

Observation, Reason, Faith, and Revelation

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Thank you, brothers and sisters, for being here. Thank you for coming to Education Week. Thank you for your faith, your faithfulness, your examples, and your desires to be here.

Observation and Reason Work Synergistically with Faith

Sometimes we fall into a trap of dealing with false dichotomies. For instance, we might believe that observation or reason are the only valid ways to learn truth. Or we might believe that observation and reason undermine faith to such an extent that they should have no role in religious life.

This is a false dichotomy because observation and reason work synergistically with faith. “Faith without works”¹ will not amplify itself. Faith will only grow by observation and reasoning, coupled with other spiritual work. In addition, observation, reason, and faith are often prerequisites not only to receiving personal revelation but to understanding that revelation.

First, let’s look at how observation alone can be unreliable, especially when we are unaware of the external conditions affecting our observations.

Technologies that use computer-generated images and videos are rapidly evolving and can portray believable material. A news story in May 2023 used an artificial intelligence–generated photo to “document” an explosion at the Pentagon.² This caused the stock markets to dip—until the bogus nature of the photo was made known. And, to ingratiate myself with this audience, I will show you a photo depicting me receiving a diploma from the BYU president himself in 1976. [A photo was shown.³] I like this image, but it is an artificial intelligence–generated image. I didn’t graduate from BYU. In the future, we would be wise to avoid relying on observation alone and should seek corroborating evidence from other reliable sources.

Second, reliance on reason alone can mislead. Interpolation can be erroneous, and extrapolation is potentially even more dangerous. Let me illustrate. In the fourth century BC, Aristotle was an amazing Greek philosopher. His teachings profoundly affected scholarship into the Renaissance. He was tutored by Plato, and, in turn, Aristotle tutored a boy in Macedonia named Alexander, who received the last name of “the Great.”

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Aristotle taught that heavier objects fall faster than lighter objects. He reasoned that those heavier objects “belonged” more on the ground, therefore they would fall faster than lighter objects that “belonged” less on the ground.

Let’s test his reasoning. I have here two fans of Aristotle: Sister Melanie Soares and Brother Ethan Brown. I hold in one hand a hymnbook and in the other hand a piece of paper.

Melanie, you check. Which is heavier?

The hymnbook.

Ethan, double-check.

Okay. I am going to drop them at the same time, and I would like you to tell us which hits the ground first.

Which one hit first?

The hymnbook.

These individuals presume from this demonstration that Aristotle was right, as he always was thought to be.

Now, if I crumple the paper, has the weight changed? No.

Let’s just double-check. Melanie, is the book still heavier?

Yes.

Now, when I drop them both, which one hits the ground first? The hymnbook and the paper hit the ground at the same time. That is amazing! When friction and air resistance are eliminated, heavy things and light things fall at the same rate. So from this demonstration, Melanie and Ethan may question Aristotle’s teaching. They may suspect, though, that my involvement in the demonstration may have affected the outcome.

Ethan could say, “Elder Renlund, I might believe you, but you’re old!” And Melanie could and would likely say, “I might believe you, but you’re bald!” And they both could say, with some loathing, “And you didn’t even graduate from BYU!” Nonetheless, reasoning alone led Aristotle astray in his teachings. In the 1600s, Galileo had to couple observation with reasoning to prove Aristotle wrong. Such methods can achieve truth, but not always reliably.

Third, let’s evaluate how reliance on faith alone could mislead. In 1984 a world-renowned eye surgeon, Ronald G. Michels, joined the Church in Baltimore, Maryland. I was serving as his bishop.

He was absolutely converted to Jesus Christ and His restored Church. At the height of his career, Ron developed a life-threatening cancer. His physicians prescribed chemotherapy. His prognosis was bleak—even with treatment, it was unlikely that he would survive for more than six months.

Some members of the Church told him that he shouldn’t take the medicine and that he should instead rely on faith alone. These members told him that taking the medicine would demonstrate to God that his faith wasn’t absolute.

Ron invited me to his office in the hospital. Spread over his desk were ten to fifteen pills. He told me his situation, the advice of his doctors, and the advice of some Church members. He said, “Dale, you are my bishop. If you tell me to take the pills, I will. If you tell me not to, I won’t.”

