

The Elusive Balance

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Imagine for a moment what it would be like if you were standing at this pulpit in a devotional assembly. I can remember sitting in the audience at the George Albert Smith Fieldhouse on such occasions, as a student twenty-five years ago, and wondering the same thing. As a student I had the opportunity of listening to prophets and apostles such as David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, J. Reuben Clark, Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, Mark E. Petersen, Marion G. Romney, and LeGrand Richards.

The overwhelming question that comes to mind is, “What subject can I possibly cover that has not already been addressed so well?” To illustrate my feelings, I can’t resist sharing an experience I had in grade school.

In 1950 I attended Maeser Elementary School here in Provo. Under the banner of “progressive” education, an experiment was conducted where the fifth and sixth grades were combined. I was a fifth grader. In front of me sat a sixth grader. In addition to the fact that she was a year older than I, she had a superior intellect. I can remember how she always finished tests before I did and with more accuracy.

On one particular Friday morning it was “show and tell” time and the assignment fell

on myself and my nemesis sitting in front of me. I worked feverishly on my project and came to school all excited, carrying my treasure in a brown paper sack. As I arrived, there was a pickup truck backed up to the entrance of the school, and there was the sixth grader and her mother carrying in item after item of collections from the Far East or some exotic place they had visited the previous summer. At the conclusion of her excellent presentation our teacher, Mr. Bowen, said, “We will now be honored to hear from Glenn.”

Apprehensively I reached under my desk, picked up my sack, walked to the head of the class, and pulled out a bottle of frog eggs. I was crazy about those frog eggs that day and feel positive about what I have prepared for you today—but then, everything is relative.

Agency and Inspiration

Being a glutton for punishment, I have chosen a subject that, most likely, has been addressed scores of times in devotional assem-

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blies. I will speak on the elusive balance of academic, or intellectual, pursuits and learning to rely on the promptings of the Spirit. How can we avoid relying too much on the intellectual while ignoring the Spirit, or expecting spiritual solutions while ignoring our own power to reason things out for ourselves?

First we'll review a doctrinal base from the scriptures and modern-day prophets, and then look at some examples on the subject. You are all aware of the great insight the Lord gave us on this subject when he told Oliver Cowdery why he failed in his attempt to translate the Book of Mormon.

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

But, behold, I say unto you, that 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 9:7–9]

Of this scripture Elder Bruce R. McConkie has commented,

Implicit in asking in faith is the precedent requirement that we do everything in our power to accomplish the goal that we seek. We use the agency with which we have been endowed. We use every faculty and capacity and ability that we possess to bring about the eventuality that may be involved. . . .

There's a fine balance between agency and inspiration. ["Agency or Inspiration—Which?" Speeches of the Year, 1972–1973 (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), pp. 110, 113]

President Marion G. Romney put it this way:

When confronted with a problem, I prayerfully weigh in my mind alternative solutions and come to a conclusion as to which of them is best. Then in prayer I submit to the Lord my problem, tell him I desire to make the right choice, what is, in my judgment, the right course. Then I ask him if I have made the right decision to give me the burning in my bosom that He promised Oliver Cowdery. . . .

*When we learn to distinguish between the inspiration that comes from the Spirit of the Lord and that which comes from our own uninspired hopes and desires, we need make no mistakes. ["Q and A," *New Era*, Oct. 1975, p. 35]*

This doctrine is so simple and straightforward one might feel guilty admitting he has had difficulty in its application. How do we determine when enough homework has been done and, consequently, we have a right to a spiritual confirmation? How can we become a master at knowing when we have received a spiritual witness? I will try to define the elusive balance of the intellectual approach versus the spiritual approach by giving examples of two extremes.

Intellectual Versus Spiritual

On one side of the spectrum is the person within or without the Church who sees very little need to call upon the Lord because this person is a scholar. He wants to be independent and free in his thinking and not tied to absolute truths that the gospel tells us do exist. He may spend his life chasing down every intellectual loose end. All counsel from general or local authorities is taken with a grain of salt because, after all, their knowledge is so minimal compared to that which the scholar has amassed.

The other end of the spectrum is just as dangerous and is probably a greater threat to the majority of this audience. A person on this end of the spectrum thinks like this: "I know the Church is true and I have received the gift of the Holy Ghost. I am a worthy member of

the Church and, therefore, have access to the Spirit." When faced with a problem he will pray for an answer, and the first thought that comes to mind is canonized. I would propose that an idea or solution that comes without appropriate reasoning is nothing better than a hunch. There are times of instant inspiration, but they are rare and usually involve an emergency.

There is a sentence used in Church circles that sends a chill up my spine. It's a perfectly good sentence that packs a spiritual wallop when used by someone who has been acted upon by the Spirit, but unfortunately is too often used by those who have wandered off-center in the spectrum. I've heard it said in my ward, at Church headquarters, and I have said it myself. The sentence that turns me cold is this: "I feel real good about it." Every time I hear it, I see a red flag go up. It's a perfectly good way of expressing a feeling of the Spirit, but far too often the literal translation is "I haven't done my homework." Some very bad decisions have been made by people who "feel really good" about something they have failed to reason out in their minds.

