

The Unspeakable Gift of the Holy Ghost

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Sister Jensen and I are pleased to be with you. I sincerely thank the choir for not only how they sang, but also for what they sang. Hymns do invite the Spirit of the Lord. They create a feeling of reverence and teach us the doctrines of the kingdom. This is a very humbling assignment, and I have prayed, and continue to pray, for the Holy Ghost to be our true teacher.

My message is titled “The Unspeakable Gift of the Holy Ghost,” a phrase from the Doctrine and Covenants: “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now” (D&C 121:26). You may recognize a few thoughts from a general conference talk I gave in October 2010. With the time given me for this message today, I will expand them further.

The Importance of the Holy Ghost

The importance of the Holy Ghost and that He is an unspeakable gift may be emphasized with two illustrations, each a message in its own right. The first illustration is from the Book of Mormon and the second from an event in Church history.

When Jesus Christ visited the people in the Book of Mormon, He taught them, blessed their children, instituted the sacrament, and

then departed. The people returned to their homes and labored through the night to gather others to be at the place where He said He would appear to them the next day.

Because of the large numbers, the twelve disciples separated the people into twelve groups to teach them what the Savior had taught them the previous day, and then they prayed. Of all the things for which they could pray, “they did pray for that which they most desired; and they desired that the Holy Ghost should be given unto them” (3 Nephi 19:9), giving an emphasis to the Holy Ghost and His importance that is unique in all scripture.

Following their prayer and in answer to their pleadings, Nephi baptized the disciples, after which “the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (3 Nephi 19:13). They received the convincing witness or testimony of Him.

The Savior then appeared to them:

And it came to pass that Jesus . . . went a little way off from them and bowed himself to the earth, and he said:

Jay E. Jensen was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this CES devotional address was given on 8 January 2012.

Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen. . . .

Father, I pray thee that thou wilt give the Holy Ghost unto all them that shall believe in their words. [3 Nephi 19:19–21]

I know of no scriptural passage that better expresses how important our Savior feels the Holy Ghost is.

The second illustration comes from the teachings of President Brigham Young. The Saints were in Winter Quarters and preparing for the migration to the West in the spring. Joseph Smith had been dead for over two and one half years. President Young had a vision, a dream, in which he visited with the Prophet Joseph Smith. As you listen, please note the number of times he emphasized the importance of the Spirit of the Lord:

“Brother Joseph, the brethren . . . have a great anxiety to understand the . . . sealing principles; and if you have a word of counsel for me I should be glad to receive it.”

Joseph stepped toward me, and looking very earnestly, yet pleasantly said, “Tell the people to be humble and faithful, and be sure to keep the spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach you what to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction, so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it. They 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. Tell the brethren if they will follow the spirit of the Lord they will go right. Be sure to tell the people to keep the Spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world. Our Father in Heaven organized the human family. . . .”

Joseph then showed me the pattern, how they were in the beginning. This I cannot describe, but I saw it, and saw where the Priesthood had been taken from the earth and how it must be joined together, so that there would be a perfect chain from Father Adam to his latest posterity. Joseph again said, “Tell the people to be sure to keep the Spirit of the Lord and follow it, and it will lead them just right.”¹

Not only does this account emphasize the importance of the Holy Ghost and seeking His influence, it also brought to my mind these principles and truths:

- The Spirit of the Lord seeks to bring order—specifically, to organize an eternal family through the ordinance of a temple sealing.
- The adversary seeks to disorganize and to destroy (see D&C 10:6–7, 22–27), especially families, as evidenced today by abortion, divorce, and same-gender marriage. I asked myself if the growing practice in your age group of postponing marriage contributes to disorganizing families.
- Revelation and knowledge through the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost came in answer to a question, as revelation often does.

From these two illustrations I conclude that the Holy Ghost is vital and that we should earnestly seek His companionship, guidance, and gifts—truly an unspeakable gift.

I will now focus on three themes: (1) the missions of the Holy Ghost, (2) conditions to receive the Holy Ghost, and (3) how to recognize direction from the Holy Ghost.