As I struggled to formulate a response, I remembered what my wife and I had recently read from the Book of Mormon: the letter Captain Moroni wrote to the governor of the land, Pahoran. In encouraging Pahoran to give more support to the armies that were fighting for freedom, Moroni wrote:

Behold, could ye suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones, and because of the exceeding goodness of God ye could do nothing and he would deliver you? Behold, if ye have supposed this ye have supposed in vain.⁴

Moroni repeated himself for emphasis:

Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us, while we sit upon our thrones and do not make use of the means which the Lord has provided for us?⁵

I asked Ron to read these verses, and then I asked, “What do these verses teach you?”

He replied, “I think it means that I should take the pills and continue to exercise my faith.”

He took his prescribed medicine, followed the advice of his doctors—making use of the means that the Lord had provided—and exercised his extraordinary faith. He lived much longer than expected, approximately eight years. Both he and I were confident that the outcome would have been worse if he had relied on faith alone.

Observation and Reason Help Build Faith

Given that observation alone, reason alone, and faith without action are not sufficient, let's look at the interaction among observation, reason, and faith.

After John the Baptist had been imprisoned, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He were the promised Messiah.⁶ The Lord could have simply answered, "Yes!" However, He responded in a way that encouraged the disciples to use observation and reason to develop faith:

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.⁷

These disciples were to observe what was happening, use their reason to answer their own question, and come to the realization that Jesus was the Messiah. In this example, the Savior encouraged observation and reason to activate faith.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Savior warned of "false prophets" who might appear as sheep but inwardly were "ravening wolves."⁸ The Lord taught how such scoundrels were to be detected. He said:

*Ye shall know them by their fruits. . . .
 . . . Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. . . .
 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.⁹*

To evaluate metaphorical fruit, one needs to observe and discern whether it is good or not.

Again, the Savior asks us to discern truth by observation and reasoning. The Savior's parables are premised similarly. His parables are simple stories that use ordinary objects or events to illustrate a spiritual truth. He then asks us to reason our way to discern the underlying meaning.¹⁰

Recall the time when the Savior was asked by "a certain lawyer" how "to inherit eternal life."¹¹ This led to the scriptural answer that included the admonition to love our neighbor as ourselves.¹² This prompted the lawyer to ask, "Who is my

neighbour?"¹³ After relating the parable of the good Samaritan, the Savior asked:

Which now of these three [the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan], thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And [the inquiring lawyer] said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.¹⁴

Insightful reasoning was required to discern the underlying meaning and the application of the parable.

As we use observation and reasoning to build faith, our own inclinations toward or away from faith are critical. In Acts 2, we read that the apostles gathered to teach the people:

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. . . .

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of [the apostles].

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues. . . .
 . . . The multitude came together. . . .*

And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans?

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?¹⁵

However, some in the assembled group were disinclined to look for and see the hand of God working in this circumstance. They relied solely on their own intellect and logic and came up with what they considered the most reasonable explanation. They mockingly asserted, "These men are [drunk]."¹⁶ Often those who lack faith in God choose to trust in their own limited understanding or choose skepticism and doubt. That leads them to say such things as "It is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come"¹⁷ or "Some things [alleged prophets] may have guessed right, among so many; but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works cannot come to pass."¹⁸

Those disinclined toward faith in God often rely too heavily on reasoning and look to explain

away the hand of God. That is what happened on the day of Pentecost. Inclinations away from faith caused some to misinterpret this remarkable spiritual outpouring.

While inclinations away from faith hamper its development, inclinations toward faith promote it. In his mission to the Zoramites, Alma and his missionary companions found that they couldn't teach the self-righteous Zoramites anything.¹⁹

Alma likely reflected on his experience with Korihor when he said to the Zoramites, "Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe."²⁰ Alma knew that miracles don't produce faith and that seeking a sign is very different from sincerely asking, seeking, and knocking. So he taught how faith can grow and how an inclination toward faith makes all the difference.

Alma invited the subset of the Zoramites who would listen to him to perform an experiment, comparing his words to a seed. Brothers and sisters, we blunder if we equate this experiment to the scientific method, even though it uses observation and reasoning. A scientific experiment carefully seeks to minimize—or, preferably, eliminate—inclinations toward a particular outcome. Skepticism is a treasured attribute when using the scientific method and is necessary to interpret the results correctly.

