

Let the Holy Spirit Guide

April 2017 General Conference

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By divine assignment, the Holy Ghost inspires, testifies, teaches, and prompts us to walk in the light of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, I, like all of you, recognize we are seeing the hastening of the Lord's work through President Thomas S. Monson and his message this morning. President Monson, we love you, sustain you, and ever pray for you, "our prophet dear."¹

We have felt an outpouring of the Spirit this weekend. Whether you are here in this great hall or watching from homes or gathered in meetinghouses in distant parts of the world, you have had the opportunity to feel the Spirit of the Lord. That Spirit confirms to your hearts and minds the truths taught at this conference.

Consider the words of this familiar hymn:

*Let the Holy Spirit guide;
Let him teach us what is true.
He will testify of Christ,
Light our minds with heaven's view.*²

From latter-day revelation we know that the Godhead is comprised of three distinct and separate beings: our Father in Heaven; His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost. We know that "the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us."³

My message today focuses on the importance of the Holy Ghost in our lives. Our Father in Heaven knew that in mortality we would face challenges, tribulation, and turmoil; He knew we would wrestle with questions, disappointments, temptations, and weaknesses. To give us mortal strength and divine guidance, He provided the Holy Spirit, another name for the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost binds us to the Lord. By divine assignment, He inspires, testifies, teaches, and prompts us to walk in the light of the Lord. We have the sacred responsibility to learn to recognize His influence in our lives and respond.

Remember the Lord's promise: "I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy."⁴ I love that assurance. Joy that fills our souls brings with it an eternal perspective in contrast to day-to-day living. That joy comes as peace amidst hardship or heartache. It provides comfort and courage, unfolds the truths of the gospel, and expands our love for the Lord and all God's children. Although the need for such blessings is so great, in many ways the world has forgotten and forsaken them.

Each week as we partake of the holy sacrament, we make a covenant to "always remember him," the Lord Jesus Christ, and His atoning sacrifice. When we keep this sacred covenant, the promise is given that we "may always have his Spirit to be with [us]."⁵

How do we do that?

First, we strive to live worthy of the Spirit.

The Holy Ghost accompanies those who are "strict to remember the Lord their God from day to day."⁶ As the Lord counseled, we must "lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better,"⁷ for "the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples."⁸ We must always try to obey God's laws, study the scriptures, pray, attend the temple, and live true to the thirteenth article of faith, "being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and ... doing good to all men."

Second, we must be willing to receive the Spirit.

The Lord has promised, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart."⁹ I began to understand this as a young missionary in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. One hot July morning my companion and I felt prompted to look up a Temple Square referral. We knocked on the door of the Elwood Schaffer home. Mrs. Schaffer politely turned us away.

As she began to shut the door, I felt to do something I had never done before and have never done since! I stuck my foot in the door, and I asked, "Is there anyone else who might be interested in our message?" Her 16-year-old daughter, Marti, did have an interest and had fervently prayed for guidance just the day before. Marti met with us, and in time her mother participated in the discussions. Both of them joined the Church.

Resulting from Marti's baptism, 136 people, including many of her own family, have been baptized and made gospel covenants. How grateful I am that I listened to the Spirit and stuck my foot in the door on that hot July day. Marti and a number of her dear family members are here today.

Third, we must recognize the Spirit when it comes.

My experience has been that the Spirit most often communicates as a feeling. You feel it in words that are familiar to you, that make sense to you, that prompt you. Consider the response of the Nephites as they listened to the Lord pray for them: "And the multitude did hear and do bear record; and their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts the words which he prayed."¹⁰ They felt in their hearts the words of His prayer. The voice of the Holy Spirit is still and small.

In the Old Testament, Elijah contended with the priests of Baal. The priests expected the "voice" of Baal to come down as thunder and light their sacrifice with fire. But there was no voice, and there was no fire.¹¹

On a later occasion, Elijah prayed. "And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

"And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."¹²

Do you know that voice?

