A selection of teachings and testimony about the First Vision from various Church leaders as given over the decades:

**Elder Jeffrey R. Holland:**

One concluding thought: Joseph Smith’s 19th-century frontier environment was aflame with competing crowds of Christian witnesses. But in the tumult they created, these exuberant revivalists were, ironically, obscuring the very Savior young Joseph so earnestly sought. Battling what he called “darkness and confusion,” he retreated to the solitude of a grove of trees where he saw and heard a more glorious witness of the Savior’s centrality to the gospel than anything we have mentioned here this morning. With a gift of sight unimagined and unanticipated, Joseph beheld in vision His Heavenly Father, the great God of the universe, and Jesus Christ, His perfect Only Begotten Son. Then the Father set the example we have been applauding this morning: He pointed to Jesus, saying: “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” No greater expression of Jesus’s divine identity, His primacy in the plan of salvation, and His standing in the eyes of God could ever exceed that short seven-word declaration.

Commotion and confusion? Crowds and contention? There is plenty of all that in our world. Indeed, skeptics and the faithful still contend over this vision and virtually all else I have referred to today. In case you may be striving to see more clearly and to find meaning in the midst of a multitude of opinions, I point you toward that same Jesus and bear apostolic witness of Joseph Smith’s experience, coming as it did some 1,800 years after our blind friend received his sight on the ancient Jericho Road. I testify with these two and a host of others down through time that surely the most thrilling sight and sound in life is that of Jesus not only passing by but His coming to us, stopping beside us, and making His abode with us.

**President Spencer W. Kimball:**

And time passed and the darkness of ages was beginning to be dissipated; the new world of America had been discovered, and honorable God-fearing people had settled upon it. The war had been waged and freedom gained, and religious liberty granted, and the Lord Jesus Christ appeared on earth again to restore and re-establish His kingdom upon the earth, and a young boy with an open and unbiased mind, knelt one beautiful spring morning in a grove, and prayed for light, and though the evil power attempted to destroy him, he was relieved by the appearance of a pillar of light above the brightness of the sun.

. . . It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound When the light rested upon me I saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling
me by name, and said—pointing to the other—"This is my beloved Son, hear him."

*(History of the Church, Vol. I, p. 5.)*

There followed warnings, instructions, and commandments and finally, as Joseph says:

> When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven.

*Ibid., p. 6.*

Following this vision came numerous other visitations from heavenly beings, in the restoration of the gospel and the establishing of his kingdom upon the earth.

The work went forward, the Church was organized, the Book of Mormon was printed, the revelations were given, twelve apostles were called, the temple in Kirtland was built, and during the dedication of it in 1836:

> . . . Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery retired to the pulpit, the veils being dropped, and there bowed in silent prayer After rising from their knees the Savior appeared to them standing on the breast-work of the pulpit and blessed them, accepting the building in his name. *(Essentials in Church History, pp. 191-192.)*

And so, having traced the appearances of the Redeemer from pre-existence to date, we look forward now to his second coming as he promised. This promise will be literally fulfilled as were his many other promises, and in the meantime, we praise his holy name and serve him, and bear testimony of the divinity of his mission, with the prophets through the generations! We testify with John the Baptist, who, as he saw the Lord approaching to him, saith:

> . . . Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

Not just a man of human warmth, but the Lamb of God.

We bear witness with Nathanael, an Israelite in whom was no guile:

> . . . Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. (John 1:49)

Not merely a great teacher, but the very Son of God.

We testify again with John the Beloved, who seeing Jesus on the shore, said with conviction, "It is the Lord!" not only a great humanist, but the Lord God of heaven.

And with Simon Peter, who, when asked by the Lord, "But whom say ye that I am?" said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," *(Matthew 16:15, 16)*, and received this statement from the Savior:

> . . . Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. *(Matthew 16)*
And finally, we bear witness with the Prophet Joseph Smith who was willing to give his life for his testimony, which comes to us in his own words as follows:

I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two personages, and they did in reality speak to me; . . . I have actually seen a vision, and who am I that I can . . . deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it, at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation. (History of the Church, Vol. I, pp. 7,8.)

I repeat my testimony:

I know that Jesus, through eternities past and future, is the Creator, the Redeemer, the Savior, the Son of God.

President M. Russell Ballard:

Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind, is not dead. He lives?—the resurrected Son of God lives?—that is my testimony, and He guides the affairs of His Church today.

