

“Lead Me, Guide Me, Walk Beside Me”: Life Lessons with the Holy Ghost

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When I was asked to give this devotional address and choose my own topic, I felt completely overwhelmed. I ran to the office of my dear friend Peggy Anderson, who gave a devotional address last fall, and she assured me the topic would come. That very evening, after I said my prayers, the music and words to the familiar children’s hymn “I Am a Child of God” came to my mind. I have always treasured this song for its elegant and inspired simplicity.

I had always considered the chorus words “lead me, guide me, walk beside me, help me find the way” (“I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 301) to be a child’s pleading for help from parents and teachers, but that evening I realized these words could also be the feelings of our prayerful hearts as we ask the Lord to lead, guide, and walk beside us through the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The connection between the words of the chorus and Doctrine and Covenants 112:10 is apparent: “Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers.” I truly felt humbled by this insight and assured that I should talk today on the lessons I have learned about following the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

What a wonderful thought that we can be guided, taught, and protected by Deity in our mortal journeys on earth. Many people think it sounds like science fiction that God and His Son love us and watch over us and communicate teachings and warnings directly to us through the promptings of the Holy Ghost. It seems so amazing that it is almost beyond imagination, but I testify that it is a divine truth. I want to share some of the lessons I have learned about receiving, recognizing, and responding to promptings from the Holy Ghost and suggest some ways in which we can all better develop these spiritual skills.

Patrick’s Lesson with Elder Kimball

I grew up in a home with amazing, faithful, and inspired parents. My father worked as the executive vice president of Upland Industries, the real estate arm of the Union Pacific Railroad. How appropriate it is that I was the caboose baby—the fifth of five children, arriving some ten years after the sibling closest to

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me in age. For those of you who don't know, a caboose is traditionally the last car on a train, and, notably, it is always the cutest part of the train.

My brothers married before I was old enough to remember their weddings, and my oldest sister married when I was only six years old. I did not like the idea of my sister getting married, so I gave my new brother-in-law quite a hard time. However, I learned to accept him, love him, and appreciate his role in my life. In fact, he taught me one of the first lessons I can remember about being led and guided by the Holy Ghost.

My late brother-in-law, Patrick Clarke, served a mission in Chile in the mid-1960s. One of his most memorable mission experiences happened during a two-week period when he and his companion traveled with the mission president and his wife and Elder Spencer W. Kimball and his wife, Camilla, on a 3,000-mile tour of Chile, holding branch and district conferences as they traveled.

They rode in a '61 Chevrolet station wagon with three rows of seats along the Pan-American Highway, which was then a narrow cement road with no shoulder or painted lines to identify lanes. Many rivers and deep canyons crisscrossed the path of the highway, necessitating bridges to span them. Most of these bridges were very narrow.

Late one afternoon, after holding a conference in the most southern branch of the Church in Chile, they headed north along the Pan-American Highway. Patrick was driving. His companion was in the front passenger seat. The mission president and his wife were seated in the back row, and Elder and Sister Kimball were in the middle row.

As they drove along they approached a narrow bridge that crossed a deep canyon with a river gushing below. Elder Kimball suggested they pull over and stop.

Patrick questioned him, saying, "Do you want to stop here where there is no shoulder,

or do you want to drive a ways and find a better place to stop?"

Elder Kimball repeated, "Stop here."

Without further hesitation, Patrick pulled the car over and stopped. Then he realized a semitruck was approaching the opposite end of the bridge in front of them. As the truck moved onto the bridge, the front wheel came off, causing the truck to roll over. Patrick and his companion jumped out of their car and assisted the driver out of the wrecked semitruck.

After the truck was removed from the middle of the bridge and things settled down, they continued across the bridge and up the road. As they reflected on what had happened, it became obvious that if Elder Kimball had not told them to pull over, they would have arrived on the bridge at the same time the semitruck lost its wheel and rolled. They would have had nowhere to turn and would very likely have been killed in a collision.