The Missions of the Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost is sometimes called the Spirit, appropriately called the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Comforter.

The Holy Ghost has certain missions or responsibilities. I will mention four.

Mission 1—He testifies of or reveals the Father and the Son. The Holy Ghost truly reveals or testifies of the Father and the Son. I experienced this as a young child, even though I could not have articulated it then.

I grew up believing in God in a wonderful Latter-day Saint home. I was baptized and received the Holy Ghost at age eight. I never questioned the existence of the Father and the Son; rather, in our family there was a full and complete acceptance, a worship and a faith in Them evidenced by regular family prayer, pausing to bless the food at each meal, family night, reading from the scriptures (especially the Book of Mormon), Church attendance, obedience to the commandments, and all the other things we do as Latter-day Saints. I personally could not turn to the scriptures to teach the doctrine that the principal role of the Holy Ghost is to reveal God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, but as a matter of faith, I certainly understood the principle.

During my mission I began a daily study of the scriptures. My scriptural knowledge, my testimony, and my faith in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, were strengthened by divine doctrine, by spiritual experiences, and by personal revelation. I know of myself that these words from the Savior are true: “And the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and the Father giveth the Holy Ghost unto the children of men, because of me” (3 Nephi 28:11; see also the chapter summary to 3 Nephi 27 and 3 Nephi 27:13–20).

Mission 2—He testifies of all truth. The Holy Ghost reveals the truth of all things. Sincere seekers who read the Book of Mormon and pray and ponder with real intent to know of its truthfulness are promised they will know it is true, “and by the power of the Holy Ghost [they] may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5).

Alma invited the poor people cast out by the Zoramites to conduct experiments with words. Specifically, he emphasized to them

that true words planted in receptive hearts would “begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good” (Alma 32:28), resulting in three ways they would know the truth:

1. “It beginneth to enlarge my soul,” evidenced in sincere seekers of truth by tears, a sigh, a nod of the head, or some other body gesture that the Holy Ghost had planted true words in their hearts.
2. “It beginneth to enlighten my understanding,” evidenced by comments such as “that makes sense” or “I have always believed that” or a question, “Are you saying then that . . . ?”
3. “It beginneth to be delicious to me,” evidenced, for example, by investigators with comments like “please tell me more” or “where did you say your church is located?” or “won’t you stay a little longer and teach us more?”—meaning they are hungry and want more.

The testimony of Brigham Young illustrates these truths:

If all the talent, tact, wisdom, and refinement of the world had been combined in one individual, and that person had been sent to me with the Book of Mormon, and had declared in the most exalted of earthly eloquence, the truth of it, undertaking to prove it by his learning and worldly wisdom, it would have been to me like the smoke which arises only to vanish. But when I saw a man without eloquence, or talents for public speaking, who could only just say, “I know by the power of the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith is a prophet of the Lord.” The Holy Ghost proceeding from that individual illuminates my understanding, and light, glory, and immortality is before me; I am encircled by it, filled with it, and know for myself that the testimony of the man is true.²

Mission 3—He sanctifies. The word *sanctify* comes from the Latin and has two roots: *sanct*, meaning “holy,” and *facere*, meaning “to do or to make”—literally meaning “to make holy.” In our religious use of the word, *sanctify* simply means to purify or make free from sin, a central message of the restored gospel.

The gospel is “God’s plan of salvation, made possible through the atonement of Jesus Christ [and] includes the eternal truths or laws, covenants, and ordinances needed for mankind to enter back into the presence of God.”³

The sanctifying role of the Holy Ghost is relevant in the context of the Savior’s definition of His gospel in 3 Nephi 27:13–20, concluding with this significant verse: “Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20). The Holy Ghost is the sanctifier, and because of Him and through the infinite Atonement we may stand spotless, clean, and pure.

In different callings where I held priesthood keys as a judge in Israel, particularly as a bishop, I witnessed the cleansing, sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost. One experience, the elements of which represent others, truly stands out.