The experiment encouraged by Alma was different; a favorable outcome depended on an inclination to believe. He said:

*But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.*²¹

Alma recommended that his listeners abandon skepticism and encouraged an inclination to believe. He even counseled against approaching the experiment neutrally so that they didn't accidentally "cast [the seed] out by [their] unbelief."²²

With an inclination to believe, we plant the seed in our hearts. When we do, the seed "will

begin to swell within [our] breasts. . . . It beginneth to enlarge [our] soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten [our] understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to [us]."²³

As the seed swells, sprouts, and grows, our faith is strengthened, and we come to "know that this is a good seed."²⁴ Alma said:

And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea. . . .

And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment . . . , ye must needs know that the seed is good.

And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because you know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.

*O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, . . . ye must know that it is good.*²⁵

When we start with an inclination to believe, observation leads to faith. As faith grows, reason facilitates the transformation of faith into revelatory knowledge, and revelatory knowledge produces added faith.²⁶ The Zoramites understood the metaphor but were a bit fuzzy on what "the word," which was likened to a "seed," represented.²⁷ This is crucial because it is this word that we can know is true. Alma clarified and encouraged his listeners to

*begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection.*²⁸

The word that Alma wanted them to plant in their hearts was Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Alma promised that if they did plant the word in their hearts, they would come to know the reality of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice and this knowledge would "become a tree, springing up in [them] unto everlasting life."²⁹ This knowledge enables receiving the greatest gift God can give His children.³⁰

While Alma applied the metaphor of a seed to Jesus Christ and His Atonement, others, including the Savior, used a simile comparing a seed to faith

itself.³¹ Sister Beatrice Goff Jackson did so in her beautiful children's song "Faith."³² She penned:

*Faith is like a little seed:
If planted, it will grow.
Faith is a swelling within my heart.
When I do right, I know.*³³

"Strong faith is developed by obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ."³⁴ I wish we could transmit faith the way that we transmit the common cold. That way we could just go around and sneeze on people, and their faith would increase. But that is not how faith grows.

This principle can perhaps be illustrated with a hypothetical faith curve. It starts at zero. Then faith is kindled by hearing the testimonies of those who have faith. After the initial kindling, for faith to grow further, we need to act in faith. Faith is nourished and grows "by righteousness."³⁵ As Sister Jackson correctly explained, "I feel [faith] grow Whenever I obey."³⁶

President Russell M. Nelson taught that we gain faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement by

- (1) studying about Jesus Christ,
- (2) choosing to believe in Him,
- (3) acting in faith,
- (4) partaking of sacred ordinances worthily, and
- (5) asking our Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, for help.³⁷

As we do so, something remarkable happens: faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement not only grows but can be transformed into the spiritual gift of knowing "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world"³⁸—for your sins and for mine. This transformation occurs when we keep the commandments of God, remain faithful, and continue to be willing to receive more and more. We will then come "to know the mysteries of God . . . in full"³⁹ and know all things.

On this hypothetical faith curve, nowhere is the slope zero. "Faith is either growing stronger or becoming weaker."⁴⁰ There is no built-in place to stop and rest; there is no plateau. Faith can atrophy in at least three ways:

1. Faith atrophies if we stop actively building our faith. This happens when we harden our hearts or we become self-satisfied with our status quo. This is doing the opposite of what President Nelson encouraged us to do: we stop studying, stop choosing to believe, stop acting in faith, stop participating in ordinances, and stop asking God for help.

2. Faith atrophies when we actively choose to go back down the faith curve. This happens when we become disobedient and stop repenting.

3. Faith atrophies when we shift our inclination away from faith toward skepticism and doubt. Recall those individuals in Lehi's vision who made it to the tree of life, partook of the fruit, and then looked around "as if they were ashamed."⁴¹ In that vision the fruit represents the blessings Jesus Christ can bestow because He accomplished His atoning sacrifice. The ashamed people represent those of us who pay attention to those who demean, ridicule, or scoff at our faith. Lehi noted, "For as many as heeded them, had fallen away."⁴² If we shift our inclination away from faith and pay attention to distracting voices, we will fall away.

