

Faith to Testimony

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Introduction –

Today I will speak about faith and testimony. I will use the story of a young woman named Maria Karlsson to introduce and illustrate the points I would like to share. Maria's story begins in Sweden in about 1974 in the city of Tranås which was about 1 hour drive from the city of Jönköping where the nearest branch of the church was located. To introduce her let me read some excerpts from her own words she titled "My path to faith"

Maria: When I began school, we sometimes studied a subject called "Knowledge of Christianity". I liked this subject and I believe it was because of this my interest in religion began. The subject of religion continued to be of interest to me throughout my school years. One day when I was 10 – 11 years old, my big sister Eva played some music and I was curious about it. I asked her who was singing and her answer was something like: "That is the Osmonds. They belong to some strange sect and they don't smoke nor drink." This sounded really good to me that they didn't smoke or drink. Besides this I wondered what kind of church this was that I hadn't heard of before. The Osmonds were known all over the world in the 70's, so now and then there would be something in the newspapers about them and I liked and approved of what I learned. I learned that they had a good family life, lived wholesome lives and stood for good values. This made an impression on me. I wanted to know more. One day when I was in a store looking through a magazine, I suddenly noticed written on a page: "Would you like to know more about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints? Write to... and there was the address to the mission office near Stockholm. I quickly memorized the address and ran home and wrote it down. I then sent a letter where I asked for information about the church

Maria received some brochures from the mission office and was contacted by a young woman named Linda from the nearest branch of the church who gave her a book of Mormon and invited her to church.

“My mom drove me to the church and went with me to the meeting. I remember that I received a good feeling as soon as I stepped through the door of the chapel.”

Linda married and moved and Maria lost contact with her. Several years passed and Maria is now 14.5 years old as we pick up her story:

Maria: During this time multiple churches rang our doorbell in Tranås. My sister became somewhat friends with one of them. Even someone from the Hare Krishna came and rang our doorbell. I thought: Why don't those whom I want to come, come?

Shortly after I thought this the telephone rang and a missionary from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints wondered if they could come and visit me!

This is where I come into the story as I was the missionary that called Maria. We set up a time and the branch mission leader drove us there. I remember well that first meeting with Maria. Some of the events of that day are still bright and clear in my mind. We knew she had received a Book of Mormon. I asked her if she had read any of it. She said she had and went and got it from her room and handed it to me. I remember I was somewhat shocked as she had read up until some chapter in Mormon (I don't recall exactly which). We asked her what she thought, and I remember her matter of fact statement that she believed all of it. We taught her a lesson that day and then came back a 2nd time and taught her.

Maria: “I agreed with everything they told me - not to make them happy, but because I felt that the pieces fall into place. It was as if everything had been hidden within me, and when the missionaries introduced the church, it seemed all so obvious that I could not but accept what they said.”

At her 2nd visit Maria was ready and desirous to be baptized. But when we explained to her mother that Maria needed her permission to be baptized until she was age 18, her mother said wait she felt Maria should wait until she was 18. Further she felt it wasn't necessary for us to come anymore to teach Maria. I received permission from her Mother and from the Mission president to correspond with Maria. In a letter I received from her a few weeks after our last visit Maria said:

Maria: "Yesterday I finished the Book of Mormon. It has been interesting, and I believe it is true. I can declare that I feel that it is true and right. Maybe that sounds dumb but that's the way I feel."

Faith cometh by hearing

- Heb 11:1
" Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

- Rom 10:17

"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"

Faith comes as the result of evidence presented to us. For those of us that are converted to the church we receive evidence from missionaries or friends. In Maria's case her evidence came with the feelings she had on her first visit to church. It came as she was taught by us missionaries and heard our testimonies. It came from reading the Book of Mormon and receiving a witness of it.

For those of us who are baptized when we are young our evidence comes from parents and others at church. For me I think of my Mother's teaching, faith and testimony.

I remember as a boy, probably around 10 years of age being at a stake conference and hearing Elder Hugh B Brown, of the first presidency speak. I remember the feeling of the spirit that touched me at that time. We stood and sang the hymn "The Spirit of God". I remember the feelings at that moment and the tears that came to my eyes. I looked up to see both my mother and my father with tears in their eyes as well as we all felt moved by the Spirit. I am still moved as I think back on that moment.