On a Sunday morning a young man in his early twenties came to see me, his bishop. During the week he and his girlfriend had allowed their emotions and passions to exceed the bounds the Lord had established.

I listened prayerfully. We read scriptures together, along with words of the latter-day prophets. I gave him a few reading assignments, placed appropriate restrictions on his Church privileges, set up future appointments, and then knelt with him in prayer.

With each subsequent interview he reported on his reading, especially from the Book of Mormon, and the anguish in his countenance and demeanor was replaced by faith in God

and in His Son, by hope and optimism, by firm resolve, and by a change in his heart. Gradually he grew spiritually. Following the appropriate passage of time, and as directed by the Spirit, I lifted the restrictions placed on him and authorized him to partake of the sacrament. As I sat on the stand in sacrament meeting, my eyes were drawn to him when first the bread and then the water reached his row. I witnessed sanctifying light, peace, and forgiveness.

The Savior’s words to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery following their partaking of the sacrament came into my mind: “Behold, your sins are forgiven you; you are clean before me; therefore, lift up your heads and rejoice” (D&C 110:5). Like Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, this young man received a remission of his sins by fire and the Holy Ghost (see 2 Nephi 31:17; D&C 19:31).

Not only did this young man experience the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost, so also can you and I experience the same freedom from sin Sabbath after Sabbath after Sabbath.

Mission 4—the teacher. With all that can be said about learning and teaching, I summarize it simply by saying that the Holy Ghost is the true teacher. In the ten verses in Doctrine and Covenants 50:13–22, the odd-numbered verses are questions, and the even-numbered verses are the Lord’s answers. As I read verses 13 and 14, please note two roles and what each does:

Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?

To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.

The role of the Holy Ghost is to teach. He is the true teacher! My role is not to cover material or get through the lesson; rather, as a holder of the priesthood, I am to preach, teach, expound, exhort, warn, and invite by the Spirit (see D&C 20:59).

My role is to be an instrument in creating an atmosphere for the Spirit to do what He does

in the divine process described in verse 22 of section 50: “Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.”

Nephi concluded his writings and expressed his inadequacies as well as his correct understanding of the role of the Holy Ghost:

And now I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people; neither am I mighty in writing, like unto speaking; for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men. [2 Nephi 33:1]

Note the preposition *unto* and not *into*. Because of our agency, He carries it *unto* our hearts. If we invite Him, He will carry it *into* our hearts, as is taught in the book of Revelation: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

I witness to you that He has other important responsibilities or missions. He is the Comforter. He restrains or constrains, He leads, He warns, and He rebukes. I invite you to study them on your own. I will now speak about conditions to receive the Holy Ghost.

Conditions to Receive the Holy Ghost

Conditions or requirements to receive the Holy Ghost are simple. I will mention only three: (1) desire, which for me includes ask, seek, and knock; (2) worthiness; and (3) alertness—both spiritual and physical.

The words *desire*, *ask*, *seek*, and *knock* are often found in scripture together, and they are fundamental to receiving the Holy Ghost and His unspeakable gifts. Alma taught that God grants “unto men according to their desire” (Alma 29:4).

I draw your attention to these words in Doctrine and Covenants 11, a revelation of the Lord to Hyrum Smith. The word *desire*

and its cognates appear eight times. Perhaps one of the most well-known and oft-cited is in verse 21. It brings together *seek*, *desire*, the *word*, and the *Spirit*—resulting in the power of God: “Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you *desire*, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men” (emphasis added).

Next, *worthiness*. To have the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, we must keep the commandments. I believe you know what evils offend the Spirit, and I will not mention them. A sentence from my patriarchal blessing has guided me: “Jay, keep your body free from the temptations and evils that present themselves. Live clean and fine for our Heavenly Father’s Spirit dwells in clean tabernacles. [He] does not dwell in unclean tabernacles.” I found that this is supported in the Book of Mormon: “The Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples” (Helaman 4:24).