In all three ways, faith atrophies and we receive less and less until we lose all that we had previously received. We lose the companionship of the Holy Ghost and ultimately "know nothing concerning" the mysteries of God.⁴³ It will be like disengaging the gears of a vehicle that has no brakes on a steep, ascending mountain road. Once our upward momentum ceases, we will roll backward. And it will happen no matter how flashy the car is or how powerful the engine is.

Principles Involved in the Process of Personal Revelation

Now, the combination of observation, reason, and faith in receiving and understanding revelation is well illustrated in an example from the life of President Joseph F. Smith. In 1918, President Smith was in poor health, and death was on his mind. His oldest son, Hyrum, became ill and died of a ruptured appendix. Hyrum's widow, Ida, died of heart failure shortly thereafter. A world war was raging. More than fifteen million soldiers

and civilians eventually died. A deadly strain of influenza was killing people around the world. The number of deaths worldwide would reach fifty million.

On October 3, President Smith

sat in his room, reflecting on the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the redemption of the world. He opened his New Testament to 1 Peter and read about the Savior preaching to the spirits in the spirit world. . . .

. . . The prophet felt the Spirit descend upon him, opening his eyes of understanding.⁴⁴

He saw into the spirit world and saw that the Savior appeared to multitudes of righteous women and men who had died before the Savior’s mortal ministry. These righteous spirits rejoiced at their liberation from death.

President Smith wondered how the Savior could preach to all the spirits in prison because His ministry was limited to the time between the Crucifixion and His Resurrection. Having formulated the question, President Smith then

understood [by revelation] that the Savior did not go in person to the disobedient spirits. Rather, he organized the righteous spirits . . . to carry the gospel message to the spirits in darkness.⁴⁵

This revelation is now canonized as section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants. As we consider these experiences of President Smith, we see that reason and faith provided a springboard for that revelation. Let’s discuss some principles that are involved in this process.

Principle 1

Personal revelation requires work, including learning how the Holy Ghost communicates individually with us. Personal revelation involves more than simply being confirmed a member of the Church. It is naive to think that just because we have received the gift of the Holy Ghost all we need to do is say, “Okay, I’m ready. Reveal!”

Early in his time as a scribe to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery made that mistake, thinking that all he had to do was ask.⁴⁶ Studying it out in one’s mind—coupling faith with observation and

reason—is necessary for spiritual impressions to come. We focus on a problem, study it out, and think about it. We formulate various solutions. It seems that only then can personal revelation reliably come.⁴⁷

The Holy Ghost communicates in different ways to different people at different times. Observing how He speaks to us is critical to receiving further revelation. The voice of the Holy Ghost is mild and still, like a whisper—not loud or noisy.⁴⁸ It may be stunningly simple and plain.⁴⁹ It can be piercing or burning.⁵⁰ It affects both the mind and the heart.⁵¹ It brings peace, joy, and hope—not fear, anxiety, or worry.⁵² It is enlightening and “delicious,” not muddling.⁵³ Observing this, we can reasonably dismiss certain contrary voices and focus on the voice of the Holy Ghost.

Elder David A. Bednar taught that spiritual impressions could come along a spectrum ranging from all at once—like flipping on a light switch—to gradually—like the intensity of light progressively increasing, as occurs in a sunrise.⁵⁴ Most of the time when impressions come all at once, observation and reason precede that “flip of the light switch.” Most of the time when impressions come gradually, observation and reason are part of the progressive revelatory process.

Some members hesitantly admit that they are not sure that they have ever felt the Spirit. We should remember those remarkable Lamanite converts in the Book of Mormon who were “baptize[d] with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and . . . knew it not.”⁵⁵ We might discern that we have been influenced by the Holy Ghost if we ask ourselves, “Have I ever felt peaceful after making a decision, felt an increased capacity to resist temptation, felt an increase in love for others, or felt an increased desire to serve?” or “Have I received ideas to help, wanted to be a peacemaker in a conflict, or simply known what to do in a complex situation?” These feelings may be manifestations of the Holy Ghost influencing us to do good.

Principle 2

Personal revelation is facilitated by understanding and formulating questions from multiple angles. Formulating and reframing questions require observation, reason, and faith. At one time or

another, many of us have asked ourselves, “How do I know whether the thought I have is my own or if it is from the Holy Ghost?” This is a reasonable question. Perhaps a better question, and certainly a more actionable one, is this: “Should I act on this particular thought?”

The prophet Mormon answered this second question. He taught:

Every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. . . .

