



Photo courtesy of Margaret McConkie Pope

Oscar and Vivian McConkie's faith focused the direction of their children and the lives of all their descendants.

## *A House of Faith*

MARGARET MCCONKIE POPE

Margaret McConkie Pope is a former part-time instructor of religion at BYU.

My father, Oscar W. McConkie, grew up in Moab, Utah, and he remembers passing the sacrament in overalls, often barefooted. Dad was raised on a diet of faith, which was the only thing his family had plenty of. Consequently, it was his desire to raise his children on the same diet. He became a mighty man of God, and my mother, Vivian, was a strong but gentle woman of profound faith. Their faith focused the direction of my life and the lives of all their descendants.

### **Desire for Gospel Knowledge**

My five brothers and I grew up in a home where the Spirit of the Lord resided. Some of my earliest memories are of listening as Dad related some of his spiritual experiences. He was a great scholar; I would treasure up his words in my heart. He planted the seed in my heart to desire to know the Lord. He was, as my brother Bruce stated in the dedication to *Mormon Doctrine*, “a pillar of spiritual strength, a scribe and theologian.”

Dad believed that spiritual experiences should be shared, for the most part, with one's children, assuming that they were worthy, believing children. Sharing such experiences would teach children that the gospel is real and not just something that we talk about. Their faith would be built up. My siblings and I all had an honest desire to study and have spiritual growth, and we all grew to know and love the scriptures. I often received, through the Spirit, a burning witness of the truth of what I was reading. This encouraged me to keep reading, that I might experience the same burning again and again. I was thrilled as I read and hungered after knowledge.

Once while I was reading in the Book of Mormon as a teenager, I stopped and pondered for a long time on 1 Nephi 10:17. I read it this way: "I, [Margaret], having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, [Margaret], was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men." This scripture has been a guiding star for me. And it works! My soul has been filled with a great joy and wonder because of it.

Dad promised us that if we would continue to study and apply gospel principles to our lives, our understanding would reach to the heavens. We grew up believing that no blessing was too great for us, that no knowledge was too great for us to receive within the bounds of our stewardship. The Prophet Joseph said, "God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what he will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them."<sup>1</sup> In our Hobbie Creek home, my husband, Bill, and I have this and other favorite scriptures printed in an old-style typeface on the wall above the bookshelves. This is another reminder to our children of where our heart is.

When I was fourteen years old, I discovered a postcard with a quote from Abraham Lincoln that immediately touched my heart: "I will study and get ready, and perhaps my chance will come."<sup>2</sup> I put it in the side of my dresser mirror. It was there until I left home to be married in the temple. Dad had implanted in each one of his six children's hearts the desire to become a gospel scholar, and each of us would someday have the opportunity to teach in a gospel class. Of course my children would need to be instructed, but I wanted



Courtesy of Margaret McConkie Pope

Margaret McConkie Pope taught religion at BYU for many years.

to also teach the youth of the Church in a seminary class. The reality of the time in which I lived was that women were never called to such a position. But I loved the scriptures and I made up my mind that I would become a scholar. Knowledge is never wasted. I determined to be prepared for Church service and family responsibilities, and my greatest joy was in teaching my children.

I taught in BYU Religious Education for twenty-seven years. I was the first female teacher in Religious Education. When I was called to teach, it was a Church calling. No salary.

I agreed to teach if I could be home when our children left for school and when the first child returned home. It worked out well and proved to be a thrilling experience for me. I worked very hard. Each semester there was at least one nonmember who joined the Church or an inactive member who became active. Often they finished the class and headed for a mission.

I taught my ward's Gospel Doctrine class for forty-two years, and I was on the Church committee that wrote the lessons for the Book of Mormon classes. Whatever knowledge I had served me well.

### High Standards and the Blessings of Obedience

My brothers and I were blessed with parents who taught us to be faithful. They set high standards. They taught us that the rewards from the Lord were so great that we did not need to desire anything else. We knew early that there was a promise attached to every single ordinance and commandment of the Lord.

One thing that was never allowed in our home was criticism of the Brethren or of our bishop. I can remember that when a guest in our house said something derogatory about one of the General Authorities, Dad said, "We do not talk that way in this house." On another occasion, he said, "I never





Oscar and Vivian McConkie's family: (front row, left to right) Brit, Bruce, Vivian, Oscar Sr., and James; (back row, left to right) William, Margaret, and Oscar Jr.

indulged the deceitful hope that I could win God's favor while I, at the same time, opposed him in any particular."

Dad served as a district judge for eighteen years, having been told in his patriarchal blessing that he would be called on "to protect the innocent and to judge the unrighteous." Some people criticized my family as I grew up, saying, "Just wait until Judge McConkie's children get out from under his strict discipline. They will rebel." None of us did. Was Dad firm? Yes. Did I realize at the time how firm he was? No.

