

# *The Holy Ghost: Our Infallible Guide*

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I am humbled by the awesome responsibility of speaking before you today, and I appreciate President Bateman’s kind introduction. I am truly a person who has worn many hats in my life. Like Bartholomew Cubbins and his 500 hats, one just keeps popping on the minute I take another off: daughter, wife, mother, grandmother; student, teacher; missionary, visiting teacher, Relief Society president, nursery leader, choir member; and on and on (see Dr. Seuss, *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* [New York: Random House, 1989]). My life has been one of marvelous experiences.

## **Introduction**

The title of my talk today is “The Holy Ghost: Our Infallible Guide.” The Holy Ghost has touched my life in many ways. One might say his influence is multifaceted, like a precious diamond, or that he also wears many hats. These hats—callings, functions, roles, or gifts—and their manifestations are so numerous that full books could be written about them (as I found when I was preparing this talk). So today I would like to narrow my discussion to three special functions of the Holy Ghost that dynamically affect our lives at Brigham Young University: teacher, guardian, and comforter. I pray that you may listen by the spirit of the

Holy Ghost to discern those things that are most needful in your individual lives.

I have keenly felt the importance of the Holy Ghost as a teacher, a guardian, and a comforter in my life because I have also worn these hats. My students know me here as a teacher of Shakespeare, technical writing, and creative writing. They also know that *unlike* the Holy Ghost, I am *not* infallible. Just this week, I found I had mixed up the colors in the War of the Roses and gave the red rose to the York faction instead of the Lancaster faction. Thank goodness for sharp students who set me right. I appreciate them for helping me be a better teacher. As a mother, I have also been a teacher and a guardian. But I wasn’t a perfect mom, either. My children had their share of cut lips and skinned knees. Try as I might, I couldn’t save them from all the bumps of life. And when either my students or my children—and now my grandchildren—have these bumps, I whip out my hat of the comforter and give this other role a try. But I’m not infallible here, either. I can’t always take away the hurt. I must hand the hat over to that wonderful personage,

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*Sally Taylor was a BYU professor of English when this devotional address was given on 5 November 1996.*

the Holy Ghost. As I discuss the three roles or functions of the Holy Ghost, may I share with you true accounts of the marvelous influence of the Holy Ghost.

### The Holy Ghost as a Teacher

First is the function of the Holy Ghost as a teacher. As students and teachers at Brigham Young University, we are engaged in the immediate task of gaining knowledge. We read, we listen, we experiment, we test, we write. We grow “line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:12) in both our fields of specialty and our general knowledge. Sometimes we become too self-sufficient and don’t allow the Holy Ghost to help us learn. But he is always there, waiting to help.

James W. Cannon, professor of mathematics, discusses how the Holy Ghost helped him to study and research in the book *Expressions of Faith*:

*The problem I was considering was a hard one that I had been working on, off and on, for five years. I felt that I was really near the end. I felt that just one little insight was all I needed — the ideal occasion for praying and receiving an answer. And so I would hide in the library at the beginning of each day, think about what direction might be the right one to pry loose that additional bit of needed insight (the one that would explain everything), pray for direction and enlightenment, and set out to work. And, amazingly to me, each day I would feel instructed and directed. I would feel at day’s end that I had traveled a great distance, and that only a little bit of insight was still needed to finish the problem. . . .*

*So went the months until at the end of the summer I was, actually, at the end of the problem. I understood it, and the little bit of needed insight was spread over the summer and was full of miraculous mathematical wonders, much deeper than I had dreamed — and I marveled. . . . I marveled at the naïveté that led me to expect my hard problem to have an easy answer, to assume that one little*

*inspiration was all I needed, that I needed just one little word in the ear. I marveled at the distance I had traveled and at the length of my instruction.* [James W. Cannon, “Study and the Prayer of Faith,” *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-day Saint Scholars*, ed. Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1996), pp. 86–87; emphasis in original]

At some times in our studies, we come up against a wall. We have done all that we can, but answers simply elude us. Robert L. Millet, dean of Religious Education, has noted:

*When disciplined minds and creative artists open themselves to the enlightening powers of the Holy Ghost and are imbued with the spirit and power of the restored gospel, learning and discovery and creativity reach beyond the paltry bounds of what has been done heretofore and open us to new vistas of understanding and expression.* [Robert L. Millet, “Knowledge by Faith,” *Expressions of Faith*, p. 97]

This knowledge, given to us by the “infallible guide,” is true, unlike some information from secular sources that may be subject to popular prejudices and limited testing.