Patrick asked Elder Kimball how he knew they were in harm's way. Elder Kimball explained that the Holy Ghost had whispered to him, "Pull over. Pull over." The young elders were impressed with his inspiration but also wondered why they had not been warned; after all, they were missionaries living close to the Lord. Elder Kimball explained to them that the Holy Ghost had not overlooked them but that they were not listening. They had not trained themselves to hear the still, small voice. Elder Kimball encouraged them to hone their senses to the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

My Experience in Tonga in 2010

Now come with me to another part of the world, forty-four year later, when I was in Tonga with another nursing faculty member, Shelly Reed, and eight nursing students. We were there to learn about Tongan culture so that we could learn how to provide nursing care in culturally mindful ways. On these

beautiful islands I learned the importance of acting on promptings when I receive them.

While we were in Tonga, one of the few small interisland planes crashed, and the other interisland planes were grounded, pending an investigation. This meant that any travel between the islands had to be by ferry. We had already traveled by ferry once, from Vava'u to Tongatapu, and had planned to make one more interisland trip to 'Eua.

As the day for this trip grew closer, it became apparent that the planes would still be grounded and we would need to go by ferry—this time on a much smaller ferry than we had used for our first interisland trip. I began to feel uneasy about the trip; in fact, it became pretty clear to me that I should not go. I did not know why, and the prompting seemed to be for me personally—not for the whole group. In addition, I felt a responsibility to be with the group, and staying back would mean I'd be alone in Nuku'alofa for my birthday. That did not sound like fun to me. Nevertheless, the promptings persisted. Finally, and foolishly, I decided I would go to 'Eua and be *really careful*.

We completed the two-hour ferry ride to 'Eua without incident or seasickness, which was a blessing. We visited the small health clinic on the island and toured the island a bit that evening. Consider for a moment how isolated Tonga is—and the island of 'Eua is isolated in Tonga. It truly feels like it is a million miles from anywhere, and there are no lights along the roads. The night darkness is deeper there than I have experienced anywhere else. We only stayed one night, but I was ready to return to Nuku'alofa. As you can imagine, I was nervous, feeling I was there against heavenly advice.

The ferry left very early in the morning, well before sunrise, and we had to travel to the dock in two groups because there was only one vehicle available to transport us that morning. I offered to go with the first group of students. When we arrived at the dock, the

only light around came from inside the ferry. Looking into the ferry, I could see quite a few people had already boarded, and I felt concerned about securing enough seats so that no one in our group would have to stand for the long ride back to Nuku'alofa. I thanked the driver, jumped out of the vehicle, and scurried across the dock ahead of the students, hoping to secure seats for our group.

Unbeknownst to me, there was no plank to provide a walkway between the dock and the ferry, and my eyes were fixed on the seats inside. As I stepped where I thought a plank would surely be, I felt the dreadful sensation of falling. My arms instinctively reached out, trying to grasp the side of the ferry so I would not fall to the ocean below. I did not succeed in preventing my fall, but I did manage to badly scrape my arms and legs on the side of the ferry.

As I hit the water, I *knew* this was why I had been warned not to go to 'Eua. I continued my descent a long way down in the water. Even in the watery deep I immediately began to pray and apologize for my disobedience while also pleading for help. I struggled mightily in the disorienting watery darkness but somehow managed to find my way to the narrow passage between the side of the ferry and the wall of the dock. Eventually I was able to reach the surface of the water. Illuminated by the light from the ferry, as I looked up I could see the horrified expressions on my students' faces melting into looks of relief. I was so grateful to breathe air again. I thanked my Heavenly Father that I had survived—so far.

But my troubles were not yet over. I was still in the water, and it was dark in that narrow, watery space between the dock wall and the ferry. I could not figure out where to go, so I treaded water until I felt I no longer could. Then I looked up, and a Tongan man had lain down on his stomach on the dock and leaned far over the edge, extending his arm to me. Braced by a large rubber tire attached to the

dock wall, I could reach up and just barely grasp his hand. How comforting the grasp of his hand was! Symbolically, how important it is for us to look up when we are in need of help! My students shouted encouragement, but I soon began to lose strength in my arthritic hand.