Alertness—physical and spiritual. We live in a very busy world when many things clamor for our time and attention. It is by design that we encourage punctuality to meetings, especially sacrament meeting, to listen to the prelude music, prepare to have the Spirit, and receive revelation. We fast, we pray, we ponder, we attend the temple, and we learn to be good listeners and observers.

President Joseph F. Smith illustrated being physically and spiritually alert when he received the revelation we call the vision of the redemption of the dead, found in Doctrine and Covenants 138:

On the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures;

And reflecting upon the great atoning sacrifice that was made by the Son of God. [D&C 138:1–2]

I visualize President Smith seated in a chair, perhaps a wooden chair, at a table with the scriptures in front of him along with pen and paper. He was not lying on a couch or slouched in a chair.

President David O. McKay emphasized the importance of being spiritually and physically alert with the story of Bishop John Wells, a former member of the Presiding Bishopric, whose son was killed in a railroad accident. A few weeks after the funeral, the mother was resting at home, mourning her son's death, spiritually and physically alert. The son appeared to her and told her that when he realized he was in the spirit world, he first tried to reach his father but could not, and he said to her that his dad was too busy at the office.⁴

In many of our General Authority training meetings, presidents of the Church and apostles have reminded us to not be so busy doing the Lord's work that spiritual impressions cannot get through to us.

How to Recognize Direction from the Holy Ghost

I find it difficult to teach how to recognize direction, guidance, and spiritual promptings. Such experiences are personal and often tailored to the individual and to the conditions I just described. There are a few patterns, however, that I have experienced, and I have learned from others.

One is *peace to your mind*. The Lord taught a struggling Oliver Cowdery a powerful lesson when He reminded him, "Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter?" (D&C 6:23). I believe receiving peace to the mind is one of the most common ways to recognize direction from the Holy Ghost. Synonyms of *peace* are *serenity, tranquility, harmony, and stillness*, while its opposites are *confusion, anxiety, distraction, stirred up, and disharmony*. We often use the words "I don't feel good about this" or "I don't feel comfort-

able." Such feelings find their home in the next principle: *mind and heart*.

Yea, behold, 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.

Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation.
[D&C 8:2–3]

I have learned from the First Presidency and from the Quorum of the Twelve, as well as through my own experiences, that revelations to the mind are often specific words, ideas, even sentences, while revelations to the heart are general feelings associated with peace. Illustrations from the life of Enos are instructive: Verses 3 and 9 in his story describe a general feeling with these phrases: "joy . . . sunk deep into my heart" and "I began to feel." In verses 5 and 10 we find complete sentences, each introduced with "there came a voice unto me, saying" and "the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying."

Receiving feelings to the heart and thoughts in the mind are taught succinctly in these words to Hyrum Smith:

I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy;

And then shall ye know, or by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me. [D&C 11:13–14]

Another one is to *study it out in your minds*. An oft-quoted scripture about recognizing revelation and promptings from the Holy Ghost is Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9:

You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought. [D&C 9:8–9]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks wisely taught that a person may have

*a strong desire to be led by the Spirit of the Lord but . . . unwisely extends that desire to the point of wanting to be led in **all** things. A desire to be led by the Lord is a strength, but it needs to be accompanied by an understanding that our Heavenly Father leaves many decisions for our personal choices. . . .*

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. 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.⁵

President Boyd K. Packer has wisely taught:

*You cannot force spiritual things. Such words as **compel, coerce, constrain, pressure, demand** do not describe our privileges with the Spirit. You can no more force the Spirit to respond than you can force a bean to sprout, or an egg to hatch before its time. You can create a climate to foster growth, nourish, and protect; but you cannot force or compel: you must await the growth.⁶*

Another is “your bosom shall burn within you,” the phrase from Doctrine and Covenants 9:8. Concerning this burning of the bosom, as a returned mission president I was called to serve on a committee with other returned presidents to find ways to improve proselyting. A suggestion was given to help missionaries experience and recognize the burning of the bosom as taught in Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9. The committee chairman, a member of

the First Quorum of the Seventy and a former mission president, shared an experience he had had with a member of the Quorum of the Twelve who had toured his mission. During the tour this wonderful mission president taught the importance of these three verses.