Sometimes as we study and learn here at BYU, circumstances beyond our control deter us from putting adequate time and energy into a class or a particular assignment. Church responsibilities, illness, family problems, or unusual situations can cause us to have additional need to call upon the Holy Ghost’s assistance. One such incident is recounted by Steven D. Bennion, now president of Ricks College. He had been serving as a bishop, completing classes for his PhD, and working full-time to support his family of seven. He needed to finish his doctoral dissertation and defend it, but it was taking much more time than he had expected. He had to do a crash program to finish. With only two days left, he ran up against a wall. I quote:

*The first day was an exercise in frustration. I struggled at length through that day and produced only 4 pages. By 9 o'clock that evening, I was discouraged and desperate: I had only two nights and a day left to compose a compelling concluding chapter. I decided to get a good night's rest the first night, leaving myself only a day and a night to complete the chapter. I remember offering special prayers both that evening and the next morning. I pleaded my need to the Lord, reminding him of my good wife and family and their faithful support while I worked on the dissertation and served as bishop. I acknowledged gratitude for opportunities and then asked for special spiritual help to quicken my mind and spirit for the monumental challenge of completing the final chapter in a single day.*

*I arose the next morning at 4:30 and began to write. The words flowed as I had never before experienced. The next 42 pages came far more easily than the first 4 had the day before.*

As Brother Bennion's wife helped him review those final pages, another miracle happened. His wife found many corrections in the first four pages, but, to their "mutual amazement, she did not suggest one change in the final 42 pages" (Steven D. Bennion, "Human Life Divided by Reason Leaves a Remainder," *Expressions of Faith*, p. 50).

As you struggle in studying, researching, writing, and test taking, be aware that the Holy Ghost will help you and teach you along the way. I wish to testify that this principle is true and to give you a personal example to this effect. When I was completing my doctoral work at the University of Utah, I also struggled with time and responsibilities. I had four small children and was the ward Relief Society president. I was finishing my degree part-time, but even then some days were incredibly hard. One particular term was coming to an end when I suddenly got a bad case of the flu. I had studied very hard, but on the day of the final I was so sick with a high fever that I was dizzy and nauseated when I tried to get out of bed.

I pleaded with the Lord for his help, then got dressed and headed for Salt Lake. As I walked to my classroom, I was so sick that I had to hold onto the wall so I wouldn't fall. I sat at the back of the room to take the exam. I remember how difficult it was to read the test questions. My mind was fuzzy and I couldn't think, but I nonetheless did my best. The next term I happened to meet that professor in the hall as I was going to another class. He stopped me and commented about my final. The Holy Ghost had blessed me more than I had ever supposed.

As our teacher, the Holy Ghost can do three things for us in our efforts to learn. First, he can reveal new knowledge. The Doctrine and Covenants says, "If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things" (D&C 42:61). If we do our part and can do no more, the Holy Ghost will add that "line upon line" to our understanding. We may even receive new insights that the world could not give. A second thing the Holy Ghost can do is to help us make connections. Like a chemist putting two different familiar elements together to create something new, we can be guided in our studies to make connections that will open up an entirely new possibility. A third way that the Holy Ghost can teach us is to bring to our mind forgotten things.

As a young missionary, the apostle M. Russell Ballard once had to defend the Church in an English debating society meeting before more than twelve hundred people. After his presentation,

*as the questions began, the missionary's anxiety turned into joy as he was filled with the power of the Holy Ghost.*

*Elder Ballard understood each question before it was finished, and the answer came to him immediately. He felt the Lord's Spirit, like a flood, filling him and guiding his responses. Sometimes he would*

*actually quote scriptures by heart — verses he had read once or twice but certainly had never memorized. He spoke with clarity and yet with warmth and good will, and the audience was moved.*

*. . . When the meeting finally ended, the crowd stood and gave him a standing ovation. [Dean Hughes and Tom Hughes, *We'll Bring the World His Truth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1995), pp. 61–62]*

Jesus told us that he would send

*the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. [John 14:26]*

Parley P. Pratt has said:

*The gift of the Holy Ghost . . . quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections; and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. [Key to the Science of Theology, 9th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1965), p. 101]*

All these teaching moments and blessings are contingent on our faithfulness and on our own preparation and effort. He will not do our work for us. The Holy Ghost usually doesn't bring to our mind things we haven't read. We must pray with humility that we can remember those things we have studied and ask for his guidance in our research.