What experiences of yours has stirred hope and faith in you?

Maria: "As my mother wouldn't let me be baptized, I said I would wait until I was 18 to be baptized. While I waited, I tried to live as if I was a member of the church.

Time went by. When I was in high school and had oral presentations or essays, I would do them about the church. I also gave a lesson on the plan of salvation and the articles of faith when we had a class of religion. I kept away from alcohol and cigarettes and tried being with good friends. During this time, I was blessed with courage and a strong faith. This was

something I really needed because I was alone and needed to stand up for my beliefs.”

Faith requires action

Is a belief or faith alone enough? No, faith requires that we act upon our belief as Maria did while she was waiting to be baptized. Just think how easy it would have been for her to do nothing and to drift away.

- **James 1:22**

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only "

Our faith requires us to act - we repent, we change, we do, we serve.

Action generates evidence or a witness

As we act in faith, we receive further witnesses, further evidence and our faith grows. It is like a spiral that grows ever bigger over time. Evidence leads to faith, faith leads to action and action yields a witness which leads to greater faith.

So, what is a testimony?

As we receive evidence or witnesses after we act in faith, as we gather them to ourselves, we are building what we refer to as a testimony. I like to describe my testimony as the sum of all the witnesses that I have received of God, Christ, His church, the Book of Mormon and so forth.

I like to think of my testimony as a conglomerate of witnesses I've received.

Some pieces are little, other pieces are bigger. For me a big piece is the witness I received from God to the truth of the Book of Mormon when I finished reading it fully for the first time and prayed about it as a teenager.

Since that time my testimony has grown by adding big and little pieces, witness to it.

Sometimes it is not easy to exercise faith

Think of the situation Maria was in as a 14 year old girl. I could generate a fairly big list of the obstacles she faced. Let alone for a teenager waiting 3.5 years is like waiting an eternity for something.

Sometimes we face situations where we can't see what is ahead and we'd like the evidence or the witness before we act.

Boyd K Packer: Beyond the edge of the Light

“Shortly after I was called as a General Authority, I went to Elder Harold B. Lee for counsel. He listened very carefully to my problem and suggested that I see President David O. McKay. President McKay counseled me as to the direction I should go. I was very willing to be obedient but saw no way possible for me to do as he counseled me to do.

“I returned to Elder Lee and told him that I saw no way to move in the direction I was counseled to go. He said, ‘The trouble with you is you want to see the end from the beginning.’ I replied that I would like to see at least a step or two ahead. Then came the lesson of a lifetime: ‘You must learn to walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness; then the light will appear and show the way before you.’ Then he quoted these 18 words from the Book of Mormon:

“Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

Witnesses comes to us after we exercise our faith.

Can we lose faith?

Yes, there are several ways we can lose our faith.

We can cast aside our witnesses by letting fear guide our actions. Fear of what others may think, or fear of what others teach.

Or we harden our hearts through pride or sin such that the Holy Ghost can’t reach us. Think of Lamien and Lemuel who could not hear the voice of the spirit because of the hardness of their hearts.

We can let doubt overcome the witnesses we have received. In this case we can look to Oliver Cowdry. He had received a witness from God – a testimony, but he had some doubts. The Lord addressed his doubts this way:

- **D&C 6:22-23**

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things.

Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?"

We can hold to and remember those times we received peace in our minds about matters. It is so with me. I can “cast my mind upon the night I cried unto the Lord” to know the truth concerning the Book of Mormon. He did speak peace unto my mind. And truly, what greater witness do I need

What happened to Maria then?

Maria: “I was baptized the 22nd of March 1981, three days after my eighteenth birthday. I remember that I felt unbelievably happy when I came up out of the water.”

About 6 months before she was baptized, Maria met her future husband Dick Thörn. He was baptized 5 months after Maria and the next year they were married and sealed in the Switzerland temple. They moved to the town of Jönköping Sweden to be close to where there was a ward and have been very active in the church ever since. They have 3 daughters and several grandchildren. One of their daughters served a mission.

My witness to you is if we but desire to have faith or grow our faith and then act on that faith our testimonies will grow. God will be there as you step out of the light into the darkness. He will uphold and lift you.

Michael Baird