In the spring of 1820, a pillar of light illuminated a grove of trees in upstate New York. Our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. This experience began the restoration of powerful doctrinal truths that had been lost for centuries. Among those truths that had been dimmed by the darkness of apostasy was the stirring reality that we are all the spirit sons and daughters of a loving God who is our Father. We are part of His family. He is not a father in some allegorical or poetic sense. He is literally the Father of our spirits. He cares for each one of us. Though this world has a way of diminishing and demeaning men and women, the reality is we are all of royal, divine lineage. In that unprecedented appearance of the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove, the very first word spoken by the Father of us all was the personal name of Joseph. Such is our Father’s personal relationship with each of us. He knows our names and yearns for us to become worthy to return to live with Him.

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith came the Restoration of the gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ has once again revealed, through His chosen prophet, the ordinances and the priesthood authority to administer them for the salvation of all who will believe.

Elder David A. Bednar:

The classic example of asking in faith is Joseph Smith and the First Vision. As young Joseph was seeking to know the truth about religion, he read the following verses in the first chapter of James:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally,
upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering (James 1:5–6).

Please notice the requirement to ask in faith, which I understand to mean the necessity to not only express but to do, the dual obligation to both plead and to perform, the requirement to communicate and to act.

Pondering this biblical text led Joseph to retire to a grove of trees near his home to pray and to seek spiritual knowledge. Note the questions that guided Joseph’s thinking and suppling.

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it? …

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join (Joseph Smith—History 1:10, 18).

Joseph’s questions focused not just on what he needed to know but also on what was to be done! His prayer was not simply, “Which church is right?” His question was, “Which church should I join?” Joseph went to the grove to ask in faith, and he was determined to act.

**Elder Robert D. Hales:**

No testimony is more significant to us in our time than the witness of Joseph Smith. He was the prophet chosen to restore the ancient Church of Christ in this, the last time when the gospel will be on the earth before the return of Jesus Christ. Like all the prophets who opened the work of God in their dispensations, Joseph was given especially clear and powerful prophetic experiences to prepare the world for the Savior’s Second Coming.

As a 14-year-old boy, he sought to know which church he should join. Then, after pondering on the matter, he turned to the Bible, where he read:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him [or her] ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally … ; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

Believing those prophetic words and with unwavering, childlike faith, Joseph went to a grove of trees near his home and there knelt and prayed. Later he recorded:

I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head. …

… When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air.
Looking up at these two beings, even Joseph could not have known who They were—for he had not yet witnessed and learned the true nature of God and Christ. But then, he records, “one of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other?—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!”

From that singular experience and others, the Prophet Joseph bore witness, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also.”

Prophets throughout the ages have shared witnesses like this one and continue to do so in this very conference.

**Elder Robert D. Hales:**

Over the centuries, the world was prepared for that restoration. The Bible was translated and published. A new land was discovered. The spirit of reformation swept through the Christian world, and a nation was founded on the principles of freedom.

Joseph Smith was born in that nation and, at the age of 14, found himself caught in a “tumult of [religious] opinions.” Often he asked himself, “If any one of [these churches] be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?”

Joseph turned to the Bible for answers. “If any of you lack wisdom,” he read in the Epistle of James, “let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

Following James’s direction, Joseph went to a grove of trees near his home and prayed. As he called upon God, “a pillar of light … descended,” brighter than the noonday sun, and “two Personages” appeared. “One of them spake …, calling [Joseph] by name and said, pointing to the other?—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!”

God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, conversed with Joseph. They answered his question. They taught him that the true Church of Christ had been lost from the earth. Joseph learned that these members of the Godhead were separate and distinct beings, They knew him by name, and They were willing to answer his prayers. The heavens were opened, the night of apostasy was over, and the light of the gospel began to shine forth.

**Presiding Bishopric Counselor Richard C. Edgley:**

The reason this Church grows so rapidly is this: A young boy of only 14 years of age went into a grove of trees to petition his God in a simple matter of prayer. And in his innocence, and to his great surprise, the unimaginable happened. The heavens opened, God and Christ appeared, angels descended, and the true gospel of Jesus Christ, with its authority, doctrine, and ordinances, was restored to the earth in its simplicity and its purity. And because of a 14-year-old boy, we can tell you about eternal families, the purpose of life, and other doctrines as revealed by God. And any honest, seeking person can have a personal revelation from God about the truthfulness of this event. And that is why this Church grows so rapidly. . . .

