

# An Unspeakable Gift from God

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In 1994, President Howard W. Hunter invited all members of the Church to “establish the temple ... as the great symbol of [our] membership.”<sup>1</sup> Later that same year, construction on the Bountiful Utah Temple was completed. Like many, we were anxious to take our young family to the open house prior to the dedication. We labored diligently to prepare our children to enter the temple, praying earnestly that they would have a spiritual experience so that the temple would become a focal point in their lives.

As we reverently walked through the temple, I found myself admiring the magnificent architecture, the elegant finishes, the light shining through towering windows, and many of the inspiring paintings. Every aspect of this sacred building was truly exquisite.

Stepping into the celestial room, I suddenly realized that our youngest son, six-year-old Ben, was clinging to my leg. He appeared anxious—perhaps even a little troubled.

“What’s wrong, Son?” I whispered.

“Daddy,” he replied, “what’s happening here? I’ve never felt this way before.”

Recognizing that this was likely the first time our young son had felt the influence of the Holy Ghost in such a powerful way, I knelt down on the floor next to him. While other visitors stepped around us, Ben and I spent several minutes, side by side, learning about the Holy Ghost together. I was amazed at the ease with which we were able to discuss his sacred feelings. As we talked, it became clear that what was most inspiring to Ben was not what he *saw* but what he *felt*—not the physical beauty around us but the still, small voice of the Spirit of God within his heart. I shared with him what I had learned from my own experiences, even as his childlike wonder reawakened in me a deep sense of gratitude for this unspeakable gift from God—the gift of the Holy Ghost.<sup>2</sup>

## Who Is the Holy Ghost?

The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead, and, as such, like God the Father and Jesus Christ, He knows our thoughts and the intents of our hearts.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Ghost loves us and wants us to be happy. Since He knows the challenges we will face, He can guide us and teach us all things we must do to return and live with our Heavenly Father once again.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, who have glorified bodies of flesh and bones, the Holy Ghost is a

personage of spirit who communicates to our spirits through feelings and impressions.<sup>5</sup> As a spirit being, He has the unique responsibility of being an agent through which personal revelation is received. In scripture, the Holy Ghost is often referred to as the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit of Promise, or simply the Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

## What Is the Mission of the Holy Ghost?

The Holy Ghost works in perfect unity with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, fulfilling many important roles and distinct responsibilities. The primary purpose of the Holy Ghost is to bear witness of God the Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ,<sup>7</sup> and to teach us the truth of all things.<sup>8</sup> A sure witness from the Holy Ghost carries far more certainty than a witness from any other source. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that “the Spirit of God speaking to the spirit of man has power to impart truth with greater effect and understanding than the truth can be imparted by personal contact even with heavenly beings.”<sup>9</sup>

The Holy Ghost is also known as the Comforter.<sup>10</sup> During times of trouble or despair or simply when we need to know that God is near, the Holy Ghost can lift our spirits, give us hope, and teach us “the peaceable things of the kingdom,”<sup>11</sup> helping us feel “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”<sup>12</sup>

Several years ago as our extended family gathered for a holiday dinner, my father began playing games with many of his grandchildren. Suddenly and without warning, he collapsed and quickly passed away. This unexpected event could have been devastating, especially for his grandchildren, raising questions that are difficult to answer. However, as we gathered our children around us, as we prayed and read the words of Book of Mormon prophets about the purpose of life, the Holy Ghost comforted each of us personally. In ways that are difficult to describe with words, the answers we sought came clearly into our hearts. We felt a peace that day that truly surpassed *our* understanding, yet the witness from the Holy Ghost was certain, undeniable, and true.

The Holy Ghost is a teacher and a revelator.<sup>13</sup> As we study, ponder, and pray about gospel truths, the Holy Ghost enlightens our minds and quickens our understanding.<sup>14</sup> He causes the truth to be indelibly written in our souls and can cause a mighty change to occur in our hearts. As we share these truths with our families, with fellow members of the Church, and with friends and neighbors in our community, the Holy Ghost becomes their teacher as well, for He carries the message of the gospel “unto the hearts of the children of men.”<sup>15</sup>

The Holy Ghost inspires us to reach out to others in service. For me, the most vivid examples of heeding the promptings of the Holy Ghost in the service of others come from the life and ministry of President Thomas S. Monson, who said: “In the performance of our responsibilities, I have learned that when we heed a silent prompting and act upon it without delay, our Heavenly Father will guide our footsteps and bless our lives and the lives of others. I know of no experience more sweet or feeling more precious than to heed a prompting only to discover that the Lord has answered another person’s prayer through you.”<sup>16</sup>

I share just one tender experience. While President Monson was serving as a bishop, he learned that a member of his ward, Mary Watson, was in the hospital. As he went to visit her, he learned that she was staying in a large room with several other patients. When he approached Sister Watson, he noticed that the patient in a neighboring bed quickly covered her head.