However, at times we are not meant to have certain knowledge. I know that I could pray until my kneecaps fell off to be a great physicist, but it's just not there. I not only don't have a physics hat, my physics area is bald. But I can write a sonnet—my creative corner is my crown. We may study for hours, prepare diligently, and pray fervently for help on an exam—and still end up with a C. That subject may be to you like my physics nonhat. You'll

have to find your right hat for success—and that hat may be a hard hat rather than a top hat. We can't all be doctors or attorneys—the Lord wants a few poets around, too.

### **The Holy Ghost as a Guardian**

A second function of the Holy Ghost is as a guardian. The Holy Ghost cannot guard us from all the pain in life, just as mothers and fathers cannot protect their children from every cut and scratch of life. But as a testifier of truth and as a protector, the Holy Ghost can guide us in our daily decisions. He can also help us to make right choices and guard us against evil. Promptings to do good come from the Holy Ghost. As I walk around campus, I see the work of the Holy Ghost as I notice people holding doors open for each other and hundreds of small ways of being kind and loving. Service opportunities are overwhelmingly supported. Students and faculty help with Special Olympics, read textbooks for the blind, staff the Crisis Center for Abuse, help with homeless shelters, serve in temples, and do numerous good things every day. The Holy Ghost not only prompts you to perform these services but gives you peace in your hearts as you serve.

When further opportunities to serve come, do not ignore the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Don't push urgings to do good aside with thoughts of your busy schedule or with feelings of inadequacy or preoccupation.

I once had a prompting to take a loaf of hot bread to a ward member. As I sat in my car in front of her house with the bread warm on the seat beside me, I said to myself that this woman was a renowned cook and homemaker in the ward and had so many wonderful gifts that my little offering would not be important to her. I talked myself out of going to her door and drove home. That very night her husband was taken to the hospital and subsequently died. My gift, although small, may have made a difference to her that day, and I have always regretted not following that prompting.

The Holy Ghost also warns us against the dangers and evils in this life. Dorothea Speth, now wife of Spencer J. Condie, records an unforgettable experience that occurred on February 13, 1945, in Dresden, Germany. This was the night that Dresden was firebombed, and Sister Condie's parent's home was hit. As the firestorm was raging through the streets, her parents decided to take the four daughters and head for the Elbe River, which was down a wide street about four blocks from their home. She says:

*For safety, we did not all walk together. My father took one of my older sisters and my twin sister and began to lead the way. My mother, my oldest sister, and I were to follow as closely as possible. As my father started walking, he headed towards a narrow side street instead of choosing the wide street which led directly to our goal, to the river. Mother stopped, not wanting to follow down the narrow, burning street and began calling Dad to try to persuade him to turn around and take the more direct route along our street, which seemed so much safer and quicker. But due to the firestorm, Dad could not hear her plea, and he continued walking along the narrow side street.*

*With each passing second, the distance between us increased, but Mom was still not willing to abandon her plan. Then I heard my older sister plead with her, "Mom, let's follow Dad; he holds the Priesthood!" With this reminder, we started to move quickly, trying to catch up with Dad, who led us safely in a roundabout way down to the river.*

After they reached safety, a neighbor lady came to tell them that she and her husband had taken the wide street to the river.

*Her husband, tall and slender, walked very quickly leading the way, but she, somewhat short and heavy, could not follow so quickly, and lagged behind. Suddenly she saw her husband burnt alive in front of her eyes. Unknown to anyone, liquid phosphorous from one of the bombs had covered the*

*street. It could not be seen but was immediately ignited whenever anyone stepped on it. There was nothing she could do to save her husband, she could only turn around and save herself. [Dorothea Speth Condie, "Let's Follow Dad—He Holds the Priesthood," *Behind the Iron Curtain: Recollections of Latter-day Saints in East Germany, 1945–1989*, coll. and trans. Garold N. Davis and Norma S. Davis (Provo: BYU Studies, 1996), pp. 33–34]*

As a holder of the priesthood, Sister Condie's father had listened to the Holy Ghost and had saved his family from a fiery death.