Following the meeting and while driving to the next one, the member of the Twelve pointed out that in his years of experience he had found members who felt a failure in seeking revelation through a burning of the bosom, even after much fasting and prayer. They had not understood that the burning of the bosom is not related to caloric heat but rather to an intensity of feeling—the peace to the mind and feelings to the heart mentioned earlier.

Many may relate to the converts in the Book of Mormon who “were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not” (3 Nephi 9:20).

In a revelation to Hyrum Smith, we find four ways to recognize how the Spirit leads us: “Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth [1] to do good—yea, [2] to do justly, [3] to walk humbly, [and 4] to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit” (D&C 11:12).

President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

How do we know the things of the Spirit? How do we know that it is from God? By the fruits of it. If it leads to growth and development, if it leads to faith and testimony, if it leads to a better way of doing things, if it leads to godliness, then it is of God. If it tears us down, if it brings us into darkness, if it confuses us and worries us, if it leads to faithlessness, then it is of the devil.⁷

Another one: *A subject may occupy the mind or weigh continually upon you.* This truth from Joseph Smith’s epistle on baptism for the dead is another way that the Spirit speaks: “That subject seems to occupy my mind, and press itself upon my feelings the strongest” (D&C 128:1). Having impressions that persist until we act are real and sacred.

While presiding over the Colombia Cali Mission, I was studying scripture late one evening, after 10:00 p.m. A thought came into my mind to telephone an elder. I had recently interviewed him and knew he had had a few challenges, and I set the thought aside. The impression came again, and using the same reasoning, again I set it aside. It came a third time, and finally I recognized the impression for what it was, and I telephoned him. His companion was in bed and answered. I asked to speak to the elder I was impressed to call. He said he was not in his bed.

“Set the phone down and find him,” I said.

He was found across the patio, talking to a young woman who had moved in that day. The elders moved to a new apartment the next day.

To conclude, I cite a significant experience and wise counsel from President Wilford Woodruff. In his travels he reported that Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other early Church leaders appeared to him. On one occasion Brigham Young (who had died three years earlier) appeared to him:

When we arrived at our destination I asked President Young if he would preach to us. He said, “No, I have finished my testimony in the flesh. I shall not talk to this people any more.” “But,” said he, “I have come to see you; I have come to watch over you, and to see what the people are doing.” Then, said he, “I want you to teach the people—and I want you to follow this counsel yourself—that they must labor and so live as to obtain the Holy Spirit, for without this you cannot build up the kingdom; without the spirit of God you are in danger of walking in the dark, and in danger of failing to accomplish your calling as apostles and as elders in the church and kingdom of God.”⁸

I humbly pray that you will desire more earnestly to be worthy of the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that you may grow in

the ability to recognize His promptings, that you may “be still and know” (D&C 101:16) the Father and the Son through the Holy Ghost, and that you will express gratitude for Him and His guidance, for to express gratitude invites more of the Spirit.

By the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, I know that Joseph Smith is the prophet of the Restoration and that the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. I know the Father and the Son live. They are real. The Holy Ghost testifies of all truth. He sanctifies, and He teaches. We are led today by living prophets, seers, and revelators, true apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. These fifteen men are guided by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 23 February 1847, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young: 1846–1847*, comp. Elden J. Watson (Salt Lake City: Elden Jay Watson, 1971), 529–30.
2. Brigham Young, “A Discourse by Brigham Young, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, June 13th, 1852,” *Deseret News*, 9 February 1854, 4.
3. Guide to the Scriptures, s.v. “gospel,” scriptures.lds.org.
4. See David O. McKay, *GI*, 525–26.
5. Dallin H. Oaks, “Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall,” *Ensign*, October 1994, 13–14; emphasis in original.
6. Boyd K. Packer, “The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983, 53.
7. Gordon B. Hinckley, “First Presidency Message: Inspirational Thoughts,” *Ensign*, July 1998, 5.
8. Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, sel. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), 290; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 46.