

## Elder Richard G. Scott

### Recognizing answers to prayer

Across from me a woman sat sobbing. With tear-filled eyes, she told me, "I don't know what I believe anymore." She spoke of having struggled and prayed many days to know how to make a vitally important decision in her life, without success. She anguished, "I don't know what to do. If you'll tell me what to do, I'll do it." With her hand on the scriptures, she said, "God told us He would help us. He answers everybody else's prayers. Why won't He answer mine?"

When one is caught in a whirlpool of emotion, it is difficult to find a way out alone. My prayer is to help you who have similar feelings.

When answers to urgent prayer don't seem to come, it may be that we don't understand some truths about prayer, or because we don't recognize answers when they come.

Our Heavenly Father did not put us on earth to fail but to succeed gloriously. It may seem paradoxical, but that is why recognizing answers to prayer can sometimes be very difficult. Some face life with only their own experience and capacity to help them. Others seek, through prayer, divine inspiration to *know* what to do. When it is required, they qualify for power beyond their own capacity to do it.

Communication with our Father in Heaven is not a trivial matter. It is a sacred privilege. It is based on unchanging principles. When we receive help from our Father in Heaven, it is in response to faith, obedience, and the proper use of agency.

It is a mistake to assume that every prayer we offer will be answered immediately. Some prayers require considerable effort on our part. True, sometimes impressions come when we have not specifically sought them. They generally concern something we need to know and are not otherwise able to find out.

### Apply truths that God has revealed

We are here on earth to gain experience we can obtain in no other way. We

are given the opportunity to grow, to develop, and to gain spiritual maturity. To do that, we must learn to apply truth. How we face challenges and resolve difficult problems is crucially important to our happiness.

To better understand prayer, I have listened to the counsel of others, pondered the scriptures, and studied the lives of prophets and others. Yet what seems most helpful is seeing in my mind a child approaching trustingly a loving, kind, wise, understanding Father, who wants us to succeed.

Don't worry about your clumsily expressed feelings. Just talk to your Father. He hears every prayer and answers it in His way.

When we explain a problem and a proposed solution, sometimes He answers yes, sometimes no. Often He withholds an answer, not for lack of concern, but because He loves us — perfectly. He wants us to apply truths He has given us. For us to grow, we need to trust our ability to make correct decisions. We need to do what we *feel* is right. In time, He will answer. He will not fail us.

I have described the absolute reality of our relationship with our Father. There is nothing about us He does not know. He is conscious of our every need and could provide all of the answers. Yet, because His purpose is our eternal happiness, He encourages us to make the correct choices.

Sometimes, like a child, we misbehave, act unwisely, and feel we cannot approach our Father with a problem. When communication is strained, how wonderful it is to have a Mediator who works things out when we obey His counsel and repent. Such is our Elder Brother, the Savior.

### Ask in faith with an honest heart

Perhaps Oliver Cowdery's experiences were recorded for us to understand how to pray and how to recognize answer to prayer. Oliver was told:

"Assuredly as the Lord liveth, . . . even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall *ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive* . . . .

"I will tell you in your *mind* and in your *heart*, by the Holy Ghost" (D&C 8:1-2; italics added).

When we receive an impression in our *heart*, we can use our *mind* either to rationalize it away or to accomplish it. Be careful what you do with an impression from the Lord.

Oliver was further taught: "Remember that without *faith* you can do nothing; therefore ask in *faith*. Trifle not with these things; do not ask for that which you ought not. . . .

"According to your *faith* shall it be done unto you" (D&C 8:10-11; italics added).

"Ask in faith" means ask with confidence in our holy Father. Like many of us, Oliver did not recognize the evidence of answers to prayers already given by the Lord. To open his eyes and ours, this revelation was given through Joseph Smith:

"Blessed art thou for what thou hast done; for thou hast inquired of me, and behold, *as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction* of my Spirit. If it had not been so, thou wouldst not have come to the place where thou art at this time.

"Behold, thou knowest that thou hast inquired of me and I did *enlighten thy mind*; and now I tell thee these things that thou mayest know that thou hast been enlightened by the Spirit of truth" (D&C 6:14-15; italics added).

If you feel that God has not answered *your* prayers, ponder these scriptures—then carefully look for evidence in your own life of His having already answered you.

### Answers reach the heart and mind

To help each of us recognize answers given, the Lord said:

"If you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried

unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things.

"*Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter?*" (D&C 6:22-23; italics added).

The Lord provides further insight by counseling us to study a problem out in our mind and then to ask if it be right:

"If it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall *feel* that it is right.

"But if it be not right you shall have no such *feelings*, but you shall have a stupor of thought" (D&C 9:8-9; italics added).

### When the Lord withholds an answer

It is vitally important to recognize that the Lord also responds a third way to prayer by *withholding an answer* when the prayer is offered. Why would He do that?

He is our perfect Father. He loves us beyond our capacity to understand. He knows what is best for us. He sees the end from the beginning. He wants us to act to gain needed experience.

When He answers *yes*, it is to give us confidence.

When He answers *no*, it is to prevent error.

When He *withholds an answer*, it is to have us grow through faith in Him, obedience to His commandments, and a willingness to act on truth. We are expected to assume accountability by acting on a decision that is consistent with His teachings without prior confirmation. We are not to sit passively waiting or to murmur because the Lord has not spoken. We are to act.

### Be spiritually sensitive

Most often what we have chosen to do is right. He will confirm the correctness of our choices His way. That confirmation generally comes through packets of help found along the way. We discover them by being spiritually sensitive. They are like notes from a loving Father as evidence of His approval. If, in trust, we

begin something which is not right, He will let us know before we have gone too far. We sense that help by recognizing troubled or uneasy feelings.

