



By David M. McConkie
First Counselor in the Sunday
School General Presidency

Learning to Hear and Understand the SPIRIT

One of the most important things we can do is learn to hear and follow the promptings of the Spirit.

My father grew up in the small town of Monticello, Utah. When he was seven, one of his daily chores was to bring the family's cows in from their pasture. His prized possession was his pocketknife, which he always kept with him. One day as he was riding his horse to fetch the cows, he reached into his pocket for his knife. To his dismay he realized he had lost it somewhere along the trail. He was heartbroken, but he believed what he had been taught by his father and mother: God hears and answers prayers.

He stopped his horse and slid off its bare back to the ground. There

he knelt and asked Heavenly Father to help him find his pocketknife. He climbed back on his horse, turned around, and rode back down the trail. After some distance his horse stopped. Dad climbed off the horse and put his hand into the deep dust on the trail. There, buried in the dust, he found his prized pocketknife. He knew that the Lord had heard and answered his prayer.

Because he had learned to listen to and act upon the whisperings of the Spirit, my father was blessed to see the hand of the Lord on many occasions throughout his life. He witnessed many miracles. Yet when he gathered his family to teach us the

gospel, he often spoke of his experience on the dusty trail in Monticello when the Lord heard and answered the prayer of a "freckle-faced seven-year-old boy."

In his later years he told us that he had learned something else from this childhood experience. With a twinkle in his eye, he said, "I learned that God can speak to horses!"

My father's experience as a young boy left a lasting impression on him because it was the beginning of his personal spiritual education. This was when he learned for himself that God hears prayers. This was when he began, as the Prophet Joseph Smith termed it, to *learn* the Spirit of God.¹



The Gift of the Holy Ghost

The Savior promised His Apostles that after He left them, they would enjoy the gift of the Holy Ghost. He said, “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are entitled to this same gift. After we are baptized, the gift of the Holy Ghost is conferred upon us by the laying on of hands by one who is authorized to administer the ordinances of the gospel. This gift

is the right, when we are worthy of it, to the constant companionship of the third member of the Godhead.

The companionship of the Holy Ghost is one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy in mortality. Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

“Men ought—above all things in this world—to seek for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing as important as having the companionship of the Holy Ghost. . . .

“There is no price too high, no labor too onerous, no struggle too severe, no sacrifice too great, if out of it all we receive and enjoy the gift of the Holy Ghost.”²

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the Spirit of God can be learned and that “by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus.”³

One of the most important things we can do is *learn* the Spirit of God—learn to hear and follow the promptings of the Spirit. If we so desire and are worthy, the Lord will school us in the principle of revelation.

Learning to Listen and to Act

To learn the Spirit of God, we must learn to listen with our hearts. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,



CHECK THE TIRE

By Andrew M. Wright

When I was 15, my family and I took a vacation from our home in Arizona to the central United States. We drove through many states, including Kansas, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Illinois.

Our vacation went well. We learned to enjoy each other’s company during the long van rides from place to place.

As we pulled into a restaurant one evening, we were all anxious to grab a bite to eat. As we got out of our van, I suddenly had a silent but powerful impression that told me to look at the back tire on our van. I started to walk toward the restaurant, but I

couldn’t shake the feeling. I looked back over my shoulder and then stopped. The impression came to my mind: “Check the back tire.” It was so forceful I couldn’t ignore it.

I approached the rear of the van and heard a hissing sound. Sure enough, our right rear tire had a leak and was quickly going flat. I ran to get my dad, who had already gone into the restaurant with the rest of the family.

My father took the van down the road to a gas station before the tire went completely flat. Since the tire wasn’t damaged, the repair was inexpensive and quick. And we were

able to fix the flat just minutes before the service station closed for the night. I don’t know what would have happened if I had ignored the prompting. But I do know that because I responded, we were able to continue our trip safely and conveniently.

Since that incident, I’m always reassured of the power of the Holy Ghost and how truly blessed we are as members of the Church to have that special line of communication. I am grateful for that experience, for it will stay with me, forever reminding me that our Father in Heaven loves, cares, and watches out for all of His children.

said: “The Spirit is a still, small voice—a voice that is *felt* rather than heard. It is a spiritual voice that comes into the mind as a thought put into your heart.”⁴

President Packer also taught: “Inspiration comes more easily in peaceful settings. Such words as *quiet, still, peaceable, Comforter* abound in the scriptures: ‘Be *still*, and know that I am God.’ (Ps. 46:10; italics added.) And the promise, ‘You shall receive my Spirit, the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which shall teach you the *peaceable* things of the kingdom.’ (D&C 36:2; italics added).”

President Packer added: “While we may invite this communication, it can *never* be forced! If we try to force it, we may be deceived.”⁵

Of utmost importance in our schooling process is our responsibility to act, without delay, in accordance with the spiritual promptings we receive.

President Thomas S. Monson stated: “We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice. When it speaks, wise men and women obey. Promptings of the Spirit are not to be postponed.”⁶

Learning to hear and understand the Spirit is a gradual and continuous process. The Savior said, “He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). “For unto him that receiveth I will give more” (2 Nephi 28:30).

Just as Christ “received not of the

fulness at the first, but received grace for grace” (D&C 93:12), so also, as we keep His commandments, we will “receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:20; see also John 1:16) and “line upon line, precept upon precept” (2 Nephi 28:30). Our schooling process is often as gradual as the descent of the dew from heaven (see D&C 121:45; 128:19).

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught that “there is no simple formula or technique that would immediately allow [us] to master the ability to be guided by the voice of the Spirit.” Rather, “our Father expects [us] to learn how to obtain that divine help by exercising faith in Him and His Holy Son, Jesus Christ.”

PORTRAIT OF BRIGHAM YOUNG BY DAN WEGELAND, COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM



Elder Scott continued: “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,” and “your confidence in the impressions you feel can become more certain than your dependence on what you see or hear.”⁷

As part of our schooling process, the Lord will help us to see the results, in our own life and in the lives of others, of our acting upon the promptings we receive from the Spirit. These experiences will strengthen our faith and give us greater courage to act in the future.

Learning to hear and understand the Spirit takes considerable effort. But the Lord has promised that the faithful will “receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that [they may] know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal” (D&C 42:61). ■

NOTES

1. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 132.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (1985), 253.
3. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 132.
4. Boyd K. Packer, “The Cloven Tongues of Fire,” *Liahona*, July 2000, 10; *Ensign*, May 2000, 8.
5. Boyd K. Packer, “Reverence Invites Revelation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 21.
6. Thomas S. Monson, “The Spirit Giveth Life,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, June 1997, 4.
7. Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Spiritual Guidance,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 6–7.



A PRIVILEGE AND DUTY

“If you want the mind and will of God . . . , get it, it is just as much your privilege as of any other member of the Church and Kingdom of God. It is your privilege and duty to live so that you know when the word of the Lord is spoken to you and when the mind of the Lord is revealed to you. I say it is your duty to live so as to know and understand all these things.”

President Brigham Young (1801–77), *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 68.