After President Monson had visited with Sister Watson and given her a priesthood blessing, he shook her hand, said good-bye, and prepared to leave. Then a simple but amazing thing happened. I quote now from President

Monson's own recollection of this experience:

"I could not leave her side. It was as though an unseen hand [was] resting on my shoulder, and I felt within my soul that I was hearing these words: 'Go over to the next bed where the little lady covered her face when you came in.' I did so. ...

"I approached the bedside of the other patient, gently tapped her shoulder and carefully pulled back the sheet which had covered her face. Lo and behold! She, too, was a member of my ward. I had not known she was a patient in the hospital. Her name was Kathleen McKee. When her eyes met mine, she exclaimed through her tears, 'Oh, Bishop, when you entered that door, I felt you had come to see me and bless me in response to my prayers. I was rejoicing inside to think that you would know I was here, but when you stopped at the other bed, my heart sank, and I knew that you had not come to see me.'

"I said to [Sister] McKee: 'It does not matter that I didn't know you were here. It is important, however, that our Heavenly Father knew and that you had prayed silently for a priesthood blessing. It was He who prompted me to intrude on your privacy.'"<sup>17</sup>

## How Does the Holy Ghost Speak to Us?

We all have experiences with the Holy Ghost, even though we may not always recognize them. As inspired thoughts come into our minds, we know them to be true by the spiritual feelings that enter into our hearts. President Boyd K. Packer has taught: "The Holy Ghost speaks with a voice that you *feel* more than you *hear*. ... While we speak of 'listening' to the whisperings of the Spirit, most often one describes a spiritual prompting by saying, 'I had a *feeling* ...'"<sup>18</sup> It is through these sacred feelings from the Holy Ghost that we come to know what God would have us do, for this, as stated in scripture, "is the spirit of revelation."<sup>19</sup>

## What Does It Mean to Receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost?

In teaching our six-year-old son, Ben, I thought it important to differentiate between what he was feeling, which was the influence of the Holy Ghost, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, which he would receive after baptism. Before baptism, all honest and sincere seekers of truth can feel the influence of the Holy Ghost from time to time. However, the opportunity to receive the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost and the *fulness* of all the associated blessings is available only to worthy, baptized members who receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands through those holding the priesthood authority of God.

Through the gift of the Holy Ghost, we receive added capacity and spiritual gifts, increased revelation and protection, steady guidance and direction, and the promised blessings of sanctification and exaltation in the celestial kingdom. All of these blessings are given as a result of our personal desire to receive them and come as we align our lives with the will of God and seek His constant direction.

As I reflect back on my experience with Ben in the Bountiful Utah Temple, I have many sweet feelings and impressions. One clear recollection is that while I was absorbed in the grandeur of what I could see, a small child near my side was recognizing the powerful feelings in his heart. With a gentle reminder, I was invited not only to pause and kneel down but also to heed the Savior's call to become as a little child—humble, meek, and ready to hear the still, small voice of His Spirit.

I bear witness of the living reality and divine mission of the Holy Ghost and that by the power of the Holy Ghost, we may know the truth of all things. I testify that the gift of the Holy Ghost is Heavenly Father's precious and unspeakable gift to all who will come unto His Son, be baptized in His name, and receive the Holy Ghost through confirmation in His Church. Of these sacred truths I bear personal witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. Howard W. Hunter, in Jay M. Todd, "President Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of the Church," *Ensign*, July 1994, 5; see also Howard W. Hunter, "The Great Symbol of Our Membership," *Tambuli*, Nov. 1994, 3; *Ensign*, Oct. 1994, 2.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:26.
3. See Alma 12:7; 18:16–18; Doctrine and Covenants 6:15–16.
4. See 2 Nephi 32:5.
5. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.
6. See Luke 4:1, 18; 11:13; John 1:33; Ephesians 1:13; Doctrine and Covenants 88:3.
7. See 2 Nephi 31:18; 3 Nephi 28:11; Doctrine and Covenants 20:27.
8. See Moroni 10:5.
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:47–48.
10. See John 14:26; Doctrine and Covenants 35:19.

11. Doctrine and Covenants 36:2.

12. Philippians 4:7.

13. See Luke 12:12; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Doctrine and Covenants 50:13–22; *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 132–33.

14. See Doctrine and Covenants 11:13.

15. 2 Nephi 33:1.

16. Thomas S. Monson, “Peace, Be Still,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 55.

17. See Thomas S. Monson, “Christ at Bethesda’s Pool,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 18–19.

18. Boyd K. Packer, “Personal Revelation: The Gift, the Test, and the Promise,” *Liahona*, June 1997, 10; *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 60.

19. Doctrine and Covenants 8:3; see also verse 2.