We need not go into Mormon folklore to find strange and miraculous happenings of protection—almost any missionary journal tells of them. Many of you have served missions and have had both great and small experiences with the promptings of the Holy Ghost. On our own mission, my husband and I were protected and blessed. An example of just a small blessing occurred one evening when we were parking our car in a lot behind an apartment complex where we were to give the missionary discussions to some investigators from Brazil. As my husband pulled into a parking spot, I suddenly said, "Don't park here." I'm sure he thought, "There goes my nutty wife again." There didn't seem to be any reason for my request, but my husband pulled out and moved to a different spot. It was dark when we came out of our discussion sometime later, but we noticed that another car was where we had originally parked. It was totally hemmed in by other vehicles.

As a guide and as a guardian, the Holy Ghost helps us make the right choices, as well as being there to guard and protect us. You will be making many of the life-shaping decisions of your lives here at the university. If you listen humbly to the whisperings of the Spirit, that future can be directed toward the joy and happiness your Father in Heaven wants you to have. In choosing your careers and your

employment opportunities, pray for guidance and then humbly and quietly listen. Do you feel at peace with your choices? Or is there an unsettled feeling? Is something just not quite right? Perhaps the Holy Ghost is trying to get through to you. Decision making is hard. Let the Holy Ghost be your partner in the process.

As you date, listen to the Holy Ghost. Ask him to help you choose each dating partner according to the right standards. Ultimately, the responsibility of choice is yours. But ask for the guidance of the Spirit to help you look for deeper spiritual values. Although you probably wouldn't want your parents choosing your mate, it doesn't hurt to listen to their advice when you have found someone special. Taking a prospective mate home to meet the folks is the acid test. You are marrying an eternal partner. No decision can have greater impact in your life. At that time you'll want the quiet assurance of the Holy Ghost. Ask him to verify your choice. But also listen to his warnings. Don't let wedding jitters rule you, but if you feel that something is not right, pay attention. The Lord *will* bless you in these decisions.

However, some hard experiences are necessary for us in our lives. One young woman whose marriage had not been smooth was deeply troubled because the Spirit had witnessed to her before the wedding that the man she had chosen was the right one. At this point in her life, she seems to have elected the wrong candidate for a husband. But the ballots are not all in yet. She may someday find the reason for this experience. In a similar manner, some promising career decisions that the Holy Ghost seems to verify end up falling to pieces. No matter what your choices are, you're going to be tested. That's the purpose of mortality—which leads to my third point: the Holy Ghost as a comforter.

### **The Holy Ghost as a Comforter**

During trials in our lives, the Holy Ghost serves another function—that of a comforter.

He brings the peace spoken of by our Savior in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." Many stories can attest to the fact that when a loved one dies, there is often a loving peace that comes to the bereaved. But death is not the only sorrow in life. Loss of friendship, discouragement in schoolwork, an unexpected poor grade, the breakup of a romance, reverses in the workplace, divorce, the misdeeds of family or loved ones, loss of health, or disappointments in our goals—just to mention a few—will come.

Here at the university we often have much need of comfort. I have finally reconciled myself to the fact that I'll never have a shape like Barbie. But who wants a waist as small as your neck? We'd all like to be beautiful or handsome, brilliant, talented, popular. Who wouldn't like to throw the perfect football pass, be the star of the show, discover a cure for Alzheimer's disease, or design a billion-dollar skyscraper? Even thinking a little smaller, we'd love to have a date for a dance or do well on the midterm or lose five pounds or get chosen as a soloist in the choir. What happens when we don't? Intellectually, we can say, "I knew I couldn't do that anyway." But inside, you still hurt. You don't have to hurt alone. The Holy Ghost can wrap his spiritual arms around you and tell you that you're okay as you are. Your hips really aren't as big as you think they are—and anyway, so what if they are? The love of our Father in Heaven isn't determined by a tape measure.

