about the gospel of Jesus Christ. At first Morris could not believe, as the teachings were so different from the teachings of his childhood. Little by little he became more interested, and a peaceful, teachable spirit fell upon him.

However, listen to what he records next in his journal: "When I listened to my selfish thoughts it seemed to me I was deceived. I hated Mormonism and regretted ever hearing it." Morris described selfish thoughts perhaps because he knew the likely reaction from his parents if he were to join the Church.

As we use our extrarational processes to gather assurance of things hoped for, will we encounter selfish or doubting thoughts? Absolutely!

We know that particularly in these latter days, gospel principles will be attacked, and those attacks may come through seemingly rational arguments. When our beliefs are challenged, we have the opportunity to choose the peace and protection that comes through faith. Faith is not a free gift. The Savior described action when he invited, "Come unto me" (Matthew 11:28) and "Knock, and it shall be [given] you" (Matthew 7:7). President Thomas S. Monson said, "Remember that doubt and faith cannot exist in the mind at the same time,

for one will dispel the other. Whereas doubt destroys, faith fulfills" ("Great Expectations," BYU devotional address, 11 January 2009).

When Morris examined the fruits of his thoughts, he noticed that whenever he would determine to have nothing more to do with Mormonism there was darkness, but when he studied the Book of Mormon and went to meetings, he felt surrounded by a peaceful influence and felt he was being instructed the principles of the gospel by an unseen power.

Morris recorded in his journal that one time after Brother Neibaur bore his testimony of the gospel, Morris asked, "Mr. Neibaur, why cannot I have such a testimony?"

Brother Neibaur replied, "Mr. Rosenbaum, I promise you in the name of Israel's God you will if you obey the principles of the gospel, repent, and be baptized for the remission of sin, then ask prayerfully your Heavenly Father for it."

Morris longed for such, and a few days later he chose to be baptized and confirmed a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Brigham Young later sealed Morris and his wife in the Salt Lake Temple, and several years later Morris served a mission to Germany. By the way, my Grandfather Glover was also named Morris, and my middle name is Morris.

We learn important principles about applying extrarational processes from my great-great-grandfather's story. We must repent and be obedient, and we must often take action before receiving the desired witness. Morris also read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover and had a strong conviction that the book was written by inspiration.

Obtaining a High Degree of Assurance

It is said that when we wish to communicate with God, we do so through prayer, and when God wishes to communicate with us, it is often through the scriptures. Our son, who is currently serving in the Australia Melbourne

Mission, has worked with people who have sought baptism after finding answers to important questions in the Book of Mormon. We learn in Alma 37 that the scriptures are our own personal Liahona. My experience is that it doesn't matter so much where in the scriptures we are reading and pondering; the act of studying and pondering opens the windows of heaven.

Using my now-keen powers of observation, I can tell you that the assurance you do obtain through extrarational processes can and will fade if you get lax in your church attendance, scripture study, and personal prayer. In Alma 32 we learn that even if the seed is good and grows into a tree that produces good fruit, if we neglect the tree it will wither away. It withers not because the seed is not good or the fruit is not delicious but rather because of the neglect and lack of nourishment.

I testify that by the proper application of our extrarational processes there is a systematic path leading to a high degree of assurance of things hoped for, even knowledge and a surety of divine and spiritual things.

I will close with a promise from our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, who in a BYU devotional taught:

To those who humbly seek, there is no need to stumble or falter along the pathway leading to truth. It is well marked by our Heavenly Father. We must first have a desire to know for ourselves. We must study. We must pray. We must do the will of the Father. And then we will know the truth, and the truth will make us free. Divine favor will attend those who humbly seek it. That is a promise which I leave with you. Think of it. ["Great Expectations"]

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.