Dad was a master psychologist. One Sunday afternoon as I was lying on the floor in front of the radio listening to a program, he said to me, "Margaret, it is almost time for sacrament meeting."

"Do I have to go?" I asked.

"No. You want to go. Run and choose which dress you want to wear."

I had been outmaneuvered, but I still had a choice. I still remember the sunny sky and the cool breeze as our family walked the mile to church. Years later I think how those simple spiritual lessons I learned as a child have guided my life.

My mother also taught us a high standard of obedience. I have fond memories of my mother's two favorite and predictable sayings. If someone

had been offended, she would say, "Live above it; think what they should have said," and if someone was not standing straight, "Stand up straight and put your shoulders back." Coincidentally, my brothers grew up to be six-foot-plus.

My parents taught that it is not age or position but personal righteousness that qualifies us for the gifts of the Spirit. Of this I am sure—our faith cannot exceed our obedience and our knowledge of the saving principles of the gospel. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this principle. Do we want to be where the action is, or are we content to read about others' experiences? The great gift of perfect faith is not appended to an office or calling or age. Each one of us can live in such a way that we have the power to call down the blessings of heaven, if we are striving to keep all of the ordinances, commandments, and covenants and if we petition the Lord for help. My father had the ability to call down the blessings of heaven, and in our home I witnessed many miracles. Although they did not create faith by themselves, they strengthened the faith we already had.

### "Just This Once!": Standards Put to the Test

Many of us have been taunted by friends. I know I have. I'll never forget when such an experience challenged my tender young faith.

There was a sharp chill as we left East High early-morning seminary. Wayne Snow drew in his breath and said, "How about a date for New Year's Eve? The fellows have it all planned. We will all go to the 10:00 p.m. show and then have a late supper at Bob's house." I was thrilled to accept. This was going to be a special date. Six weeks passed. In those days, boys asked girls on special dates far in advance. One week before New Year's Eve, Wayne telephoned and said, "The fellows have decided to have dinner first and then take in the midnight show."

My heart sank. New Year's Eve was on a Saturday, and Sunday shows were not allowed at our house.

"Wayne," I said, "I've never been to a show on Sunday. This is something I will have to clear with my dad."

"Margaret, this is New Year's Eve! Everybody else can go. Bob's dad is a bishop. My dad is on the high council. They've said, 'Well, it is New Year's Eve. Just this once won't hurt.'"

Dad and I had a conference. It ended with him saying that the choice was mine. I called Wayne and said, "I'm disappointed and sorry, but I cannot go."

The next day when I went to school, it seemed as though everybody that I met had already heard that I had broken my date. No one seemed to understand why. But I knew it was because I did not want to let my dad down.

### A Legacy of Faith

My brother Bruce believed that faith could be inherited, that our father inherited the faith of his mother, Emma Somerville, and that Bruce, in like manner, had inherited the faith of his mother and father. As a young girl, my constant prayer was that I would find a good man who would be the head of the house as my dad had been, and, as evidence that prayers truly are answered, I found one, Bill J. Pope. My own family inherited my parents' faith; now, in like manner, my children have inherited the faith of Bill and me.

My parents' descendants now number around eight hundred. They have served as leaders in the Relief Society, Mutual, and Primary, on Church general boards and the Church writing committee, and as bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, patriarchs, temple presidents, and members of the Quorum of the Twelve. None have left the Church. All of them who are married were married in the temple. It would be a mistake to assume that serving the Lord in our lives has always been easy and that blessings have flowed without faith. Not so. We have had our trials and seasons of testing. But we have come through active in the Church.

I remember once wondering how my parents were able to establish such a house of faith. As I lay on the carpet in front of our front room fireplace pondering this question, I remember the sun streaming through our picture window. The Spirit whispered to me, "Your parents told their children, daily, that they loved them." There were many ways in which we were reminded how much they loved us. For example, during family prayer, while Mother or Dad prayed we often heard, "Thank you, Father, for sending us these choice spirits whom we love so much." Mother and Dad taught us by their actions that they loved each other and each one of us, and also that they loved the Lord; they truly loved keeping the commandments, and they taught us it was our privilege to keep them as well. These are things that all parents can do.

My parents' example of love, faith, obedience, and thirst for gospel knowledge gave us a pattern for how we wanted to live and serve, and has blessed their posterity for generations to come. **RE**

### Notes

1. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 149.

2. Quoted in Laura Haddock, *Steps Upward in Personality: What Kind of Person Do I Want to Be?* (New York: Professional and Technical Press, 1931), 183.