Many trials are more than just wishing for something we don't have—and will probably never have. Some are very painful. But they are given for our growth here in mortality. As the Lord told Joseph in Liberty Jail, "All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). Joseph Smith was often comforted in his trials—and he certainly had many more trials than any of us: dragged from his home in the night to be beaten, tarred, and feathered; jailed dozens of times; lied

about and verbally abused; mocked; and finally martyred. And his suffering was small compared to the suffering of our Savior for us.

On a personal level, it is difficult to turn off the suffering, however. When these trials come—and they will come—we have the right to call upon the Holy Ghost to comfort us, just as Joseph Smith did.

That comfort came to my husband the night our furniture business, which was our livelihood, burned to the ground. For me, it took place again during my years of doctoral studies. Through a food or water contamination, both my husband and our next-door neighbor contracted infectious hepatitis. Our neighbor was pregnant, so she was hospitalized. As Relief Society president, I was responsible to find someone to help care for her young children left at home. But no one wanted children who had been exposed to hepatitis. I brought them to my home to be with my own four children during the day while the neighbor's husband was at work. All went reasonably well until I had to go to a class in Salt Lake City. I checked with my good friend who ran the day-care center that my own two youngest attended to see if it could accommodate the extra children. My friend graciously agreed. When I got home and picked up the children, I happened to notice one of the neighbor children's eyes—the whites had turned yellow. As the spread of the illness was confirmed, I called the day-care center with the bad news. My friend then called the parents of the other children who had been at the center so they could get a shot of gamma as a preventative. Panic ensued. Within a day or so, the day-care center (with my friend's much-needed income) was closed down by the board of health. When I heard this news, I was devastated. The pressure of caring for a very sick husband, my own—plus extra—children, going to school, and fulfilling my Relief Society responsibilities in addition to the terrible guilt I felt about the day-care incident drove me

sobbing to my knees. Suddenly, an overwhelming feeling of love and peace flowed over me, beginning at the top of my head and covering me like a cloak. "Everything will be all right," the Spirit whispered. And, of course, everything did work out—not without more difficult moments, but I never again despaired.

A similar feeling to the one I experienced is described by Elfriede Pawlowski in the book *Behind the Iron Curtain*. She had been struggling with "an evil power" that seemed to try to prevent her from accepting the gospel. Then one day in branch meeting, this dark power tried to overcome her again. She later wrote:

*I prayed fervently that the Lord would free me from this power so I could understand the gospel. . . . Then something happened that I will never forget. A new skin almost seemed to be drawn over me. It began with the top of my head and went down over my shoulders and over my entire body right down to the tips of my toes. At first, I was somewhat frightened, but a feeling of freedom came over me, a lightness, and a deep feeling of gratitude. [Elfriede Pawlowski, "If God Is for Us, Who Can Be Against Us?" *Behind the Iron Curtain*, p. 72]*

Occasionally, we want things that we shouldn't have. We pray and then agonize when what seems to us to be righteous desires aren't realized. Our parents are not healed from a sickness. They die, and we don't want them to die. We fail an examination that is vital to our future. Our best friend is permanently crippled in an accident. Our child is born with a handicap or is led away by bad companions. Despite our righteous lives and our prayers, the difficult things in life come. In essence, the Lord has said "no" or "not at this time" to our prayers.

When we are told "no" by the Lord, the Holy Ghost can soften that "no." Elder Boyd K. Packer tells of an incident where he was "invited to speak to a group at Harvard University." He says:

*Both faculty members and students were to be present. I, of course, hoped that the gospel message would be accepted and that the meeting would end in a harmony of views. As I prayed that this might result, there came to me the strong impression that this petition would not be granted. I determined that, however preposterous talk about angels and golden plates and restoration might be to my audience, I would teach the truth with quiet confidence, for I have a testimony of the truth. If some must come from the meeting unsettled and disturbed, it would not be me. Let them be disturbed, if they would.*

*It was as the Spirit foretold. Some in the group shook their heads in amazement, even cynical amusement, that anyone could believe such things. But I was at peace. I had taught the truth, and they could accept it or reject it, as they pleased.* [Boyd K. Packer, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), p. 88; emphasis in original]

Sometimes the answer is not “no” but “not at this time.” We must have patience. The Holy Ghost is not a trained dog to jump through hoops at our demand. The Holy Ghost works in his own way in his own time frame. Some knowledge comes quickly, some is revealed little by little, and some will need to be revealed later—in God’s time. Some blessings and healings will come later or even in the next life. Sometimes suffering must come before the comfort. If we are humble and submit ourselves to God’s will, we will be comforted and will understand.

