

Elder Thomas S. Monson

Learning another language

Recently I visited the Missionary Training Center at Provo, Utah, where missionaries who have been called to serve throughout the world are devotedly learning the fundamentals of the languages spoken by the people to whom they shall teach and testify.

Vaguely familiar to me were the conversations in Spanish, French, German, and Swedish. Totally foreign to me and perhaps to most of the missionaries were the sounds of Japanese, Chinese, and Finnish. One marvels at the devotion and total concentration of these young men and women as they grapple with the unfamiliar and learn the difficult.

I am told that on occasion when a missionary in training feels that the Spanish he is called upon to master appears overwhelming or just too hard to learn, he is placed during the luncheon break next to missionaries studying the complex languages of the Orient. He listens. Suddenly Spanish becomes not too overpowering, and he eagerly returns to his study.

Language of the Spirit

There is one language, however, that is understood by each missionary: the language of the Spirit. It is not learned from textbooks written by men of letters, nor is it acquired through reading and memorization. The language of the Spirit comes to him who seeks with all his heart to know God and to keep His divine commandments. Proficiency in this language permits one to breach barriers, overcome obstacles, and touch the human heart.

The Apostle Paul, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, urges that we turn from the narrow confinement of the letter of the law and seek the open vista of opportunity which the Spirit provides. I love and cherish Paul's

statement: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

In a day of danger or a time of trial, such knowledge, such hope, such understanding bring comfort to the troubled mind and grieving heart. The entire message of the New Testament breathes a spirit of awakening to the human soul. Shadows of despair are dispelled by rays of hope, sorrow yields to joy, and the feeling of being lost in the crowd of life vanishes with the certain knowledge that our Heavenly Father is mindful of each of us.

The Savior provided assurance of this truth when He taught that even a sparrow shall not fall to the ground unnoticed by our Father. He then concluded the beautiful thought by saying, "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

Spiritual answers to questions

We live in a complex world with daily challenges. There is a tendency to feel detached—even isolated—from the Giver of every good gift. We worry that we walk alone.

From the bed of pain, from the pillow wet with the tears of loneliness, we are lifted heavenward by that divine assurance and precious promise, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Joshua 1:5).

Such comfort is priceless as we journey along the pathway of mortality, with its many forks and turnings. Rarely is the assurance communicated by a flashing sign or a loud voice. Rather, the language of the Spirit is gentle, quiet, uplifting to the heart and soothing to the soul.

At times, the answers to our questions and the responses to our daily prayers come to us through silent promptings of the Spirit. As William Cowper wrote:

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm. . . .

"Judge not the Lord by feeble
sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."
(*Hymns*, no. 48.)

Examples of "heart petals"

We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice. When it speaks, wise men and women obey. We do not postpone following promptings of the Spirit.

To address such a sacred subject, may I refer not to the writings of others, but to the actual experiences of my life. I testify to their truth, for I lived them. I share with you today three cherished examples of what President David O. McKay identified as "heart petals"—the language of the Spirit, the promptings from a heavenly source.

First, the inspiration which attends a call to serve.

Second, the gratitude of God for a life well lived.

Third, the knowledge that we do not walk alone.

Inspiration in calls

Every bishop can testify to the promptings which attend calls to serve in the Church. Frequently the call seems to be not so much for the benefit of those to be taught or led as for the person who is to teach or lead.

As a bishop, I worried about any members who were inactive, not attending, not serving. Such was my thought as I drove down the street where Ben and Emily lived. They were older—even in the twilight period of life. Aches and pains of advancing years caused them to withdraw from activity to the shelter of their home—isolated, detached, shut out from

the mainstream of daily life and association.

I felt the unmistakable prompting to park my car and visit Ben and Emily, even though I was on the way to a meeting. It was a sunny weekday afternoon. I approached the door to their home and knocked. Emily answered. When she recognized me, her bishop, she exclaimed, "All day long I have waited for my phone to ring. It has been silent. I hoped that the postman would deliver a letter. He brought only bills. Bishop, how did you know today was my birthday?"