As Joseph Smith walked out of the Sacred Grove declaring a marvelous revelation, his name was reviled. He has indeed been called a charlatan, uneducated, an egomaniac, and every other scornful
name that can be expressed. And yet to those who knew him best through personal acquaintance or personal study or personal revelation, he is revered as one of the Lord’s most beloved and choice servants. . . .

Joseph’s teaching from on high began in the secluded classroom of a grove of trees on that historic day in 1820 when the Father declared: “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” As Joseph subsequently testified, “I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me” (JS—H 1:17, 25).

With this vision of the Father and the Son, Joseph already knew more about the personality and attributes of God than any man on earth. Joseph understood the personal nature of the Godhead and Their separateness—and that he was literally created in Their image and likeness. Joseph at 14 was already a religious scholar—unmatched by any. And with that vision the Restoration was started and the persecutions began. The stone rolled forward and Joseph’s name began to be known for good and evil.

Joseph endured well this all-too-common life of a prophet. We read in the fifth chapter of Acts that the early Apostles were taken before a council of Jewish high priests and tried for their lives for preaching Jesus Christ. After the Apostles had been beaten, judged for their lives, and threatened with death if they ever again preached Jesus Christ, we read:

And they [the Apostles] departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. [Acts 5:41–42]

And so it was with Joseph. As he recounted his marvelous vision, in his wonderment he stated:

How very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. . . .

. . . I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true. . . . For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation. [JS—H 1:23, 25]

And so, like the Apostles of old, Joseph Smith rejoiced in suffering shame for Jesus Christ, “and daily in the temple, and in every house, [he] ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

Elder David B. Haight:

Since my early youth I have believed and carried in my mind a vivid picture of the
teenage Joseph finding a secluded spot, kneeling in the quiet grove, and in childlike faith asking the desire of his heart. He must have felt assured the Lord would hear and somehow answer him. There appeared to him two glorious personages, a description of whom, he said, was beyond his ability to express.

I have been blessed, as the years have passed, with unusual experiences with people, places, and personal events of an intimate, spiritual nature, and, through the power of the Holy Ghost, I have received an ever-deepening witness and knowledge of this heaven-directed restoration of the Lord’s plan of salvation. The events related by Joseph Smith of the Restoration are true.

Each of you can develop in your bosom an uplifting, sanctifying, and glorifying feeling of its truth. The Holy Ghost will reveal and seal upon each of your hearts this knowledge, if you truly desire. Our understanding, belief, and faith in “the vision” (as we refer to it) of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son appearing to Joseph, thereby ushering in this final dispensation with its great and precious truths, is essential to our eternal salvation. Salvation comes only through Christ. Joseph Smith is the instrument or revealer of that knowledge, divinely called to teach of the terms and conditions of the Father’s plan and given the keys of salvation for all mankind.

The knowledge is mine that God did reveal himself unto Joseph—his witness of this final dispensation. We now know something of the form, features, and even character of that mighty intelligence whose wisdom, creation, and power control the affairs of the universe. God made it known that Jesus Christ is the express image of the Father.

In Joseph’s own words, the brightness was above anything he had ever known. He looked up. Before him stood two glorious personages. One of them, pointing to the other, said, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (JS—H 1:17).

It might have seemed inconceivable to young Joseph that he was looking upon God our Heavenly Father and his Son—that the Lord had come to visit and instruct him.

The Son, bidden by the Father, spoke to the kneeling boy. Joseph was told that all the churches were wrong. They had corrupted the doctrine; they had broken the ordinances and had lost the authority of the priesthood of God. He was told that the leaders of the man-made churches were displeasing to the Lord, that they were collecting money which should be given freely, and that the time for the restoration of all truth and authority had come, including the organization of the Church. Then, to his infinite astonishment, he was told that he, Joseph Smith—young, unlearned, but humble—was to be the instrument through whom the Almighty would reestablish his work in these, the latter days—the gospel never to be taken away again. Such was the glorious beginning of the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ.

**Elder L. Tom Perry**:

Out of this hard, difficult beginning, Joseph Smith developed a great reliance on the Lord, trusting in him to gain the exceptional spiritual strength needed so that he could be used by the Lord to organize his church again on the earth. To organize the work to begin this dispensation, the Lord needed a pure spirit, unlearned in the things of the world. He had to have one who could be taught by the ministration of angels. There was no earthly teacher equipped to do this training. The would-be prophet had to be truly sensitive to the Spirit, a quick learner, and a young man of exceedingly great faith—faith enough to approach the Lord after being impressed by reading James 1:5, which reads, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;
and it shall be given him.”