Just then a young Tongan man was at my side. I do not know how he got in the water, but I remember the overwhelming gratitude I felt for him and his bravery. He did not speak English, but he managed to guide me toward the front of the ferry, where the dock surface was closer to the water. Two large Tongan men reached down, each grasping one of my arms, and quickly pulled me to the safety of the dock.

The Tongan women quickly gathered around me to comfort me and tell me more about what I had just experienced. They told me it was a miracle I had survived. They explained that the ocean was unusually calm that morning. If there had been the slightest movement in the ocean, I would have been crushed between the rocking ferry and the dock. My knees went weak as I realized the tender mercies I had experienced, and I felt the love of my Heavenly Father, despite my disobedience to the promptings I had been given. Angels, seen and unseen, helped me through the peril I had created by my disobedience and taught me a lesson I hope to never forget.

Interestingly, from this experience I am left with a constant, gentle reminder that I need to obey the Holy Ghost's promptings. You see, when two large Tongan men pull you out of the ocean, you come out in a *big* hurry. The strain of the pull on my right shoulder wrenched it enough so that to this day, nearly four years later, I continue to experience varying amounts of shoulder discomfort. I let this pain serve as a reminder that I not only need to listen to the still, small voice but that I need to obey so that I can have the Holy Ghost lead and guide me through my mortal journey.

Not Always a Matter of Life and Death

The lessons I have shared thus far have been about inspiration warning of great peril. Fortunately such situations are rare, but promptings from the Holy Ghost are not rare. Our Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus Christ care deeply about the details of our lives. If it matters to us, it matters to Them. As I share this next story, I hope it brings to mind memories of times when you have been blessed by our Heavenly Father's watchful care and by promptings from the Holy Ghost.

My parents moved to St. George a few years after they retired. I loved to visit them and escape from the cold and the smog of the Wasatch Front. After one visit with them, my daughter Laura and I left to drive home. We had just passed the fourteen-mile marker on I-15, north of St. George, when we got a flat tire. I pulled over to the shoulder and quickly reached for my cell phone to call my dad and ask for his help. He was at the neighbors', but my mom went over to tell him of our plight.

In the meantime, a couple of nice men stopped and began to change our flat tire. They were just finishing when my dad pulled up behind us. He got out of his car and thanked the men for helping me. My dad and I visited briefly and then said our good-byes once more.

I got in my car, started it, and tried to pull forward but could not. Something was wrong. My dad was behind us, so he had not yet moved. We got out of our cars, and he took a quick look at my tire. He went to his trunk and removed a two-by-four piece of wood and a hammer. Something was hanging underneath my car in the wheel well against the tire, preventing it from rotating. He placed the two-by-four along the top of the tire and hit the other end of the board with his hammer, moving the dangling piece out of the way so the tire could rotate freely.

When I looked at my dad, I noticed he was a bit teary. I thanked him, and he said, "There is something you need to know. When I entered

the garage to get in the car and come to you, I felt prompted to take a two-by-four and a hammer. Although I wondered why in the world I would need a two-by-four and a hammer to change a tire, I gathered them and put them in the trunk. They were exactly what I needed to fix your car.”

I became teary too. A loving, watchful Heavenly Father had communicated to my dad through the Holy Ghost to help me with a need that neither my dad nor I knew I had when the prompting was given. My heart filled with gratitude for my Heavenly Father, for my wonderful earthly father, and for the Holy Ghost. I felt so loved, so protected, and so safe. Our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost care about the details of our lives.

Some Thoughts on Promptings

How do we learn to be better in tune with promptings from the Holy Ghost? It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between a spiritual prompting and our own deep emotional desires. Elder Boyd K. Packer explained: “The spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual” (“The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983, 56). As we strive to be in tune and act upon the promptings we are given, we will begin to better differentiate a prompting from an emotional impulse.