. . . The way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge. . . .

. . . For every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil.⁵⁶

These are the criteria to determine whether we should act on a particular thought: the thought promotes believing in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ; it promotes loving and serving Them; and it promotes doing good.⁵⁷ If the thought meets these criteria, does it really matter whether it was planted directly by the Holy Ghost in that exact moment or if the thought arose thanks to a lifetime of experiences and prior decisions? In reality, it doesn't. But observation and reason provide a filter through which we determine whether to act on an impression.

Understanding and formulating questions from multiple angles are not the same as repeatedly asking God the identical question. Doing so is unwise, as Joseph Smith learned in the episode with Martin Harris and the 116 manuscript pages.⁵⁸ I have wondered what would have happened if Joseph had relied on the answer he first received and had then formulated different questions the second time Martin Harris approached him. What would have happened if Joseph had clearly stated the problem to the Lord? The prayer would have been something like “Heavenly Father, we have a problem, and that problem

could interfere with the coming forth of the book I am translating. We need Martin's resources, but his wife is opposed to him helping. What can we do to make things easier for Martin?”

Do you think posing and pondering this question might have resulted in different insights or answers? Perhaps.

Principle 3

Personal revelation usually requires depending on and acting on incomplete understanding. For me, revelation frequently comes in short, terse, imperative directives such as “Go!” and “Do!” and “Say!” Or it may come as ideas, usually coupled with a nudge to act on those ideas. Such promptings may be conveyed without words. Revelation can be delicate, and trying to put into words that which was not given with words can limit understanding. Rarely does revelation come with clear explanations of *why* we should do something.⁵⁹

Trying to explain “why” when no revelatory reason was given often misleads or can cause us to stumble.

President M. Russell Ballard shared his tender experience of rationalizing away a spiritual prompting. It is instructive for us all. As he was leaving his bishop's office late one evening, President Ballard had a strong impression to visit an elderly widow in his ward. However, he reasoned that it was too late. And it was snowing. He postponed the visit until the next day.

Early the next morning, [he] drove straight to the widow's home. Her daughter answered the door and tearfully said, “Oh, Bishop, thank you for coming. Mother passed away two hours ago.” [President Ballard] was devastated. . . . [He had missed the opportunity to] hold her hand, comfort her, and perhaps give her a final blessing . . . because [he had] reasoned away this strong prompting from the Spirit.⁶⁰

Something like this has happened to me more than once. Perhaps it has happened to you too.

Observation, reason, and acting in faith does not mean that we are paralyzed when we do not feel an affirmative prompting. President Dallin H. Oaks taught:

*We should study things out in our minds, using the reasoning powers our Creator has placed within us. Then we should pray for guidance and act upon it if we receive it. If we do not receive guidance, we should act upon our best judgment.*⁶¹

Elder Richard G. Scott made this comforting promise: “When you are living righteously and are acting with trust, God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision.”⁶²

Principle 4

Personal revelation is iterative. God has said:

*For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more.*⁶³

Thus we should recognize what God has already revealed to us personally while being open to further revelation from Him.

Even when we have received revelation, it often takes acting in faith to understand how best to apply that information. You may recall that the apostle Peter had a vision in which he saw something like a tablecloth being let down wherein were all kinds of foods that observant Jews considered unclean. He was commanded to eat, but he protested.

He was then told, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”⁶⁴

The vision occurred three times. The vision was crystal clear, as if a light switch had been flipped, but Peter didn’t understand it. He had to walk all the next day from Joppa to Cæsarea, enter the home of the centurion Cornelius, and hear him out before Peter understood that the revelation was a commandment to take the gospel to the non-Jewish population.⁶⁵ Even then Peter and the other apostles had to discuss and reason how to apply this revelation in practical terms. Only after “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to [them],”⁶⁶ did they know how to proceed. That

understanding came gradually, like the light of dawn progressively getting brighter.

Principle 5

Personal revelation requires humility to corroborate and not concoct impressions. Observation, reason, and faith propel us to corroborate spiritual impressions.⁶⁷ As we pray for inspiration, we compare our spiritual impressions with the scriptures and the teachings of living prophets. Impressions from the Spirit will align with these sources.

