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FINDING Answers

*It is not the design of heaven that we be rescued from all difficult situations.
Rather, it is the Lord's will that we learn to handle them.*

By Joseph Fielding McConkie

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Not long after I graduated from college I found myself in Vietnam. I had been commissioned an officer in the United States army and was serving as a Latter-day Saint chaplain. Throughout the country, LDS servicemen were organized into mobile groups that functioned like quorums and moved with their military units. Every mobile group acted under the direction of one of three districts, each of which covered about a third of the country.

Our district president was an air force chaplain by the name of Farrell Smith. I served as his first counselor. As chaplains we were responsible for meeting the spiritual needs of the military units to which we were assigned—including 25 of these mobile quorums. As the units deployed, the soldiers often found themselves in a different place each Sunday, but thanks to LDS helicopter pilots who found a way to get us to wherever we needed to be, the system worked well. Even so, the problems we faced reached far beyond our experience.

We were extremely pleased when we received word that Bishop Victor L. Brown (1914–1996) of the Presiding Bishopric was coming to visit. We were to travel with him from one end of Vietnam to the other, meeting with as many LDS servicemen as possible. Prior to Bishop Brown's visit, Chaplain Smith and I made a list of the questions we wanted to ask him relating to our specific challenges and committed them to memory.

Servicemen came from all over the country to meet with Bishop Brown. We held meetings on the sides of runways, in bunkers, and in ditches. We sometimes held meetings with the ground rumbling beneath our feet and guns thundering around us. In some instances we met in small military chapels.

Between meetings, Chaplain Smith and I took turns asking Bishop Brown questions. His counsel was wise, but what we were doing became evident, and he halted our questioning.

"Brethren," he said, "I am going to tell you a story. You won't like it, but it is a great story."

It centered on a young man with a difficult



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" (D&C 9:8).

Twelve Apostles. I will present the matter to him."

The next day, as he met with the Apostle, the stake president raised the matter. The Apostle listened attentively and asked a few questions to ensure that he fully understood what was involved. He then said, "President, I have no idea what to tell you, but this afternoon I will be meeting with

President McKay. I will ask him."

That afternoon he met with President David O. McKay (1873–1970) and carefully explained the problem. President McKay listened attentively and asked a few questions to ensure that he understood all that was involved. He said, "Well, that's his problem, isn't it?"

As Bishop Brown had predicted, we did not like the story. It brought an end to our question session and led to the realization that our problems were ours to solve. That is why the Lord had placed us there.

Learning to Solve Our Own Problems

That lesson is one that we are generally reluctant to learn. My father and grandfathers had a great love of the gospel and were marvelous sources of understanding. I have, however, a distinct memory of the occasion when I went to my father with some gospel questions only to receive the following response: "Look, Junior, you have the same sources available to you as I have to me." More important than any answers these men gave to my questions was their teaching me how to get answers for myself. They are now gone. Questions continue, as does the confidence that the same sources that were available to them are available to me.

In Doctrine and Covenants 9:8 we find the process of revelation: "But behold, I say unto you, that you must

problem. He did not know what to do, so he visited with his bishop for counsel.

The bishop listened carefully and thoughtfully. He asked a few questions to ensure that he understood all that was involved. He then confessed that he had no idea what counsel to give but told the young man that he would present the matter to the stake president when they met the following evening.

The next evening the bishop met with the stake president. He explained the young man's problem. The stake president listened attentively and asked a few questions to ensure he understood all that was involved. He then said, "Bishop, I have no idea what to tell you, but tomorrow I will be meeting with a member of the Quorum of the

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.” This process is designed to balance our experience and agency with the wisdom of heaven.

Seeking the Companionship of the Holy Ghost

We frequently speak of our right to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps an analogy, one my father taught me, will help in distinguishing between receiving a revelation from the Holy Ghost and having the *gift* of the Holy Ghost.

