

Take the Holy Spirit as Your Guide

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What an incomparable gift comes to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. That gift is the Holy Spirit.

On this Easter Sunday, our thoughts turn to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and to the empty tomb that gives every believer hope in Christ's triumph over otherwise certain defeat. I believe, with the Apostle Paul, that just as God "raised up Christ from the dead [so] shall [He] also quicken [our] mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in [us]."¹

To *quicken* means to make alive. Just as Christ brings our bodies back to life after physical death through the power of His Resurrection, so can He also quicken us, or make us alive, from spiritual death.² In the book of Moses, we read of Adam undergoing this kind of quickening: "[Adam] was baptized, and the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit, and became quickened in the inner man."³

What an incomparable gift comes to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. That gift is the Holy Spirit giving us what the New Testament calls "life in Christ."⁴ But do we sometimes take for granted such a gift?

Brothers and sisters, it is an extraordinary privilege to "have ... the Holy Spirit for [our] guide,"⁵ as demonstrated by the following experience.

During the Korean War, Ensign Frank Blair served on a troop transport ship stationed in Japan.⁶ The ship wasn't large enough to have a formal chaplain, so the captain asked Brother Blair to be the ship's informal chaplain, having observed that the young man was a person of faith and principle, highly respected by the whole crew.

Ensign Blair wrote: "Our ship was caught in a huge typhoon. The waves were about 45 feet [14 m] high. I was on watch ... during which time one of our three engines stopped working and a crack in the centerline of the ship was reported. We had two remaining engines, one of which was only functioning at half power. We were in serious trouble."

Ensign Blair finished his watch and was getting into bed when the captain knocked on his door. He asked, "Would you please pray for this ship?" Of course, Ensign Blair agreed to do so.

At that point, Ensign Blair could have simply prayed, "Heavenly Father, please bless our ship and keep us safe," and then gone to bed. Instead, he prayed to know if there was something *he could do* to help ensure the safety of the ship. In response to Brother Blair's prayer, the Holy Ghost prompted him to go to the bridge, speak with the captain, and learn more. He found that the captain was trying to determine how fast to run the ship's remaining engines. Ensign Blair returned to his cabin to pray again.

He prayed, "*What can I do* to help address the problem with the engines?"

In response, the Holy Ghost whispered that he needed to walk around the ship and observe to gather more information. He again returned to the captain and asked for permission to walk around the deck. Then, with a lifeline tied around his waist, he went out into the storm.

Standing on the stern, he observed the giant propellers as they came out of the water when the ship crested a wave. Only one was working fully, and it was spinning very fast. After these observations, Ensign Blair once again prayed. The clear answer he received was that the remaining good engine was under too much strain and needed to be slowed down. So he returned to the captain and made that recommendation. The captain was surprised, telling him that the ship's engineer had just suggested the opposite—that they increase the speed of the good engine in order to outrun the storm. Nevertheless, the captain chose to follow Ensign Blair's suggestion and slowed the engine down. By dawn the ship was safely in calm waters.

Only two hours later, the good engine stopped working altogether. With half power in the remaining engine, the ship was able to limp into port.

The captain said to Ensign Blair, "If we had not slowed that engine when we did, we would have lost it in the middle of the storm."

Without that engine, there would have been no way to steer. The ship would have overturned and been sunk. The captain thanked the young LDS officer and said he believed that following Ensign Blair's spiritual impressions had saved the ship and its crew.

Now, this story is quite dramatic. While we may be unlikely to face such dire circumstances, this story contains important guidelines about how we *can* receive the Spirit's guidance more frequently.

First, when it comes to revelation, we must properly tune our receiver to heaven's frequency. Ensign Blair was living a clean and faithful life. Had he not been obedient, he would *not* have had the spiritual confidence necessary to pray as he did for the safety of his ship and to receive such specific guidance. We must each be making the effort to align our lives with God's commandments in order to be directed by Him.

Sometimes we can't hear heaven's signal because we are not worthy. Repentance and obedience are the way to achieve clear communication again. The Old Testament word for *repent* means "to turn" or "turn around."⁷ When you feel far from God, you need only make the decision to turn from sin and face the Savior, where you will find Him waiting for you, His arms outstretched. He is eager to guide you, and you are just one prayer away from receiving that guidance again.⁸

Second, Ensign Blair did not just ask the Lord to *solve* his problem. He asked what *he could do* to be part of the solution. Likewise we might ask, "Lord, what do I need to do *to be part of the solution?*" Instead of just listing our problems in prayer and asking the Lord to solve them, we ought to be seeking more proactive ways of receiving the Lord's help and committing to act according to the Spirit's guidance.

There is a third important lesson in Ensign Blair's story. Could he have prayed with such calm assurance if he had not received guidance from the Spirit on previous occasions? The arrival of a typhoon is no time to dust off the gift of the Holy Ghost and figure out how to use it. This

young man was clearly following a pattern he had used many times before, including as a full-time missionary. We need the Holy Spirit as our guide in calm waters so His voice will be unmistakable to us in the fiercest storm.

Some may think we shouldn't expect daily guidance from the Spirit because "it is not meet that [God] should command in all things," lest we become slothful servants.⁹ This scripture, however, was given to some early missionaries who asked Joseph Smith to obtain revelation they should have received for themselves. In a preceding verse, the Lord told them to come to the mission field *"as they shall counsel between themselves and me."*¹⁰

These missionaries wanted a specific revelation about their travel plans. They hadn't yet learned to seek their own direction in personal matters. The Lord called this attitude what it is: slothful. Early Church members may have been so happy to have a true prophet that they were in danger of failing to learn how to receive revelation themselves. Being spiritually self-reliant is hearing the Lord's voice through His Spirit for one's own life.

Alma advised his son to "counsel with the Lord *in all thy doings.*"¹¹ To live in this way—what we often call "living by the Spirit"—is a high privilege. It brings a sense of calm and certainty as well as fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, and peace.¹²

Ensign Blair's ability to receive revelation saved him and his shipmates from a raging storm. Other kinds of storms are raging today. The Book of Mormon's parable of the tree of life¹³ provides a powerful image of how to achieve spiritual safety in such a world. This dream tells of sudden mists of darkness arising to bring spiritual destruction to members of the Church walking on the path back to God.¹⁴

In contemplating this image, I see in my mind's eye throngs of people traveling that path, some with their hands firmly gripping the iron rod, but many others simply following the feet of the people in front of them. This latter approach takes little thought or effort. You can just do and think what others are doing and thinking. This works fine in sunny weather. But the storms of deception and the mists of falsehood arise without warning. In these situations, being familiar with the voice of the Holy Ghost is a matter of spiritual life and death.

Nephi's powerful promise is that "whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and ... *hold fast unto it ...* would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction."¹⁵

Following the feet of the people ahead of you on the path is not enough. We cannot just do and think what others are doing and thinking; we must live a guided life. We must each have our own hand on the iron rod. Then we may go to the Lord with humble confidence, knowing that He "shall lead [us] by the hand, and give [us] answer to [our] prayers."¹⁶ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.