This inspired the young man. He took courage and went into a grove of trees and there asked God to give him the wisdom he was seeking. The great, humble petition of this simple young man brought forth a remarkable change in the thinking of mankind toward the very nature of God. It was the beginning of a whole series of events that occurred in Joseph’s young life.

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**Elder Neal A. Maxwell:**

How can we expect to be a part of such momentous developments as these and yet expect to pass unnoticed so far as the people of the world are concerned? Surely we will not pass unnoticed in our righteous endeavors so far as the adversary is concerned. In 1820 he noticed an obscure teenage lad going into an obscure grove to pray—of all the prayers offered that day, why bother that boy? But it was sufficiently clear to Satan what was about to transpire. Is it any wonder that those who resist the building of the latter-day kingdom will, from time to time (as described in Ether, chapter 8, or the 38th section of the Doctrine and Covenants), act in “combinations” against the kingdom? Everything in the arsenal of the adversary will eventually be used.

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**President Henry D. Moyle:**

In considering the qualifications of Joseph Smith and the importance of his testimony, I call to your attention the fact that what would be a good witness for a scientific discovery, for instance, or any other inquiry would differ materially from the qualifications of a good witness from the standpoint of the Restoration of the gospel, but both would have this thing in common: they would have, as the result of lifelong study, application, and experience, qualified themselves either as a witness for the one or the other, and that work, that effort is as important pertaining to the spiritual witness as it is to the temporal.

A witness’s testimony can be appraised at various times. Take Joseph Smith, for instance. His testimony which he gave as a boy of 15 carries with it all of the earmarks of accuracy, truthfulness. Under those circumstances, Joseph Smith was a perfect witness. He possessed the unique qualifications incident to youth which every lawyer recognizes (absence of self-motive). The result of his testimony placed him in an unenviable rather than a favorable position with his fellowmen. Dare we say that Joseph’s testimony was given to the world then, or was it given to the world as he went along and finally as it was given to the world with the sealing of his blood? You brethren and sisters are familiar with his history, even as I or more so. You consider the testimony of Joseph Smith in its various forms, given at the various periods of his life, and see how perfect a witness he was at each period of time and how he possessed the essential qualifications of a true witness whenever he bore witness, from the time he received his first vision until his martyrdom.

At the time of his death his qualifications as a witness were perfect. He had learned to understand life’s most important problems and how to approach them for others. He had faced these problems in life with keen intellect, sound judgment, wise exercise of free agency. He could have qualified under the most rigid cross-examination of the best lawyer as an expert witness. He lacked none of the qualifications. He further qualified by living a moral, useful, serviceable, unselfish, spiritual life. For these virtues Joseph was willing to work, struggle, fight, and suffer, and we know by experience that
is the only way that we can become the witness that we should. His life was a struggle toward perfecton. He found solutions for the problems of others. All that he did and undertook was successful. He sought the truth. Through him, the Lord told Hyrum Smith, “Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word” (D&C 11:21). I think that is so essential for us who go out to teach the gospel, as is recorded in the 11th section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word [it means that we cannot be a witness unless we obtain His word and His Spirit], and then shall your tongue be loosed [think of that promise]; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men” (D&C 11:21). That is our mission, and that is the power that is promised to the humblest of us, whatever our other qualifications may be. (“Value of a Personal Testimony,” Lecture given to Seminary and Institute Teachers, July 16, 1954; Brigham Young University.)

President Harold B. Lee:

I met a man in his late seventies down in Brisbane, Australia, who said that all his lifetime he had been searching for a church that could answer satisfactorily his question, “Are God and his Son, the Savior of the world, living with your church today?” And always the answer to his question was negative. “The scriptures are closed,” they said. “There is no prophet through whom the Lord speaks today. God does not reveal himself to man.”

He was convalescing from a painful accident when two young men—missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints called. In their opening testimony, they bore witness that the Lord had appeared with his Heavenly Father to Joseph Smith, and in answer to his question as to which church they should join, he was told to join none of them, for they were all wrong, “… they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.” (See Joseph Smith 2:19.)

Here was the answer he had been seeking, and the Spirit bore witness that this was in truth the true Church of Jesus Christ, with which the Father and the Son were living today.

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