We rely on personal revelation only within our own purview and not within the prerogative of others. When we seek revelation that is rightly the prerogative of others, it is easy to be deceived.⁶⁸

Years ago, three acquaintances separately mentioned to me that they felt inspired that they were going to marry the same woman. None of the three had even gone on a date with her. I believe all three misinterpreted physical attraction and raging hormones as spiritual promptings. None of the three ended up marrying her. Heavenly Father respects agency and is unlikely to send promptings that violate the agency of someone else. He may prompt us to further action, but coercion will never be part of His plan.

President Dallin H. Oaks cautioned:

*Persons who persist in seeking revelatory guidance on subjects on which the Lord has not chosen to direct us may concoct an answer out of their own fantasy or bias, or they may even receive an answer through the medium of false revelation.*⁶⁹

The Prophet Joseph Smith warned, “Nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit, when they think they have the spirit of God.”⁷⁰

We shouldn’t try to force spiritual things.⁷¹ If we try to, we may rely on emotions that mimic spiritual promptings but are not. These emotions may include sentimentality, awe, empathy, excitement—or raging hormones.

Similarly, it is an advanced spiritual skill to know that revelation has not been received and to be prompted not to act. I know a Relief Society president, Sister Jones,⁷² whose first counselor

moved out of the ward and needed to be released. Sister Jones felt inspired to recommend that her second counselor be called as her first counselor but didn't feel prompted to recommend a new second counselor. The bishop encouraged her to consider several qualified sisters. She gave prayerful consideration, but affirmative confirmation didn't come, and she knew it. So she waited, and she knew that she should wait.

Two weeks later, a relatively new convert, Sister Brown,⁷³ moved into the ward. Sister Jones now felt a prompting to recommend that Sister Brown be interviewed by the bishop and, if he felt a spiritual confirmation, that she be called as the second counselor.

Sister Brown was called and served for several years as a counselor to Sister Jones—not only helping significantly but learning from Sister Jones and the experienced first counselor. Upon Sister Jones's release, Sister Brown was called to be the new ward Relief Society president. I am grateful that Sister Jones did not force a conclusion prematurely and instead had become sufficiently spiritually mature to know that revelation hadn't been received and that she had been prompted to wait on the Lord.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, observation, reason, and faith facilitate revelation and enable the Holy Ghost to be a reliable, trustworthy, and beloved companion. These elements will be key factors in producing "spiritual momentum in our lives"⁷⁴ and helping us move "forward amid . . . fear and uncertainty."⁷⁵

I testify of Heavenly Father and His plan, Jesus Christ and His Atonement, and the Holy Ghost and His role in helping us fulfill our purpose in mortality, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. James 2:20, 26; see also verse 17. See also verses 14–26.

2. See Philip Marcelo, "Fact Focus: Fake Image of Pentagon Explosion Briefly Sends Jitters Through Stock Market," *Washington News*, Associated Press, 23 May 2023, apnews.com/article/pentagon-explosion-misinformation-stock

-market-ai-96f534c790872fde67012ee81b5ed6a4; Donie O'Sullivan and Jon Passantino, "'Verified' Twitter Accounts Share Fake Image of 'Explosion' Near Pentagon, Causing Confusion," *Business*, CNN, 23 May 2023, cnn.com/2023/05/22/tech/twitter-fake-image-pentagon-explosion/index.html; Danielle Wallace, "Fake Pentagon Explosion Image Goes Viral on Twitter, Sparking Further AI Concerns," *Artificial Intelligence*, Fox Business, 23 May 2023, foxbusiness.com/technology/fake-pentagon-explosion-image-goes-viral-twitter-sparking-further-ai-concerns.

3. The image was created in June 2023 by Clint Melander, specialist in media and technology in the Office of the Quorum of the Twelve, using two different methods: text and image prompting in MidJourney and illustrating in photoshop with generative AI.

4. Alma 60:11.

5. Alma 60:21.

6. See Matthew 11:2–3.

7. Matthew 11:4–5.

8. Matthew 7:15.

9. Matthew 7:16–17, 20.

10. See Matthew 13:10–17.

11. Luke 10:25.

12. See Luke 10:27.

13. Luke 10:29.

14. Luke 10:36–37; see also verses 30–35.

15. Acts 2:2–4, 6–8.

16. Acts 2:13.

17. Helaman 16:18.

18. Helaman 16:16.

19. See Alma 31 and 32. See also Dale G. Renlund, "Choose You This Day," *Ensign*, November 2018; describing a scene in the stage musical of *Mary Poppins* and citing *Libretto to Mary Poppins: The Broadway Musical*, 70.