Promptings come in various ways to different people and at different times in our lives. Just as we have various learning styles in college classrooms, we have unique needs for learning about spiritual guidance, so our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost customize our learning experiences with spiritual promptings. For me, promptings often come as sudden thoughts or feelings, such as when I suddenly understood the chorus of “I Am a Child of God” in what was a new way for me. These sudden impressions are often things I have never thought of before

and produce something of an aha moment. Promptings from the Holy Ghost are *always* consistent with the gospel and *always* edify as we are taught, reminded, warned, or encouraged to provide a service for someone else.

Promptings from the Holy Ghost are often described as still and small. Sometimes with the noise and chaos around us, our busy lives are anything but still and quiet. As I was preparing for this devotional, I felt the temptations of Satan to be angry and irritated by the minor inconveniences of life, preventing me from being still so that I could receive promptings I felt I needed.

As I studied and prayed, I read about Joseph Smith’s experience when he was unable to translate one morning because he had argued with Emma. Only after he had taken time to pray, calm himself, and ask Emma for forgiveness was he able to continue the work of translating. I believe it is similar for us; we need to avoid contention and anger so that we can be still and ready for the quiet promptings we yearn for.

Since reading about Joseph Smith’s experience, I have tried to be less irritable so that contentious feelings are less likely to interrupt my ability to receive and recognize spiritual promptings. And since then, when I feel irritation surging through me, I shake my head and say to myself, “Cancel, cancel,” to help me remember the high cost of contention, let it go, and move on. This might seem like a silly signal, but it helps me—even on this past Saturday when I discovered my water heater had burst, sprayed water all over my furnace room, and flooded part of my basement.

We need to find times and places in which we can be still and quiet to help us sense promptings. For all of us these times should include at least daily prayer in which we *ask* for the guidance and companionship of the Holy Ghost and for help in recognizing His promptings. Scripture study helps our minds dwell on spiritual things and provides a

medium for revelation as the Holy Ghost verifies the truths in the scriptures and teaches us how they apply to our lives. Additionally, temples are places in which we can ponder the things of eternity, pray, and listen intently. In Doctrine and Covenants 97:16 the Lord referred to temples when He promised, “Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it.” Temples are ideal places for us to commune with Deity.

Each Sunday when we partake of the sacrament, we renew our baptismal covenant to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, to always remember Him, and to keep His commandments. Remember the promise we are given in return? It is a very significant promise: to have His spirit to be with us. Imagine the blessing of having the constant companionship of a member of the Godhead. As we strive to do our best to keep our baptismal and other covenants and listen for promptings, we will increase our sensitivity to the still, small voice.

Finally, remember that promptings are often very subtle, coming in ways that might make it difficult for us to *know* when we have received inspiration. Most often promptings come as gentle nudges that suggest a particular course of action. Rarely does the Holy Ghost pester us until we finally submit to His promptings. Because inspiration so often comes in these quiet, unobtrusive ways, we should not sit and wait in a state of paralysis for inspiration to direct us. Nephi said, “I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. Nevertheless I went forth” (1 Nephi

4:6–7). Nephi did not wait until the way forward was clear and certain.

The sacred hymn “Lead, Kindly Light” also suggests our need to “go and do” as Nephi did (1 Nephi 3:7):

*Lead, kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom;
Lead thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead thou me on!
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.
[Hymns, 2002, no. 97]*

I hope you will reflect on your own life lessons with the Holy Ghost and ponder ways in which you might increase your sensitivity to His promptings. Remember, you are a spiritual being having a mortal experience. As you provide the proper context, your *spirit* can understand the Holy Ghost as He leads, guides, and walks beside you on your mortal journey. Live your life in a way that invites His presence and helps you sense His tender whispers.

I bear my testimony that our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost know and love each one of us, and They are intimately acquainted with the challenges we face. How grateful I am to be one small part of this unique university where we can freely discuss matters of eternal consequence. In closing, I express my love and gratitude to each member of the Godhead and bear testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.