

Promptings of the Spirit

Elder Gary E. Stevenson—Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—October 2023

1 The constant companionship of the Holy Ghost is one of the greatest spiritual gifts Latter-day Saints enjoy.

2 Looking through a gospel lens, God endows His children with many spiritual gifts, making them spiritually gifted people. Covenant-keeping members of the Church are bestowed with gifts of the Spirit, which include the gift of a testimony of Jesus Christ as our Savior, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the gift of faith to heal and be healed, the gift of discernment, the gift of receiving miracles, and the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. The Lord invites us to earnestly seek the best gifts, even spiritual gifts. He gives spiritual gifts to bless us and to use in blessing others.

3 ... it is important to remember that a gift alone does not a master make. Extraordinary natural talent notwithstanding, it is through painstaking and laborious practice and effort that performers refine and hone their craft to reach their highest level of artistry. Even those gifts received and unwrapped are often accompanied by the dreaded language “some assembly required.”

4 I have observed a learning curve associated with spiritual gifts. Exercising spiritual gifts requires spiritual exercise. “Having the guidance of the Holy Ghost in your life requires spiritual work. This work includes fervent prayer and consistent scripture study. It also includes keeping your covenants and God’s commandments. ... It includes worthily partaking of the sacrament each week.”

5 What are the fruits of exercising spiritual gifts? They include promptings from the Spirit that help us face our daily needs and show us what to do and say and blessings of peace and comfort. As we listen and act on spiritual promptings, the Holy Ghost magnifies our abilities and capacities to far exceed what we can do on our own. These precious spiritual gifts will help us in every aspect of our lives.

6 The constant companionship of the Holy Ghost is one of the greatest spiritual gifts Latter-day Saints enjoy. How important is this gift? President Russell M. Nelson answered this question categorically when he stated that “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”

A Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives

I urge you to stretch beyond your current spiritual ability to receive personal revelation, for the Lord has promised that “if thou shalt [seek], thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.”

Oh, there is so much more that your Father in Heaven wants you to know. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “To those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, it is clear that the Father and the Son are giving away the secrets of the universe!” Nothing opens the heavens quite like the combination of increased purity, exact obedience, earnest seeking, daily feasting on the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon, and regular time committed to temple and family history work. To be sure, there may be times when you feel as though the heavens are closed. But I promise that as you continue to be obedient, expressing gratitude for every blessing the Lord gives you, and as you patiently honor the Lord’s timetable, you will be given the knowledge and understanding you seek. Every blessing the Lord has for you—even miracles—will follow. That is what personal revelation will do for you.

Russell M. Nelson ‘Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives’ (April 2018)

[<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/04/revelation-for-the-church-revelation-for-our-lives/>]

B Can I Receive Revelation?

“Now I must confess that when I was about your age, admonitions about the need to receive revelation intimidated and, quite frankly, worried me more than a little bit. While some of my acquaintances would share stories about how the Spirit had given them specific directions in dramatic ways, I could not readily recall any such personal experiences. I started wondering whether I was missing something. I began to imagine that I would get up to the judgment bar, and God would say to me, “I tried to tell you what you needed to do in life on such and such a date and again on another such date, and you just missed it.”

That feeling was compounded a bit during my mission when I had one particular companion who genuinely had a gift for knowing where to go to find people who were ready to accept the gospel. While we would be tracting, I would usually simply begin on the first street and go from one house to the next in a perfectly orderly fashion. He, on the other hand, would feel impressed to skip houses or entire streets because he felt impressed that someone way down the line had been prepared to listen to us. And more often than not, he was right. I rarely, if ever, felt such promptings. Thus, for much of my youth and young adulthood, I wondered if I had been born spiritually tone deaf.

If you have ever found yourself feeling that way, and especially if you feel that way now, I want to speak to you particularly today because, as President Nelson made clear, much of what we are to accomplish individually, as a university, and as a Church depends on our ability to refine our spiritual hearing.

Let me first assure you that none of us is spiritually tone deaf. As Joseph Smith once observed: *It is the privilege of the children of God to come to God and get revelation. . . . God is not a respecter of persons; we all have the same privilege.*

President of BYU; Kevin J. Worthen ‘Receiving Revelation’ (September 2018)

[<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/kevin-j-worthen/receiving-revelation/>]

C Seek the Guidance of the Holy Ghost

“Having the guidance of the Holy Ghost in your life requires spiritual work

You face different needs and circumstances every day. Promptings from the Spirit will help you know what to do and say. As you seek and act on these promptings, the Holy Ghost will magnify your abilities and service to far exceed what you can do on your own. He will help you in every aspect of your missionary service and your personal life. (See 2 Nephi 32:2–5; Alma 17:3; Helaman 5:17–19; Doctrine and Covenants 43:15–16; 84:85.)

Preach My Gospel ‘Chapter 4: Seek and Rely on the Spirit’

[<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/preach-my-gospel-2023/12-chapter-4/>]

7 Over the course of my ministry, I have found a universal longing by everyone to know how to invite and recognize the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Promptings of the Spirit are very personal and come in different ways. We are, however, blessed to have words of prophets, both ancient and modern, give us valuable insights about how to receive direction from the Spirit.