### **Being Worthy to Receive the Spirit**

For the Holy Ghost to bless our lives, we must be worthy for its influence to be fully realized. I would like to reiterate what has been so masterfully given in many conference talks and *Ensign* articles—that the gift of the Holy Ghost, that precious gift we receive through baptism and the laying on of hands in confirmation, is only fully in force when we are

worthy in mind and body to receive it. It cannot “always be with us” if our thoughts and acts are unclean.

To be guided properly by the Holy Ghost, we must follow some basic principles. Elder Carlos E. Asay suggests that

*we must keep our bodies [and] minds clean. . . . We must [make] a place in our hearts for the Holy Spirit. . . . We must avoid all iniquity, all manner of wickedness. . . . We must pray, feast upon the words of Christ, and walk uprightly before God.* [“The Companionship of the Holy Ghost,” *Ensign*, April 1988, pp. 15–16]

We ourselves must be a worthy temple to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. If we are *not* keeping the covenant we made at baptism and make each week as we partake of the sacrament to “always remember him, and keep his commandments,” we cannot expect him to keep his part of the covenant to “always have his Spirit to be with” us (Moroni 4:3). But if we are sincerely trying to keep the covenants, each of us is entitled to help from the Holy Ghost.

He can help you with your studies—he can help in every aspect of your lives. When your families begin, you young men can receive promptings from the Holy Ghost in guiding your family in righteousness, as did Sister Condie’s father. Many of you young women will become mothers. You are entitled to the promptings of the Holy Ghost in guiding your children and blessing your home.

As a mother, I have been blessed many times. For example, one evening when our oldest son was about twelve years old, he had a slightly upset stomach and a bit of a fever. I put him to bed early, but in the middle of the night I woke suddenly and sat up in bed. “Matt has appendicitis,” I told my startled husband. The next morning I took our son in for an examination. By early afternoon Matt was in surgery. The appendix was almost ready to rupture.



My husband has also had promptings for the safety and blessing of our family. Just before our eldest daughter, Jolynne, left for her mission to Peru, my husband was prompted to give her a priesthood blessing, which miraculously healed a severe eye condition. Recently she told me that her eye doctor can't understand why her eyes have gotten better through the years rather than worse.

### Listening for the Spirit

What does it mean, "listening for the Spirit"? What does the voice of the Holy Ghost sound like? It can come in several different ways. It can come as a voice in the mind or even as an audible voice. It can come as a voice we can feel that "will tell [us] in [our] mind and in [our] heart" (D&C 8:2). It can create a warm feeling or the burning in the bosom or in the heart (see D&C 9:8) or even a tingling or lightness. Or it can "speak peace to [the] mind" (D&C 6:23). (See Jay E. Jensen, "Have I Received an Answer from the Spirit?" *Ensign*, April 1989, pp. 20–25.) Different people respond to the Spirit in different ways. And you must learn to recognize it for yourself.

When the audible voice came to the brothers Lehi and Nephi, it is described in the book of Helaman as

*not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul.* [Helaman 5:30]

Marvin J. Ashton once noted, "Small voices are heard only by those who are willing to listen" ("There Are Many Gifts," *Ensign*, November 1987, p. 21).

During the horrifying experience of being attacked by a bear, Michael Dunn felt an impression come to his mind: "play dead" ("Of Bears, Scares, and Prayers," *This People* 17, no. 3 [fall 1996]: 34). He heeded that voice and

was saved from death. From my own experience, I have "heard" in my mind the words "not at this time" and "you already know" in answer to prayer. But "feeling" the words is almost closer to the actual experience. Nephi notes that Laman and Lemuel "could not feel [the Lord's] words" (1 Nephi 17:45). Although Oliver Cowdery was told that his "bosom [would] burn within [him]," he was also told that he would "feel that it is right" (D&C 9:8). The Lord also told him, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost" (D&C 8:2). President Ezra Taft Benson noted:

*We hear the words of the Lord most often by a feeling. If we are humble and sensitive, the Lord will prompt us through our feelings. That is why spiritual promptings move us on occasion to great joy, sometimes to tears.* ["Seek the Spirit of the Lord," *Ensign*, April 1988, p. 4]

How do we know that the Holy Ghost is helping us? One of the things we teach in missionary discussions is to recognize what the Holy Ghost feels like. As missionaries speak of the Holy Ghost, they turn to Galatians 5:22–23 and read, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." The missionaries ask the investigator, "Do you feel these things when you listen to our message?" If the Spirit has been there, all in the room usually feel the peace, joy, and love it brings.