20. Alma 32:17.

21. Alma 32:27.

22. Alma 32:28.

23. Alma 32:28.

24. Alma 32:30; emphasis added.

25. Alma 32:31, 33–35; emphasis added.

26. See Alma 32:35–37.

27. Alma 33:1.

28. Alma 33:22.

29. Alma 33:23.

30. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
31. See Luke 17:6; see also Beatrice Goff Jackson, “Faith,” *Songbook*, 96–97.
32. See “Faith,” *Songbook*.
33. “Faith,” *Songbook*.
34. Bible Dictionary, s.v. “faith.”
35. Bible Dictionary, s.v. “faith.”
36. “Faith,” *Songbook*.
37. See Russell M. Nelson, “Christ Is Risen; Faith in Him Will Move Mountains,” *Liahona*, May 2021.
38. Doctrine and Covenants 46:13.
39. Alma 12:10; see also Doctrine and Covenants 50:24; 71:6; 93:20, 28.
40. Neil L. Andersen, “Faith Is Not by Chance, but by Choice,” *Ensign*, November 2015.
41. 1 Nephi 8:25; see also verses 24–34.
42. 1 Nephi 8:34.
43. Alma 12:11; see also 2 Nephi 28:30; Doctrine and Covenants 1:33; 93:39.
44. *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 3, *Boldly, Nobly, and Independent, 1893–1955* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022), 202–3. See also Doctrine and Covenants 138.
45. *Boldly, Nobly*, 203. See also Doctrine and Covenants 138.
46. See Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–8.
47. There is a form of personal revelation that does not depend on our asking, seeking, and knocking. Consider Alma the Younger’s visit from the angel (see Mosiah 27). He had not sought this revelation, nor was it earned by his obedience to the commandments. We should never suppose that God is prevented from revealing something when it serves His purposes.
48. See Helaman 5:30–33; Boyd K. Packer, “Speaking Today: The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983.
49. See Russell M. Nelson, “Hear Him,” *Ensign*, May 2020.
50. See 3 Nephi 11:3; Doctrine and Covenants 9:8–9; 85:6; 1 Kings 19:11–12.
51. See Doctrine and Covenants 8:2–3.
52. See Doctrine and Covenants 6:22–24; Nelson, “Hear Him”; Nelson, “Embrace the Future with Faith,” *Ensign*, November 2020; Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018.
53. Alma 32:28; see also Doctrine and Covenants 9:9; 11:13–14.
54. See David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation,” *Ensign*, May 2011.
55. 3 Nephi 9:20.
56. Moroni 7:13, 15–17; see also verse 12.
57. See Moroni 7:12–17; see also chapter 4, “Seek and Rely on the Spirit,” *PMG*, 2023, 106; *TGBH*, 260–61; Omni 1:25; Doctrine and Covenants 11:12.
58. For the full account of the loss of the 116 manuscript pages, see *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), 44–53; see also Doctrine and Covenants 3:5–15; 10:1–5.
59. See, for instance, Acts 10. Only after Peter had acted on terse directives did he understand the remarkable vision he had received.
60. M. Russell Ballard, “Remember What Matters Most,” *Liahona*, May 2023; see also Susan Easton Black and Joseph Walker, *Anxiously Engaged: A Biography of M. Russell Ballard* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 90–91.
61. Dallin H. Oaks, “Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall,” *Ensign*, October 1994; see also Oaks, “Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall,” BYU fireside address, 7 June 1992.
62. Richard G. Scott, “Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer,” *Ensign*, May 2007.
63. 2 Nephi 28:30.
64. Acts 10:15; see also verses 10–16.
65. See Acts 10–11.
66. Acts 15:28.
67. See Dale G. Renlund, “A Framework for Personal Revelation,” *Liahona*, November 2022.
68. See *PMG*, 109.
69. Oaks, “Our Strengths” (1994); also Oaks, “Our Strengths” (1992).
70. Joseph Smith, “Try the Spirits,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 11 (1 April 1842): 744.
71. See *PMG*, 109.
72. Not her real name.
73. Not her real name.
74. Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, November 2022.
75. Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022.