

HELPING CHILDREN RECOGNIZE THE HOLY GHOST

By Merrilee Browne Boyack

We can use the different ways the Holy Ghost communicates to help our children develop testimonies.

As the parents of four sons, my husband and I always seek ways to help our children feel the Spirit and gain a testimony. We had a breakthrough in understanding in an unusual way. I was standing in a store when the prompting came.

Our oldest son's grades in his social studies class were declining. We had talked with him about it, encouraging him to study harder, but there was still no improvement. We had been praying for ideas to help him. One day in a bookstore, I had a strong impression to buy a book from a pile of books that were on sale.

The book was about how each of us has distinct learning styles. Many people are visual learners, meaning they learn best by what they see. These learners often love art and reading. Some learn best aurally. They process information most effectively when they hear it. These people often love music. Finally, some learners are kinesthetic learners. They learn best when there is motion or activity involved. These learners sometimes struggle in school when teachers insist on them sitting still. They learn best when they're moving around.



There was the answer! Our son was obviously an aural learner—he loved music and talking! We discovered that he was often being pulled out of class for other activities during social studies and was then told by the teacher to go

home and read the material. He was struggling because he wasn't hearing the class discussion. Once we understood this, we encouraged him to read his assigned material aloud and then discuss it with us. His grades shot back up.



Facilitating Spiritual Experiences

But our understanding of learning styles didn't stop there. We realized as we studied this more and observed our children that the Holy Ghost often teaches our children in the ways they learn best. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the Spirit talks to us in our language and in ways we can understand. The Holy Ghost adapts His language to be understood by all, even little children. "Our Heavenly Father is always available to us. He adapts to our level of understanding. 'If He comes to a little child, He will adapt himself to the language and capacity of a little child' (Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 3:392)."¹

Knowing that the Spirit adapts His communication for our understanding can encourage parents to create opportunities for their children to hear teachings from the Holy Ghost in ways they will understand best. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isaiah 54:13).

As I mentioned, our oldest son's primary method of learning was aural. Both he and our third son love music, so in our home we often played beautiful music by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir as well as classical music. They felt the Spirit deeply in this environment. We also had many lively discussions regarding the gospel, and this helped them learn truths that were reinforced by the Spirit as they heard them.

Another son was primarily a visual learner. He loved to read and would feel the Spirit best while reading the scriptures or gospel-centered books. We provided many books for him to read that helped him feel the Spirit and gain a testimony. We also placed pictures of gospel scenes and sayings on our walls so that our house became a feast of visual learning.

Our second son was a visual and kinesthetic learner. He was a very active boy and was happiest on a mountain bike or hiking with his dad. We discovered that he felt the Spirit best when he was outdoors and moving. We had many family camping trips where we talked about Jesus Christ, the Creation, and the plan of salvation. These messages reached our second son in a powerful way as he took part in these activities.

My husband and I also discovered that kinesthetic learning can occur when doing service. So we did lots of service activities with our children so they could see, hear, and participate. This created a wonderful environment where all of our sons could internalize lessons of charity and Christlike service, and these projects especially resonated with our second son.

Hearing and Understanding

We also learned that people "hear" the Holy Ghost in a variety of ways. I was teaching a Sunday School lesson to relatively new converts, and I asked the question, "How do you feel

the Spirit?" Their answers were very enlightening. One said, "I feel clarity in my thoughts." Another said, "I have a warm feeling inside," while another shared, "I feel a deep sense of peace." A woman who had been a member for a few months said, "I feel prickles all over!" And several stated that they occasionally would "hear" a voice speaking to them or that new ideas would come to them.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: "In its more familiar forms, revelation or inspiration comes by means of words or thoughts communicated to the mind (see Enos 1:10; D&C 8:2-3), by sudden enlightenment (see D&C 6:14-15), by positive or negative feelings about proposed courses of action, or even by inspiring performances, as in the performing arts. . . . 'Inspiration comes more as a feeling than as a sound.'"²

It is clear that each of us may hear and feel the communication of the



Holy Ghost in a variety of ways. We should move beyond simply teaching children that they will have a warm feeling because they might not experience that feeling; they may receive inspiration in a different way.

Elder Jay E. Jensen, formerly of the Presidency of the Seventy, related this story about a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who was touring a mission. In between zone conferences, this Apostle turned to the member of the Seventy who had spoken at the previous conference and said, “I wonder if you might have left an impression in the missionaries’

minds that has created more problems than you can resolve. As I have traveled throughout the Church, I’ve found relatively few people who have experienced a burning of the bosom. In fact, I’ve had many people tell me that they’ve become frustrated because they have never experienced that feeling even though they have prayed or fasted for long periods of time.” Elder Jensen continued: “Over the years, I have tried to learn the different ways in which the Spirit of the Lord works. Surely God does speak from heaven, but he manifests, confirms, or gives direction in a variety

of ways.”³ It’s very important to teach our children that they need to learn to hear the Spirit in the way He speaks to them.

As we teach our children, we share principles of faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to hear and understand the promptings that come to them is critical to their spiritual development. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) counseled us: “[Your children] will need all the strength and all the faith you can give them while they are yet near you. And they will also need a greater strength which comes of a higher power.”⁴

Receiving guidance and direction from our Heavenly Father through the Holy Ghost is a great blessing in our lives. As we teach our children how to receive and pay attention to these promptings, feelings, and instructions, they will be able to gain personal testimonies that will give them strength in the future. The Holy Ghost can be their constant companion, and they will be able to hear Him more fully. As parents we can help with this process and help bless our children. ■

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NOTES

1. Gérald Caussé, “Even a Child Can Understand,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 32.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Eight Ways God Can Speak to You,” *New Era*, Sept. 2004, 4.
3. Jay E. Jensen, “Have I Received an Answer from the Spirit?” *Ensign*, Apr. 1989, 21–22.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “These, Our Little Ones,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2007, 9.