

Filing out the Blemishes

An Address given by Chad Staten in the Tooele 29th Ward, 19 May 2024

Explosive Decompression

On a winters day just over 70 years ago, a passenger jet operating as BOAC Flight 781 took off from Ciampino airport in Rome. Temperatures hovered near freezing, but there was no precipitation, and there were no abnormal indications as the airplane climbed into partly cloudy skies. About 20 minutes after taking off, the world's first production jet airliner, a De Havilland Comet, broke up in mid-air, scattering wreckage and the remains of all 35 souls on board into the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of the island of Elba.



There were no witnesses, nor any meaningful radio transmissions that could help explain this sudden disaster. There was speculation in the media, with theories ranging from sabotage, to turbulence, to an explosion of fuel vapor in an empty tank. De Havilland immediately recommended 60 modifications aimed at

correcting any design flaws, but these were nothing better than shots in the dark. Nobody knew what had really happened.

The Royal Navy conducted a search, but as late as September 1954, still only 70 to 80% of the wreckage had been recovered. Using these pieces, the Royal Aircraft Establishment reconstructed about two-thirds of the aircraft on a hangar floor in



Farnborough, England. Investigators found evidence that the catastrophic break-up had resulted from the sudden growth of a tiny, undetected crack in a rivet hole that caused the skin to fail downward and rearward, resulting in an explosive decompression, or in other words, the airplane disintegrated in mid-air.

The insidious thing about cracks in aircraft structures is that they are often hidden. They can develop from the most innocuous things. Just yesterday, I read an article in an email from the air safety foundation. The NTSB has investigated several accidents where a failure to properly inspect and repair small damage to aluminum propeller blades resulted in fatigue cracking and fractures, which can occur if a small nick on the edge is not repaired. Treating damage like small nicks in a propeller is usually easy to do and very effective. It involves filing out the blemishes to eliminate sharp corners where stresses could build up and lead to cracks.

Think of the spin cycle on your washing machine when all the towels are bunched in one side of the drum. The washer shakes furiously trying to spin the unbalanced load. Multiply this by a couple thousand RPM and you can begin to imagine how violent it can be if a large piece of your propeller blade suddenly breaks off.



Sometimes we allow doubts to form tiny, undetected cracks in our testimonies. Maybe we're not so careful about doing spiritual inspections (or *introspections*) and we miss the warning signs. Perhaps we even discover small areas of damage, but don't do the required maintenance (scripture study and prayer, coupled with daily repentance for our shortcomings) to repair the damage. We go through life thinking everything is fine until suddenly, it's not.

What happens then depends on how much redundancy is built into the system. As long as our gospel study is centered with a heavy emphasis on core doctrines,

we are less likely to be drawn away by things on the outer fringes that distract us from what's most important.

Stay at the Trunk

As a group, the leaves make up an important part of the tree, creating energy through photosynthesis, and taking care of the respiratory functions for the whole tree. But one, or five, or ten leaves on a big tree are individually not so critical to the health of the tree. You can pull off a single leaf (or many on a big tree) before the tree starts to suffer. The leaves are the part of the tree we see most. It's easy to get distracted by a few yellow leaves, perhaps causing us to worry that the whole tree is sick. And if we think the tree is sick, what is to keep us from abandoning it, or even worse, attempting to chop down a healthy tree?



In an address at the most recent BYU Women's Conference, Relief Society General President Camille Johnson compared our understanding of the gospel to a tree.

"I invite you to stay at the trunk of the tree," she said.

Spend your precious time striving to understand foundational points of doctrine—that nourish the roots of the tree. For example: the nature of my covenant relationship with God; the Savior and His Atonement; how to exercise faith in Him; and the glorious plan of happiness.

Then, when you have a leaf question, consider how it connects back to the branch and then to the trunk or core fundamental doctrine of the gospel.

For example, when I am firmly rooted in the truth that God loves us and directs His work through living prophets—when I know that “trunk doctrine,” I can be content in not knowing the answer to a leaf question.