### Nephi followed the spiritual law

Nephi's efforts to obtain the plates of brass show how the principles work. When the older brethren were asked to go, they murmured and received no help. Nephi was assured, "Thou shalt be favored of the Lord, because thou hast not murmured" (1 Nephi 3:6). Nephi's words "I will go and do<sup>a</sup> reveal a positive commitment to act and to succeed by using spiritual law (1 Nephi 3:7).

After two unsuccessful attempts, Nephi remained confident. He crept into the city toward the house of Laban without all the answers. He observed, "I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do," significantly adding, "*Nevertheless I went forth*" (1 Nephi 4:6-7; italics added).

Nephi was willing to try time and again, using his best efforts. He expressed faith that he would be helped. He refused to be discouraged. But because he acted, had confidence in the Lord, was obedient, and properly used his agency, he received guidance. He was inspired step after step to success, and in his mother's words was "given . . . power [to] accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded" (1 Nephi 5:8; italics added).

Nephi knew he was required to confide in God, to exercise faith, and to act so that he could receive help, step by step. He did not murmur nor ask for a full explanation. But, observe particularly, he did not wait passively for help. He acted! By following spiritual law, he was inspired and given power to act.

### Seek God's will

Sometimes answers to prayer are not recognized because we are too intent on wanting confirmation of our own desires. We fail to see that the Lord would have

us do something else. Be careful to seek His will.

I confess I don't know how to make a correct decision except where there is righteousness and trust in a Heavenly Father. The principles simply will not work when agency is intentionally used at variance with the will of God. If there is unrepented sin, we are left to our own devices to flounder and struggle on our own. We *can* be rescued through our own repentance.

### Answers may come gradually

When we seek inspiration to help make decisions, the Lord gives gentle promptings. These require us to think, to exercise faith, to work, to struggle at times, and to act. Seldom does the whole answer to a decisively important matter or complex problem come all at once. More often, it comes a piece at a time, without the end in sight.

### Express gratitude in prayer

I have saved the most important part about prayer until the end. It is gratitude! Our sincere efforts to thank our beloved Father generate wondrous feelings of peace, self-worth, and love. No matter how challenging our circumstances, honest appreciation fills our mind to overflowing with gratitude.

Why is it that the most impoverished seem to know best how to thank the Lord? In the highlands of Guatemala, members barely subsist. Going to the temple requires *great* sacrifice. A visit takes a year of preparation. There is hard work, sacrifice to save money and food, the spinning, dyeing, and weaving of new clothing. There is the long, barefoot walk out of the mountains, the crossing of Lake Isabel, the bus rides with little food. Tired and worn, they arrive at the temple. They scrub until they shine, dress in their new clothing, and enter the house of the Lord.

Reclothed in white, they are taught by the Spirit, receive ordinances, and make covenants. One highland woman was greatly touched by the spirit and

meaning of the endowment. Entering the celestial room, she saw others seated, with heads reverently bowed. Innocently, she knelt at the entrance to the room, oblivious to others. She bowed her head, sobbed, and for twenty minutes poured out her heart to her Father in Heaven. Finally, with her dress soaked with tears, she raised her head. The sensitive temple matron asked, "May I help?" She responded, "Oh, would you? This is my problem: I've tried to tell Father in Heaven of my gratitude for all of my blessings, but I don't feel that I've communicated. Will you help me tell Him how grateful I am?"

### **Trust God and be clean**

The counsel about prayer is true. I have tested it thoroughly in the laboratory

of my own personal life. I have discovered that what sometimes seems an impenetrable barrier to communication is a giant step to be taken in trust.

If you seek His help, be sure your life is clean, your motives are worthy, and you're willing to do what He asks — for He *will* answer your prayers. He is your loving Father; you are His beloved child. He loves you perfectly and wants to help you.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Monson**

We have just heard from Elder Richard G. Scott of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker for this session.

## **Elder M. Russell Ballard**

### **Sorrow for deaths of missionaries**

My brothers and sisters, since April's general conference, some of our missionaries have found themselves in increasingly more difficult circumstances. As the adviser to the South America North Area Presidency, I was saddened, as I know you were, at the news that two faithful missionaries, Elder Todd Ray Wilson and Elder Jeffrey Brent Ball, lost their lives in Bolivia. The deaths of these two righteous young men while they were in the service of the Lord caused the entire Church membership to mourn. We grieve also for other missionaries who have died from illness or accident since the first of the year.

Our sorrow at the loss of any faithful missionary can be tempered by this declaration from the Lord himself: "And whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name's sake, shall find it again, even life eternal" (D&C 98:13). To all parents, family members, and friends of missionaries who have lost their lives while in the service of the Master, we

extend to you our love, gratitude, and prayers for comfort and peace.

### **President Stephen Wright's dream**

With the permission of President Steven B. Wright of the Bolivia La Paz Mission, I share this special experience that came to him in a dream: "I saw these two elders dressed in white, standing at the doors of a beautiful building. They were greeting numerous people, who also were dressed in white as they entered the building. It was obvious from their dress that those who entered were Bolivians. I envisioned the temple that will someday be built in Bolivia. Elders Wilson and Ball were ushering those they had prepared to receive the gospel in the spirit world into the temple to witness the vicarious ordinances being performed in their behalf. This dream has been a great comfort to me and has helped me to understand and accept their deaths."

This glimpse by President Wright of the work of redemption beyond mortality is consistent with the heavenly vision