Imagine yourself traveling in the dark of night through rugged and difficult terrain, seeking a place of safety where you will be reunited with your family. Let us also suppose that a flash of lightning momentarily marks the path of safety before you. This brief flash of light represents a manifestation through the Holy Ghost.

If you then follow the path it marked out, it will lead you to the waters of baptism and to confirmation as a member of the Church. The authority who confirms you will say, “Receive the Holy Ghost,” meaning the gift of the Holy Ghost. The light by which you now walk is the companionship of the Holy Ghost. It is the light of the gospel—or, for some, the gospel in a new light. In either case, it enables you to see that which you could not see before. It now becomes your privilege to walk, as it were, by the light of day. The light is constant, and, in most instances, the path you are called on to travel is clearly marked. When it is not, you are entitled to the visions, impressions, or prodding necessary to assure your arrival at the place of safety.

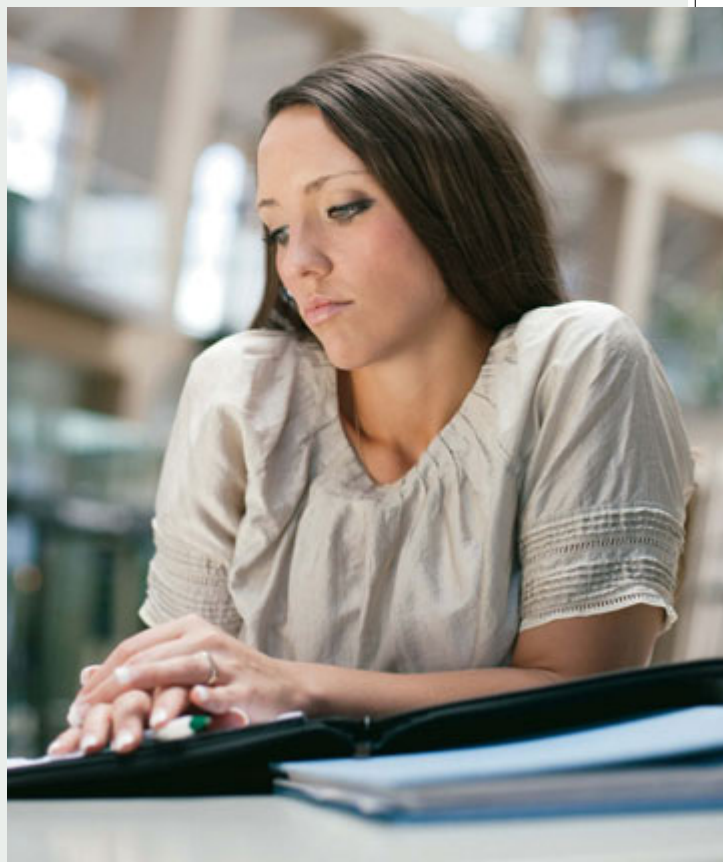
The fact that every member of the Church is given the gift of the Holy Ghost is evidence that the Lord wants to reveal things to you and through you. Joseph Smith said, “No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator.”¹

As you serve in Church callings and seek direction, that same Spirit will lead you far beyond your own thoughts and mark a course that reaches beyond that which you can see even by the light of day.

