

## Elder Richard G. Scott

### Need for spiritual guidance

Throughout the ages, many have obtained guidance helpful to resolve challenges in their lives by following the example of respected individuals who resolved similar problems. Today, world conditions change so rapidly that such a course of action is often not available to us.

Personally, I rejoice in that reality because it creates a condition where we, of necessity, are more dependent upon the Spirit to guide us through the vicissitudes of life. Therefore, we are led to seek personal inspiration in life's important decisions.

What can you do to enhance your capacity to be led to correct decisions in your life? What are the principles upon which spiritual communication depends? What are the potential barriers to such communication that you need to avoid?

### Learning to be led by the Spirit

President John Taylor wrote: "Joseph Smith, upwards of forty years ago, said to me: 'Brother Taylor, you have received the Holy Ghost. Now follow the influence of that Spirit, and it will lead you into all truth, until by and by, it will become in you a principle of revelation.' Then he told me never to arise in the morning without bowing before the Lord, and dedicating myself to him during that day."<sup>1</sup>

Father in Heaven knew that you would face challenges and be required to make some decisions that would be beyond your own ability to decide correctly. In His plan of happiness, He included a provision for you to receive help with such challenges and decisions during your mortal life. That assistance will come to you through the Holy Ghost as spiritual guidance. It is a power, beyond your own capability, that a loving Heavenly Father wants you to use consistently for your peace and happiness.

I am convinced that there is no simple formula or technique that would immediately allow you to master the ability to be guided by the voice of the Spirit. Our Father expects you to learn how to obtain that divine help by exercising faith in Him and His Holy Son, Jesus Christ. Were you to receive inspired guidance just for the asking, you would become weak and ever more dependent on Them. They know that essential personal growth will come as you struggle to learn how to be led by the Spirit.

What may appear initially to be a daunting task will be much easier to manage over time as you consistently strive to recognize and follow feelings prompted by the Spirit. Your confidence in the direction you receive from the Holy Ghost will also become stronger. I witness that as you gain experience and success in being guided by the Spirit, your confidence in the impressions you feel can become more certain than your dependence on what you see or hear.

Spirituality yields two fruits. The first is inspiration to know what to do. The second is power, or the capacity to do it. These two capacities come together. That's why Nephi could say, "I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded."<sup>2</sup> He knew the spiritual laws upon which inspiration and power are based. Yes, God answers prayer and gives us spiritual direction when we live obediently and exercise the required faith in Him.

### Responding to spiritual impressions

Now I share an experience that taught me a way to gain spiritual guidance. One Sunday I attended the priesthood meeting of a Spanish branch in Mexico City. I vividly recall how a humble Mexican priesthood leader struggled to communicate the truths of the gospel in his lesson material. I noted the intense desire he had to share

those principles he strongly valued with his quorum members. He recognized that they were of great worth to the brethren present. In his manner there was an evidence of a pure love of the Savior and love of those he taught.

His sincerity, purity of intent, and love permitted a spiritual strength to envelop the room. I was deeply touched. Then I began to receive personal impressions as an extension of the principles taught by that humble instructor. They were personal and related to my assignments in the area. They came in answer to my prolonged, prayerful efforts to learn.

As each impression came, I carefully wrote it down. In the process, I was given precious truths that I greatly needed in order to be a more effective servant of the Lord. The details of the communication are sacred and, like a patriarchal blessing, were for my individual benefit. I was given specific directions, instructions, and conditioned promises that have beneficially altered the course of my life.

Subsequently, I visited the Sunday School class in our ward, where a very well-educated teacher presented his lesson. That experience was in striking contrast to the one enjoyed in the priesthood meeting. It seemed to me that the instructor had purposely chosen obscure references and unusual examples to illustrate the principles of the lesson. I had the distinct impression that this instructor was using the teaching opportunity to impress the class with his vast store of knowledge. At any rate, he certainly did not seem as intent on communicating principles as had the humble priesthood leader.

In that environment, strong impressions began to flow to me again. I wrote them down. The message included specific counsel on how to become more effective as an instrument in the hands of the Lord. I received such an outpouring of impressions that were so personal that I felt it was not appropriate to record them in the midst of a Sunday School class. I sought

a more private location, where I continued to write the feelings that flooded into my mind and heart as faithfully as possible. After each powerful impression was recorded, I pondered the feelings I had received to determine if I had accurately expressed them in writing. As a result, I made a few minor changes to what had been written. Then I studied their meaning and application in my own life.

Subsequently I prayed, reviewing with the Lord what I thought I had been taught by the Spirit. When a feeling of peace came, I thanked Him for the guidance given. I was then impressed to ask, "Is there yet more to be given?" I received further impressions, and the process of writing down the impressions, pondering, and praying for confirmation was repeated. Again I was prompted to ask, "Is there more I should know?" And there was. When that last, most sacred experience was concluded, I had received some of the most precious, specific, personal direction one could hope to obtain in this life. Had I not responded to the first impressions and recorded them, I would not have received the last, most precious guidance.

What I have described is not an isolated experience. It embodies several true principles regarding communication from the Lord to His children here on earth. I believe that you can leave the most precious, personal direction of the Spirit unheard because you do not respond to, record, and apply the first promptings that come to you.

Impressions of the Spirit can come in response to urgent prayer or unsolicited when needed. Sometimes the Lord reveals truth to you when you are not actively seeking it, such as when you are in danger and do not know it. However, the Lord will not force you to learn. You must exercise your agency to authorize the Spirit to teach you. As you make this a practice in your life, you will be more perceptive to the feelings that come with spiritual guidance. Then, when that guidance comes,

sometimes when you least expect it, you will recognize it more easily.