President Monson has taught, "As we pursue the journey of life, let us learn the language of the Spirit."¹³ The Spirit speaks words that we feel. These feelings are gentle, a nudge to act, to do something, to say something, to respond in a certain way. If we are casual or complacent in our worship, drawn off and desensitized by worldly pursuits, we find ourselves diminished in our ability to feel. Nephi said to Laman and Lemuel, "Ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel [the] words."¹⁴

Last June, I was on an assignment to South America. We were on a tight 10-day schedule visiting Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. An enormous earthquake had killed hundreds, injured tens of thousands, damaged and destroyed homes and communities in the Ecuadorian cities of Portoviejo and Manta. I felt prompted to add to our schedule a visit to members living in those cities. With damage to the roads, we weren't sure we could get there. In fact, we had been told we could not get there, but the prompting would not go away. Consequently, we were blessed and were able to visit both cities.

With such short notice, I expected that only a few local priesthood leaders would attend the hastily organized gatherings. However, we arrived at each stake center to find the chapels filled all the way back to the stage. Some who attended were the stalwarts of the region, the pioneers who had held fast to the Church, encouraging others to join them in worship and to feel the Spirit in their lives. Sitting on the front rows were the members who had lost loved ones and neighbors in the earthquake. I felt prompted to bestow an apostolic blessing upon all who were in attendance, one of

my very first given. Though I was standing at the front of that room, it was as if my hands were on each of their heads, and I felt the words of the Lord pouring forth.

It didn't end there. I felt prompted to speak to them just as Jesus Christ had done when visiting the people in the Americas. "He took their little children ... and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them."¹⁵ We were in Ecuador, we were about our Father's business, and these were His children.

Fourth, we must act on the *first* prompting.

Remember the words of Nephi. "I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. Nevertheless," he said, "I went forth."¹⁶

And so must we. We must be confident in our first promptings. Sometimes we rationalize; we wonder if we are feeling a spiritual impression or if it is just our own thoughts. When we begin to second-guess, even third-guess, our feelings—and we all have—we are dismissing the Spirit; we are questioning divine counsel. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that if you will listen to the first promptings, you will get it right nine times out of ten.¹⁷

Now a caution: don't expect fireworks because you responded to the Holy Ghost. Remember, you are about the work of the still, small voice.

While serving as a mission president in New York City, I was with some of our missionaries in a restaurant in the Bronx. A young family came in and sat near us. They appeared golden for the gospel. I watched our missionaries as they continued to visit with me, then noticed as the family concluded their meal and slipped out the door. Then I said, "Elders, there's a lesson here today. You saw a lovely family come into this restaurant. What should we have done?"

One of the elders spoke up quickly: "I thought about getting up and going over to talk to them. I felt the nudge, but I didn't respond."

"Elders," I said, "we must always act on our first prompting. That nudge you felt was the Holy Ghost!"

First promptings are pure inspiration from heaven. When they confirm or testify to us, we need to recognize them for what they are and never let them slip past. So often, it is the Spirit inspiring us to reach out to someone in need, family and friends in particular. "Thus ... the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things,"¹⁸ points us to opportunities to teach the gospel, to bear testimony of the Restoration and Jesus Christ, to offer support and concern, and to rescue one of God's precious children.

Think of it as being what is called a first responder. In most communities the first responders to a tragedy, disaster, or calamity are firefighters, police officers, paramedics. They arrive with lights flashing, and may I add, we are so incredibly

grateful for them. The Lord's way is less obvious but requires just as immediate a response. The Lord knows the needs of all His children—and He knows who is prepared to help. If we let the Lord know in our morning prayers that we are ready, He will call on us to respond. If we respond, He will call on us time and time again and we will find ourselves on what President Monson calls “the Lord's errand.”¹⁹ We will become spiritual first responders bringing help from on high.

If we pay attention to the promptings that come to us, we will grow in the spirit of revelation and receive more and more Spirit-driven insight and direction. The Lord has said, “Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good.”²⁰

May we take seriously the Lord's call to “be of good cheer, for I will lead you along.”²¹ He leads us by the Holy Ghost. May we live close to the Spirit, acting quickly upon our first promptings, knowing they come from God. I bear witness of the power of the Holy Ghost to guide us, guard us, and ever be with us, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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