With those two extremes in mind, I would now like to give some examples that might help us inch our way into the center of the spectrum or toward that elusive balance.

"Now, Go Get It!"

Approximately five years ago I learned a great lesson while laboring as the new managing director of the Welfare Services Department of the Church. We were at a critical stage in the history of welfare. It was time to go through an agonizing reappraisal of the program in light of current world conditions. The specifics are irrelevant to this discussion except to say I was beside myself with worry and concern.

After praying for a solution, I had a terrific thought: "Glenn, you have access to the Quorum of the Twelve and to a member of the First Presidency." What a resource! I called for

appointments and met one-on-one with these great men. I poured out my concerns and added my feelings that we were at a stage where further revelation on the subject was necessary. Then I sat back with my yellow notepad and Cross pen and waited for pearls of wisdom.

I received a total of one pearl from all of those interviews: "Brother Pace, I commend you for your concern and conscientiousness in finding solutions to these weighty matters. I, too, have some deep concerns and anxieties, and you are absolutely right, we do need revelation. Now, *go get it!*"

Who, me? I was an employee of the Church, not a General Authority, but I had the responsibility to bring forth well thought-out recommendations to the Brethren that could be confirmed, modified, or rejected in the appropriate forums. It was my obligation and right to receive inspiration, but it came with intense, agonizing study, research, and meditation.

"Ye Were Past Feeling"

Next let's see what we can learn about balance from the recent fuss about historical documents. The lessons on straying off-center are vivid. Let me ask you a soul-searching question. Would the discovery of any document, no matter how contradictory to what you believe to be true, shake your testimony? It may raise some intellectual questions, but if it shakes your testimony, I would submit you don't really have one. The intellectuals of our day may point at those who cannot and will not be shaken and accuse them of "blind faith." This type of accusation only serves as an indictment to those intellectual giants and proves them to be spiritual pygmies. They have not yet learned there is an avenue to truth greater than intellect and more certain than the five senses. They have left unexplored the most glorious of all avenues to truth—direct revelation from heaven.

Does all this mean we should have no interest in history? I love Church history. I'm

thankful we know the locations of the Sacred Grove, Hill Cumorah, the Jackson County temple site, Nauvoo, Adam-ondi-Ahman, Liberty Jail, and the other Church sites. My joy when visiting these sites is intensified by knowing the history behind them. However, the most lasting impressions obtained by these visits is what is *felt* there, rather than what is remembered.

Two years ago my wife and I visited some of these sites. Two experiences come to mind that have relevance to this search for balance. In Jackson County we sat on the lawn within the boundaries of the future Jackson County temple. It was sunset. We were alone. We talked of history. We talked of prophecies of the future. But we remember most the sweet, peaceful, spiritual witness that Jesus Christ stands at the head of this Church and that Joseph Smith is what he claimed to be, a prophet of God. No amount of historical research alone can bring to pass that spiritual witness. It comes only when we become attuned and learn to recognize spiritual things. However, the spiritual witness was intensified by our knowledge of what has happened and what will happen there. That evening we found the elusive balance.

The next day we strayed off-center. We went to Adam-ondi-Ahman, part of a sacred past and destined to be included in a sacred future. Knowing this history helped us understand the significance of the land. We had a history book that told of an altar of Adam and of the Nephites—this book told the exact location. We didn't know at the time that subsequent research had given rise to some questions on the exact location. We arrived one hour before sunset, and in search of the precise location of the altar we drove to and fro, becoming more frustrated by the minute.

We climbed over fences, walked through fields, stampeded cattle, and soon found ourselves in a very vile mood. Fortunately, we came to our senses and drove to a knoll just in

time to watch the sunset and enjoy the spirit of the place. Again, the Lord blessed us with a spiritual experience that can be recalled vividly upon reflection.

How often do we get so involved in the search for historical and archaeological details that we fail to take advantage of spiritual experiences right before our eyes? The same historical knowledge that can intensify spiritual experiences can destroy spirituality when we stray too far off-center.

A complete testimony was never intended to be gained through history, except through that kept by prophets and coming forth as scripture. A saving testimony will never come from a spectacular historical or archaeological find. If the Lord meant for our testimonies to be based on physical, historical evidence other than scripture, he would send Moroni with the golden plates. We would then send them to the FBI, and experts on golden plates would give them scientific tests. What would be the verdict? Opinions would vary.

While I was on my mission, the question I dreaded most was "Where are the golden plates today?" I didn't enjoy the looks we got when we answered, "The angel took them back." I didn't comprehend then what I know now. If my companion and I had been able to take Moroni and the plates from door to door, our converts would not have increased. If Moroni had stood between us suspended in the air, without a confirmation of the Spirit the whole experience would be explained away as a trick of mirrors or some other deception.

Do you remember what the Lord told Joseph regarding Martin Harris' desire to see the plates? "Behold, if they will not believe my words, they would not believe you, my servant Joseph, if it were possible that you should show them all these things which I have committed unto you" (D&C 5:7).