### **Barriers to spiritual communication**

The inspiring influence of the Holy Spirit can be overcome or masked by strong emotions, such as anger, hate, passion, fear, or pride. When such influences are present, it is like trying to savor the delicate flavor of a grape while eating a jalapeño pepper. Both flavors are present, but one completely overpowers the other. In like manner, strong emotions overcome the delicate promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Sin is addictive; self-degenerating; conducive to other strains of corruption; deadening to spirituality, conscience, and reason; blinding to reality; contagious; destructive to mind, body, and spirit. Sin is spiritually corrosive. Unrestrained it becomes all-consuming. It is overcome by repentance and righteousness.

I share a warning. Satan is extremely good at blocking spiritual communication by inducing individuals, through temptation, to violate the laws upon which spiritual communication is founded. With some, he is able to convince them that they are not able to receive such guidance from the Lord.

### **Destructive influence of pornography**

Satan has become a master at using the addictive power of pornography to limit individual capacity to be led by the Spirit. The onslaught of pornography in all of its vicious, corroding, destructive forms has caused great grief, suffering, and heartache and has destroyed marriages. It is one of the most damning influences on earth. Whether it be through the printed page, movies, television, obscene lyrics, vulgarities on the telephone, or flickering personal computer screen, pornography is overpoweringly addictive and severely damaging. This potent tool of Lucifer

degrades the mind and the heart and the soul of any who use it. All who are caught in its seductive, tantalizing web and remain so will become addicted to its immoral, destructive influence. For many, that addiction cannot be overcome without help. The tragic pattern is so familiar. It begins with curiosity that is fueled by its stimulation and is justified by the false premise that when done privately, it does no harm to anyone else. For those lulled by this lie, the experimentation goes deeper, with more powerful stimulations, until the trap closes and a terribly immoral, addictive habit exercises its vicious control.

Participation in pornography in any of its lurid forms is a manifestation of unbridled selfishness. How can a man, particularly a priesthood bearer, not think of the emotional and spiritual damage caused to women, especially his wife, by such abhorrent activity?

Well did inspired Nephi declare, “And [the devil] will . . . pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, . . . and thus [he] cheateth their souls, and leatheth them away carefully down to hell.”<sup>3</sup>

If you are ensnared in pornography, make a total commitment to overcome it now. Find a quiet place; pray urgently for help and support. Be patient and obedient. Don’t give up.

Parents, be aware that the addiction of pornography can begin with youth at a very early age. Take preventative action to avoid that tragedy. Stake presidents and bishops, warn of this evil. Invite anyone you consider captured by it to come to you for help.

An individual with foundation standards and an enduring commitment to obey them is not easily led astray. Someone who is increasingly repulsed by grievous sin and who exercises self-restraint outside human influence has character. Repentance will be more efficacious for such an individual. A feeling of remorse after a mistake is a fertile soil wherein repentance can flower.

### Consistently guided by the Spirit

Have patience as you are perfecting your ability to be led by the Spirit. By careful practice, through the application of correct principles, and by being sensitive to the feelings that come, you will gain spiritual guidance. I bear witness that the Lord, through the Holy Ghost, can speak to your mind and heart. Sometimes the impressions are just general feelings. Sometimes the direction comes so clearly and so unmistakably that it can be written down like spiritual dictation.<sup>4</sup>

I bear solemn witness that as you pray with all the fervor of your soul with humility and gratitude, you can learn to be

consistently guided by the Holy Spirit in all aspects of your life. I have confirmed the truthfulness of that principle in the crucible of my own life. I testify that you can personally learn to master the principles of being guided by the Spirit. That way, the Savior can guide you to resolve challenges of life and enjoy great peace and happiness. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### NOTES

1. John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom*, sel. G. Homer Durham (1943), 43–44.
2. 1 Nephi 3:7.
3. 2 Nephi 28:21.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 8:2.

## Vicki F. Matsumori

### Whisperings of the Spirit

At the end of the day, a pair of missionaries starts toward home, when one suddenly turns to the other and says, “I feel we need to stop at this one last place.” A home teacher is prompted to call one of the families he visited just a few days before. A young woman plans on attending a school friend’s party yet feels impressed to stay home this time.

How did the missionaries know to knock on the door of someone who had been praying for them? or the home teacher to call a family that was in desperate need? or the young woman to stay away from a situation where her values could be compromised? In each of these situations they were guided by the influence of the Holy Ghost.

Similar experiences happen repeatedly to members throughout the world on a regular basis, and there are those who desire to feel the Spirit guiding them daily in their lives. While each person can learn to recognize the whisperings of the Spirit, that learning process can be facilitated as

others help us understand about the Holy Ghost, share their personal testimonies, and provide an environment where the Spirit can be felt.

### Understanding the doctrine

The importance of helping others understand is described in the Doctrine and Covenants. Parents “in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized,” are told to help their children “understand the doctrine.”<sup>1</sup>

Whether we are in a classroom, a missionary discussion, or a family home evening, teaching the doctrine regarding the Holy Ghost can help others understand this important gift. We learn that while “the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil,”<sup>2</sup> the right to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost comes as members are given that gift by the laying on of hands by those who have the proper authority.<sup>3</sup>

This companionship can continue to be ours if we are worthy. We are told that “the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in