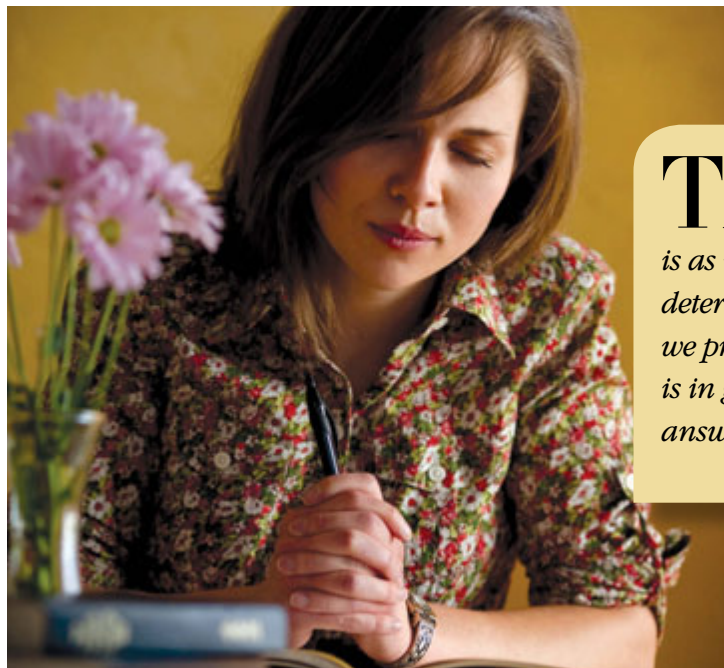
Acting When No Sure Answer Comes

There will be some instances when no sure answer comes. We have a series of revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants in which the Lord tells the early missionaries of this dispensation that some matters were to be left to their discretion. The phrase that is often repeated is “it mattereth not unto me” (D&C 60:5; 61:22; 62:5).

President Brigham Young explained this doctrine: “If I do not know the will of my Father, and what he requires of me in a certain transaction, if I ask him to give me wisdom concerning any requirement in life or in regard to my own course, or that of my friends, my family, my children,



or those that I preside over, and get no answer from him, and then do the very best that my judgment will teach me, he is bound to own and honor that transaction, and he will do so to all intents and purposes.”²



The role of the Holy Ghost is as important in determining what we pray about as it is in giving us the answers we seek.

Asking the Right Question

In finding answers we must seek the balance between agency and inspiration. Let me share a fundamental but often overlooked principle relative to getting answers to prayers and questions that trouble us.

Few things facilitate getting the right answer like asking the right question. A mother told me a story about the disappointing behavior of a man after he had been called as a priesthood leader. “How,” she asked, “can I explain to my children that callings in this Church are inspired and at the same time explain the behavior of this man?”

While I share her concern over what took place, her question infers that if a leader makes a mistake then their calling was not inspired. Perhaps a better question would be: should my faith rest in the infallibility of priesthood leaders or in the assurance that if I keep my covenants, the Spirit of the Lord will always be my companion?

Often what stands between us and answers to our prayers is our failure to ask the right questions. Thus the role of the Holy Ghost is as important in determining what we pray about as it is in giving us the answers we seek.

Perhaps the greatest revelation of this dispensation was the one Joseph Smith received prompting him to go into the woods to find a place to pray. Having read the injunction in James, he said:

“Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that

if any person needed wisdom from God, I did” (Joseph Smith—History 1:12).

Do you see what is taking place? Joseph was getting a revelation telling him to go get a revelation. The Spirit was directing him in what he prayed for, and because the Spirit was his com-

panion in the asking of the question, he could ask with complete faith.

In 3 Nephi, the Savior says, “And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you” (3 Nephi 18:20).

Think of that! We have the sure promise that if we pray in the manner prescribed by Jesus Christ and ask for that “which is right,” it shall be given unto us.

Learning to Handle Difficult Situations

I return to where we began, with two young chaplains in Vietnam. My story is a nearly universal one. Each of us must grow up and leave the security of home and the protective care of parents to enter a world full of problems and challenges that reach far beyond our experience. As we venture out, we would like a ready source to tell us how to handle every difficult situation. But that is not the Lord’s system.

It is not the design of heaven that we be rescued from all difficult situations. Rather, it is the Lord’s will that we learn to handle them.

The sense of being overwhelmed is very much a part of the journey. The power with which God clothes us in His holy temples does not imply that our journey will be an easy one.

As we accept our lot and move forward with what the Lord has asked of us, we discover that we enjoy the company of the Holy Ghost, angels feel constrained to join us, and the heavens open to our vision. ■

From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University, December 12, 2006. For the full text, visit speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. *History of the Church*, 6:58.
2. *Deseret News*, Feb. 27, 1856, 402.