I answered, "God knows, Emily, for He loves you."

In the quiet of the living room, I said to Ben and Emily, "I don't know why I was directed here today, but our Heavenly Father knows. Let's kneel in prayer and ask Him why." This we did, and the answer came. Emily was asked to sing in the choir—even to provide a solo for the forthcoming ward conference. Ben was asked to speak to the Aaronic Priesthood young men and recount a special experience in his life when his safety was assured by responding to the promptings of the Spirit. She sang. He spoke. Hearts were gladdened by the return to activity of Ben and Emily. They rarely missed a sacrament meeting from that day to the time each was called home. The language of the Spirit had been spoken. It had been heard. It had been understood. Hearts were touched and lives saved.

A life well lived

For my second example I turn to the release of a stake president in Star Valley, Wyoming—even the late E. Francis Winters. He had served faithfully for the lengthy term of twenty-three years. Though modest by nature and circumstance, he had been a perpetual pillar of strength to everyone in the valley. On the day of the stake conference, the building was filled to overflowing. Each heart seemed to be saying a silent thank-you to this noble

leader who had given so unselfishly of his life for the benefit of others.

As I stood to speak following the reorganization of the stake presidency, I was prompted to do something I had not done before, nor have I done so since. I stated how long Francis Winters had presided in the stake; then I asked all whom he had blessed or confirmed as children to stand and remain standing. Then I asked all those persons whom President Winters had ordained, set apart, personally counseled, or blessed to please stand. The outcome was electrifying. Every person in the audience stood to his feet. Tears flowed freely—tears which communicated better than could words the gratitude of tender hearts. I turned to President and Sister Winters and said, “We are witnesses today of the prompting of the Spirit. This vast throng reflects not only individual feelings but also the gratitude of God for a life well lived.” No person who was in the congregation that day will forget how he felt when he witnessed the language of the Spirit of the Lord.

We do not walk alone

Finally, I testify that we do not walk alone.

Stan, a dear friend of mine, was taken seriously ill and rendered partially paralyzed. He had been robust in health, athletic in build, and active in many pursuits. Now he was unable to walk or to stand. His wheelchair was his home. The finest of physicians had cared for him, and the prayers of family and friends had been offered in a spirit of hope and trust. Yet Stan continued to lie in the confinement of his bed at the university hospital. He despaired.

Late one afternoon I was swimming at the Deseret Gym, gazing at the ceiling while backstroking width after width. Silently, but ever so clearly, there came to my mind the thought: “Here you swim almost effortlessly, while your friend Stan languishes in his hospital bed, unable to move.” I felt the

prompting: “Get to the hospital and give him a blessing.”

I ceased my swimming, dressed, and hurried to Stan’s room at the hospital. His bed was empty. A nurse said he was in his wheelchair at the swimming pool, preparing for therapy. I hurried to the area, and there was Stan, all alone, at the edge of the deeper portion of the pool. We greeted one another and returned to his room, where a priesthood blessing was provided.

Slowly but surely, strength and movement returned to Stan’s legs. First he could stand on faltering feet. Then he learned once again to walk—step by step. Today one would not know that Stan had lain so close to death and with no hope of recovery.

Frequently Stan speaks in Church meetings and tells of the goodness of the Lord to him. To some he reveals the dark thoughts of depression which engulfed him that afternoon as he sat in his wheelchair at the edge of the pool, sentenced, it seemed, to a life of despair. He tells how he pondered the alternative. It would be so easy to propel the hated wheelchair into the silent water of the deep pool. Life would then be over. But at that precise moment he saw me, his friend. That day Stan learned literally that we do not walk alone. I, too, learned a lesson that day: Never, never, never postpone following a prompting.

As we pursue the journey of life, let us learn the language of the Spirit. May we remember and respond to the Master’s gentle invitation: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him” (Revelation 3:20). This is the language of the Spirit. He spoke it. He taught it. He lived it. May each of us do likewise, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder Thomas S. Monson of the Council of the Twelve has been our concluding speaker.