Let me offer four guiding principles that may be of assistance to you in inviting and recognizing the promptings of the Spirit.

8 The first is to stand in holy places. Our temples and homes are the most sacred of these dedicated spaces. In them we more easily invite and recognize the Spirit. Other holy places include meetinghouses, seminary buildings and institutes, and Church history sites and visitors' centers. Stand in holy places.

9 Second, stand with holy people. The Spirit cannot be restrained from attending a gathering of holy people. If you hope to feel the Spirit, be with people with whom the Spirit can easily dwell. The Savior said it this way: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

10 Third, testify of holy truths as often as you can. The Comforter always shares His voice when we testify with our voice. The Spirit bears witness to the speaker and listener alike.

11 The final principle is to listen to the Holy Spirit. He can be our constant companion, but He speaks in subtle, quiet tones. The prophet Elijah found that the voice of the Lord was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire but was "a still small voice." It is "not a voice of thunder" but rather "a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper," and yet it can "pierce even to the very soul."

12 President Boyd K. Packer stated: "The Spirit does not get our attention by shouting or shaking us with a heavy hand. Rather it whispers. It caresses so gently that if we are preoccupied we may not feel it at all." I have observed that sometimes His voice is so subtle, or I am so preoccupied, that a loved one captures it for me. Many have been the times when promptings of the Holy Ghost have come to me through my wife, Lesa. Righteous parents or leaders may also receive inspired guidance for you.

The noise, clamor, and contention prevalent in the world may overpower still, quiet impressions of the Holy Spirit. Find a quiet place, a holy space where you can seek to receive direction from the Spirit.

<https://8ward.eu>

D Influenced by Revelation, and not Knowing

Speaking of the Lamanites who had embraced the gospel prior to the resurrected Christ's visit to ancient America, the Lord said, "Because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, [they] were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and *they knew it not.*" These Saints received the Holy Ghost, which the Prophet Joseph said is always accompanied by revelation, but they did not realize it. They had received and been influenced by revelation, but they knew it not.

A similar thing happened to Oliver Cowdery, who received a witness before he met Joseph Smith that Joseph's message was true. However, he later questioned whether that was the case and sought another revelation. As Elder David A. Bednar once explained, the Lord's reassuring response—found in section 6 of the Doctrine and Covenants—was a *revelation . . . informing [Oliver] that he had been receiving revelation. Apparently Oliver had not recognized how and when he had been receiving direction from God and needed this instruction to increase his understanding about the spirit of revelation.*

Thus we can receive and be influenced by revelation without fully recognizing it. I believe that happens more often than we think and that, therefore, we are better at the process than we might initially suppose.

Elder Bednar has provided one explanation of why this can happen. He likened the experience of receiving revelation to two different ways that we have experienced the physical transition from dark to light:

Elder Bednar then explained how these two experiences relate to the receipt of revelation:

*A light turned on in a dark room is like receiving a message from God quickly, completely, and all at once. . . . Descriptions of such immediate and intense manifestations are found in the scriptures, recounted in Church history, and evidenced in our own lives. . . . However, **this pattern of revelation tends to be more rare than common.***

By contrast, Elder Bednar explained:

*The gradual increase of light radiating from the rising sun is like receiving a message from God "line upon line, precept upon precept" (2 Nephi 28:30). . . . Such communications from Heavenly Father gradually and gently "distil upon [our souls] as the dews from heaven" (D&C 121:45). **This pattern of revelation tends to be more common than rare.***

President of BYU; Kevin J. Worthen 'Receiving Revelation' (September 2018)

[\[https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/kevin-j-worthen/receiving-revelation/\]](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/kevin-j-worthen/receiving-revelation/)

13 Some Words of Caution

As you consider these principles to invite and recognize the Spirit, consider the following words of cautionary guidance.

Confirm your spiritual impressions. For example, impressions from the Spirit will align with the scriptures and the teachings of the living prophets.

Be certain that the feelings you receive are consistent with your assignment. Unless you are called by proper authority, impressions from the Spirit are not given for you to counsel or correct others.

Spiritual matters cannot be forced. You can cultivate an attitude and an environment that invite the Spirit, and you can prepare yourself, but you cannot dictate how or when inspiration comes. Be patient and trust that you will receive what you need when the time is right.

Use your own best judgment. Sometimes we want to be led by the Spirit in all things. However, often the Lord wants us to use our God-given intelligence and act in ways that are consistent with our best understanding. President Dallin H. Oaks taught:

"A desire to be led by the Lord is a strength, but it needs to be accompanied by an understanding that our Heavenly Father leaves many decisions for our personal choices. . . . Persons who try to shift all decision making to the Lord and plead for revelation in every choice will soon find circumstances in which they pray for guidance and don't receive it. . . . "We should study things out in our minds. . . . Then we should pray for guidance and act upon it. . . . If we do not receive guidance, we should act upon our best judgment."