We need to pay the price to know that God’s prophets are His mouthpiece, that Jesus Christ is actively leading His Church, and that we can trust Him with complete certainty even when we don’t understand completely—then the leaves draw context and spiritual insight from the trunk of the tree.¹

What About Doubts?

Elder Dieter Uchtdorf also touched on this issue in his General Conference address in 2013:

Some might ask, “But what about my doubts?”

It’s natural to have questions—the acorn of honest inquiry has often sprouted and matured into a great oak of understanding. There are few members of the Church who, at one time or another, have not wrestled with serious or sensitive questions. One of the purposes of the Church is to nurture and cultivate the seed of faith—even in the sometimes sandy soil of doubt and uncertainty. Faith is to hope for things which are not seen but which are true.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters—my dear friends—please, first doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith. We must never allow doubt to hold us prisoner and keep us from the divine love, peace, and gifts that come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.²

Abinadi and the Priests

One of the principles most important to our testimony of the foundational truths of the gospel is understanding with the heart. When wicked King Noah had him dragged before his priests for questioning, Abinadi withstood all their questions and confounded them. In their efforts to trip him up in his speaking, the priests asked him to explain a passage of scripture, saying “What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers?”³

¹ Sister Camille Johnson, BYU Women’s Conference, 2024

² Dieter Uchtdorf, General Conference, 2013

³ Mosiah 12:20



Abinadi would have none of their deceitful machinations, and accused them:

“Are you priests, and pretend to teach this people, and to understand the spirit of prophesying, and yet desire to know of me what these things mean? I say unto you, wo be unto you for perverting the ways of the Lord! For if ye understand these things ye have not taught them; therefore, ye have perverted the ways of the Lord.

Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people?

And they said: We teach the law of Moses.⁴

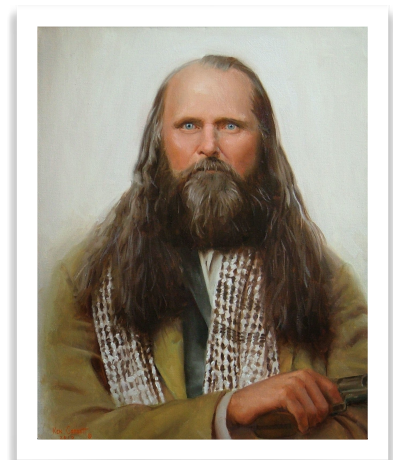
They may have taught the law of Moses, but did they understand it? No. Though it functioned under the Aaronic Priesthood as a preparatory gospel, its function was to bring people to Jesus Christ. They had forgotten that all the ceremonies, rituals, and symbols were meant to remind them of the Savior.

⁴ Mosiah 12:25-30

Now, we live a higher law. We have the fullness of the Gospel of Christ. But how often do we find ourselves going through the motions, just like the priests of Noah? Why do we go to church? Why do we pay tithing? Why do we study the scriptures? Do we view these things as ritualistic obligations, or do we cherish them because we actively apply our hearts to understanding that all these things help us to develop a closer relationship with the Saviour?

Conclusion

Porter Rockwell was said to have quipped "I may not walk the straight and narrow path, but I cross it as often as I can." But King Noah and his priests had wandered so far away from the path, there was no crossing it for them. They were already long past applying their hearts to understanding by the time Abinadi was standing before them. They had already lost part of a propeller blade and experienced an explosive decompression because they hadn't done the required maintenance all along. They failed to file out the blemishes before little and harmless things became big and catastrophic things.



Let us take a lesson from this story and make a real effort to apply our hearts to understanding that we may develop a testimony that is deeply, spiritually strong—not intellectual, but superficial. If we are firmly rooted in good soil, the tempest and the whirlwind may blow, but we will remain true and faithful, and stand firm when the storm is over. This we do through careful and prayerful study. Let us also do the necessary introspection so that we can recognize distractions and see our imperfections, that we may file out the blemishes before we develop cracks and risk the devastating disintegration of our spiritual lives. Humility and an attitude of daily repentance, grasping the outstretched, steadying hand of our Saviour as he runs to our aid will help us accomplish this frequent maintenance.

That we may so do is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.