There is no other way to gain a testimony but through the promise of Moroni. You can rely on nothing else. Spiritual manifestations

are generally reserved for the spiritually mature, not so much as a trial of faith as to assure they are not mocked. One must become adept at recognizing the Spirit before a spiritual manifestation can be a sanctifying experience. We have numerous scriptural examples of how pointless a physical manifestation can be without the accompanying receipt of the witness of the Holy Ghost. Conversion comes not by physical manifestations from heaven.

Laman and Lemuel observed many miraculous manifestations such as that recorded in 1 Nephi 3:30–31:

And after the angel had spoken unto us, he departed.

And after the angel had departed, Laman and Lemuel again began to murmur, saying: How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands? Behold, he is a mighty man, and he can command fifty, yea, even he can slay fifty; then why not us?

Nephi couldn't believe this and said, "Ye know that this is true; and ye also know that an angel hath spoken unto you; wherefore can ye doubt?" (1 Nephi 4:3). Here we have an example of knowledge being of no eternal value because the Spirit is absent.

Nephi put his finger on Laman and Lemuel's problem in 1 Nephi 17:45.

Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God. Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling.

Even in heavenly manifestations we must acquire the ability to recognize the Spirit and feel the experience as well as see and hear it. Were it not so, Satan could thoroughly confuse us with his own demonstrations. Despite all the spectacular manifestations received by the

Nephites and Lamanites at the birth of the Savior, within a short period of time doubts crept into the minds of those who were not converted.

The people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard, and began to be less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven, inso-much that they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which they had heard and seen —

Imagining up some vain thing in their hearts, that it was wrought by men and by the power of the devil, to lead away and deceive the hearts of the people. [3 Nephi 2:1–2]

If a witness of the Spirit is necessary to discern the validity of a visit by an angel, how much more vital that witness is in more subtle situations.

Recognizing a Witness of the Spirit

I will spend the balance of my time on how we can acquire the ability to recognize a witness of the Spirit. Even as I speak, I know it's impossible to convey an understanding of this phenomenon. We must make the discovery privately and individually.

First, remove from yourself the guilt feelings you have experienced when you have fallen on your spiritual behinds. Have any of you ever been certain you have received a spiritual witness only to have subsequent events prove you were in error? Have any of you had a spiritual witness you dismissed as indigestion, only to find out you blew it? Have any of you ever heard a General Authority admit he's had problems too?

We have more patience with our failures in learning to ski than we do in learning how to recognize the Spirit. When we fall going down the slope, we get up, laugh at ourselves, and try again. When we have a failure in recognizing the Spirit we feel great guilt and are reluc-

tant to go forward. It's natural to have spiritual setbacks. It's OK. It's all right. Stay with it.

We all know it takes years of practice to become a professional athlete and a price must be paid. However, we expect to be overnight successes in spiritual things.

Joseph Smith said,

A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus. [Teachings, p. 151]

Please note he said, "You may grow into the principle of revelation." To become proficient in basketball one practices shooting countless shots. By repeating successful approaches and changing failures, the player gets the uncanny ability of knowing as soon as the ball leaves his hands whether the shot will be good or not.

In spiritual things we need to learn exactly when we have had a witness of the Spirit and be able to recognize a counterfeit thrown at us by Satan or self-imposed by our own ambition and desire. How many of you young men have told your girlfriends, "I have received a spiritual witness that you are to be my wife?" In some cases I would suggest that the witness is more a desire than a manifestation. If you receive that witness, put it to the test. Ask her to marry you. If she says yes, you were right. If she says no, you were wrong. But keep your witness to yourself. She is perfectly capable of receiving her own revelation—even if she hasn't been on a mission and you have.

What does a spiritual confirmation feel like? It's the feeling you have when you read the Book of Mormon. It's the feeling you have

when you talk of heavenly things with your parents or a valued friend. Learn to recognize it. Learn to follow it.

Only the Truth

If it were possible, I would lay down a formula for instant and certain success. One of the reasons it is so hard to enjoy consistent success is that the variables change each day. We are in tune more on one day than on another. We are more emotionally vulnerable on one day than on another. Satan works harder on us on one day than on another. However, with all the variables there is one constant. The Spirit witnesses only the truth.

If your success ratio for recognizing the Spirit is low, ask yourself these questions:

1. How well am I living the commandments?
2. Am I studying the scriptures in order that I might be more attuned to spiritual things?
3. Am I praying with real intent?
4. Have I done my homework and gone to the Lord with a well thought-out solution?
5. Have I learned to recognize a stupor of thought?
6. Can I honestly say "thy will be done," and am I willing to take "no" for an answer?

Students, don't fail to invest adequate time learning things of the Spirit while at this university. I'm not speaking of required religion classes, although I heartily endorse them. I'm speaking of learning how to recognize and obtain revelation. It's a lifetime course, but you don't have to wait until graduation to receive benefits. The rewards are immediate. Close in on the elusive balance between intellectual pursuits and that of learning to recognize the promptings of the Spirit. There is a balance, and it is incumbent upon each of us to find it. I pray that you will be successful in your attempt to find the elusive balance and that you will be successful in learning to recognize the Spirit when you feel it. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.