

**Stake Conference Talk**  
**Joseph A. Staples**  
**Willow Creek Stake**  
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One of the most enjoyable things we get to do as a stake presidency and high council is to hear from recently returned missionaries as they report on their labors. I wish you could all hear them.

Last month we had six return and report one Sunday morning. I took a picture of them. I can't show the picture to you, though I did consider passing my phone around for you to look at the picture, but that obviously wouldn't work very well. But there they stood, five fine Elders and a wonderful sister, big smiles on their faces, reunited like the Sons of Mosiah, proud of what they had accomplished. It was a great sight!

As they reported, one of the Elders started by saying something that I feel is so appropriate for what I'd like to talk about this morning. Elder Levi Lambson said as he began his testimony, "The words are the same as when I left on my mission, but the feelings and that testimony are deeper."

Deeper! His testimony was deeper!

What does that mean?

As you're aware, the theme for this stake conference is deepening our discipleship in the Savior. In my remarks this morning, I would like to focus on that word "deepening". Specifically, I'd like to:

1. Answer what it means to deepen our discipleship
2. Discuss how we deepen our discipleship
3. Why, or to what end, is deepening important

Okay, back to the first question... What does it mean to deepen our discipleship?

Just about everyone, when they get married professes love to their soon-to-be spouse. "I love you" are words that often flow freely from the young bride or groom to be. But my wife Robyn had a test that she would use with our daughters when they looked like they might be headed to the temple with some young man that we hardly knew! She would ask our daughter, "would he swim through shark infested waters for you?" What she was trying to get to was an answer about the depth of his love. This ALWAYS caused our daughters to stop, or at least pause, and consider the answer.

So in many respects, the depth of our discipleship goes hand in hand with our willingness, or commitment to do all that He asks of us.

For most everyone here today... we have testimonies. We believe that God lives, that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, that the gospel was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We believe that. We're active church members. But the personal reflection is to ask ourselves, "How deep is my discipleship? How deep is my conviction?"

Together with President Ludlow, I've sat in the stake president's office while President Esplin issued a calling. A calling that might be challenging. A calling that might detract from other things this couple wanted to do. A calling that might not come at the most convenient time. And after the calling was accepted, President Esplin looked at the couple with complete sincerity and said, "Thank you. I know if we asked you to do cartwheels down Highland Drive, that you would say yes, because those are the kind of people you are."

That level of commitment is an expression of the depth of our discipleship.

There is evidence, or let's call it self-evidence that can also help us determine how deep our discipleship is. And it's not what church position we hold! Those come and go. It's far more personal than that. It is found in the answers to questions such as: How often do we think about the Savior? How concerned are we about those around us - and specifically, those that don't have the Gospel in their lives? How willing are we to do whatever the Lord asks of us? How anxious are we to feast on the word of God?

It's a personal question, but one that we should each ask ourselves, how deep is my discipleship.

Second, how do we deepen our discipleship?

President Kimball details a practical application. He wrote, "There are in our lives reservoirs of many kinds. Some reservoirs are to store water. ... There should also be reservoirs of knowledge to meet the future needs; reservoirs of physical strength to help us meet the frequent burdens of work and illness; reservoirs of goodness; ... especially reservoirs of faith so that when the world presses in upon us, we stand firm and strong."

Two years ago I felt that in order to deepen my own personal discipleship, I needed to increase my knowledge of the doctrine of the church. I still have so much farther to go, but I've made progress. And that progress has only come with work and effort – there aren't any shortcuts.

So I would suggest that we each should pick something, one thing, that would deepen our own very personal discipleship. It could be better Sabbath day worship, deeper study of the scriptures, a recommitment to family home evening, more regular temple attendance, or any or several other things. And your choice might not be the same as my choice... but some action is required if we want to deepen your discipleship.

We all remember President Russell M. Nelson's challenge we he asked the young adults of the Church to consecrate a portion of their time each week to study *everything* Jesus said and did as recorded in the standard works.

When he finished that exciting exercise, his wife asked him what impact it had on him. He told her, "I am a different man!"

So the "how" behind deepening is to take action. To pick something and then to do it.

That leads us to the last question...Why is this important? Why do we need to deepen? Why isn't our current state good enough?

Let me offer an analogy.

We lived in Seattle for six years.. We lived on a beautiful one acre lot originally covered with aspen trees, most of which were 20 feet tall or more. When they cleared a portion of our lot to build our home, the trees that used to be in the middle of the grove, protected by the strength of so many other trees now found themselves on the edge of the tree line, where they had to face the wind in a very different way than before. After one of our first winters there, I went through this grove of trees and counted 31 trees that had been snapped in two by the wind. The circumstances for those trees had changed!

We'd be wise to recognize that the world changes. Sister Elaine Cannon made the statement: People need more than a junior high education in the gospel to deal with today's problems."

What worked for us today, might not be strong enough to withstand what we'll need to endure tomorrow's challenges. And without a deep testimony and discipleship of the Savior, we put us, and our family at risk.

The scriptures teach a profound lesson of the "why" behind the need to "deepen" our discipleship. It's found in the words of Helaman to his sons Lehi and Nephi.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Helaman, Helaman gives us the reason why we need a deep-rooted discipleship... Verse 12 says, "That when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you."

I stand with you in our daily pursuit of deepening our discipleship. I close with my testimony of truthfulness of the Gospel. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith. I express my immense gratitude to my Heavenly Father and bear witness of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.