Do we feel peace and joy or other gifts of the Spirit as noted in Galatians when we receive impressions, whisperings, or thoughts that come into our minds? What are the results of our behavior when we act on those whisperings? In other words, what are the fruits of those promptings? Are we bringing joy to others? Are we better people because we have followed the promptings? Are we happier? Do we feel closer to our Father and to Jesus Christ? If we can answer yes, then we know that our promptings are from the right spirit.

As we continue to follow those promptings throughout our lives, we learn to truly know what the promptings of the Holy Ghost feel like for us.

### **False Voices**

However, we need to guard against false voices. Since the Holy Ghost can be felt in different ways by different people, how can we know for sure it is the Holy Ghost speaking? Elder Packer notes:

*Not all inspiration comes from God (see D&C 46:7). The evil one has the power to tap into those channels of revelation and send conflicting signals which can mislead and confuse us. There are promptings from evil sources which are so carefully counterfeited as to deceive even the very elect (see Matthew 24:24). . . .*

*An unusual spiritual experience should not be regarded as a personal call to direct others. . . .*

*Few things disturb the channels of revelation quite so effectively as those who are misled and think themselves to be chosen to instruct others when they are not chosen. [Packer, *Let Not Your Heart*, pp. 212–13]*

Joseph Smith said that the Saints

*can tell the Spirit of the Lord from all other spirits; it will whisper peace and joy to their souls; it will take malice, hatred, strife and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness and build up the kingdom of God. [Manuscript History of Brigham Young: 1846–1847, ed. Elden J. Watson (Salt Lake City: E. J. Watson, 1971), p. 529]*

Our emotions can be tuned to many different responses. I can only use my own experiences as a guide, but for me, the Holy Ghost is a deep, peaceful feeling, a feeling of joy and rightness.

At times I have thought a feeling of excitement was the Spirit speaking, but I discovered

that I was wrong. The voice of the Spirit isn't an excitement buzz. I have found that there is positive excitement and negative excitement. When a positive exciting thing comes—like the birth of a grandchild—with it also comes a deep joy and a spirit of peace. That accompanying joy and peace is *not* there in the negative excitement. Mob reactions create an electricity that is exciting. Defying the law by robbing, stealing, doing drugs, vandalizing, and even killing are reported to create an exciting high. Excitement in and of itself is not the Holy Ghost creating a feeling in our hearts.

In a similar way, those who think they are prompted to find the mote in a neighbor's eye are also listening to the wrong spirit. The Holy Ghost will not prompt us to correct our bishop or our General Authorities. We must *follow* those in authority over us—not fight with their decisions, even if we disagree with the decisions. The Holy Ghost will not prompt us to change the Church. It will not prompt us to tell the person who smells of tobacco to leave campus. The Holy Ghost's promptings are not of censoring. Judgment and correction are given to the proper authorities.

The voice of the Holy Ghost is also not a voice of anger, even righteous anger—because the voice we are hearing may really be self-righteous anger. The voice of pride or the voice of selfishness are not voices of the Spirit. Yet all of these voices can prompt us. We must carefully consider their fruits. If those fruits do harm, then they are false voices that we must turn off and tune out.

### **Conclusion**

May I conclude by giving personal witness. I know that God our Father is concerned about each one of us. He is the great designer of the plan of salvation and has given us a savior in Jesus Christ and a teacher, guardian, and comforter in the Holy Ghost. Through the Holy Ghost—through the baptism of the spirit—we are cleansed of our sins. He purifies and

sanctifies us as we go through the process of returning to our Father in Heaven. He also is our brother, and he loves us. This wonderful

personage, the Holy Ghost, is our infallible guide. I leave this witness with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.