

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

I have difficulty distinguishing between promptings of the Spirit and my own personal feelings. How can I tell the difference?



ELIJAH, BY WILSON JAY ONG

The Lord speaks to Elijah.

From an experience of the prophet Elijah, we learn how the Spirit most often speaks to us: “The Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11–12). The Spirit speaks in such a still, small voice that it might be unrecognized if one is not spiritually in tune.

Through sincere prayer, we can ask Heavenly Father to give us the ability to recognize the sweet promptings of the Spirit and the courage to follow that guidance.

Tinubi Oluwasegun Babatunde, Nigeria

Here are several questions I ask to help make the determination:

Is the prompting an answer to prayer? Sometimes an impression will come after I have been praying and pondering over a particular issue for some time.

Does the prompting help me accomplish my righteous desires and goals? When my heart has a desire the Lord approves of, He frequently will assist me in accomplishing that desire.

If I follow this prompting, what will happen? I visualize myself following the prompting and experiencing the results. If this process leaves me feeling dark and cold, I choose not to follow. If the feelings are light and warm, I move forward.

Denise W. Anderson, North Dakota

When I was a new missionary, President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) taught that we must have the courage to act on promptings and then observe the fruit of those actions. In other words, if a sudden thought comes *and it is a good thought*, act on it and then observe the outcome. In this way you begin to learn from

your own experience to distinguish the impressions of the Spirit. Alma taught this same principle relating to faith, inviting listeners to “experiment upon [his] words” (Alma 32:27).

Thirty years after being instructed by President Lee, I went to a meeting for stake presidencies where we were taught by General Authorities. The presiding authority called on members to share an experience in which they had been led by the Spirit. Among men of much experience, one ventured to say that many times he wasn’t completely sure whether an impression was inspired until afterward when he saw the outcome. The presiding authority replied, “Would you feel better if you knew it’s that way much of the time?”

I was immediately taken back to that day 30 years before when we were taught that we must act and learn from our own experience. Following this instruction has yielded some of the choicest experiences of my life.

Reese Carter, Utah

The majority of my answers to prayers have come as I have followed this process: studying out the issue in my mind (see D&C 9:8–9), making the decision that best follows what I know to be right, and then going forward with what I have decided even if

I don't seem to get an answer from the Lord. Then, as I act on my decision, I feel comfortable and at peace, and I may even feel a strong burning in my bosom later on.

Melissa Camille Clayton, Pennsylvania

The only thing we truly have to give to Heavenly Father is our will. He wants to bless us, but He wants us to learn accountability and responsibility. As we choose to turn our mind, body, heart, and spirit to Him, we tune our souls to receive better spiritual reception.

Many of the decisions we make have minimal eternal impact and are between two or more good options. When it's not clear whether a prompting is from personal feelings or the Spirit, I take comfort in the fact that Heavenly Father gave me resources to make decisions: a mind, good parents and friends, and talents. As long as my choice allows me to better serve others, brings me closer to God, and allows me to be happy, I am certain He is pleased. He has said, "It is not meet that I should command in all things" (D&C 58:26). He wants us to use our agency to do good. We will not stray if we are truly seeking His righteousness.

Christopher K. Cox, Utah

When making important decisions I use the test given in Doctrine and Covenants 8:2 as my guide: "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost." If a prompting makes sense in my mind and feels good in my heart, I can have confidence that it is right and

comes from the Lord. If the two are not in harmony and I am confused, I know I may need to step back, take some time, reconsider the options, and modify the decision.

Crystal Ward, Utah

This method works for me and is helping me teach my children to recognize promptings:

When you are in a situation where you are positive that the Spirit is present—such as a testimony meeting, during a musical number, after receiving a blessing, and so on—take note of how you feel. Write down your thoughts and

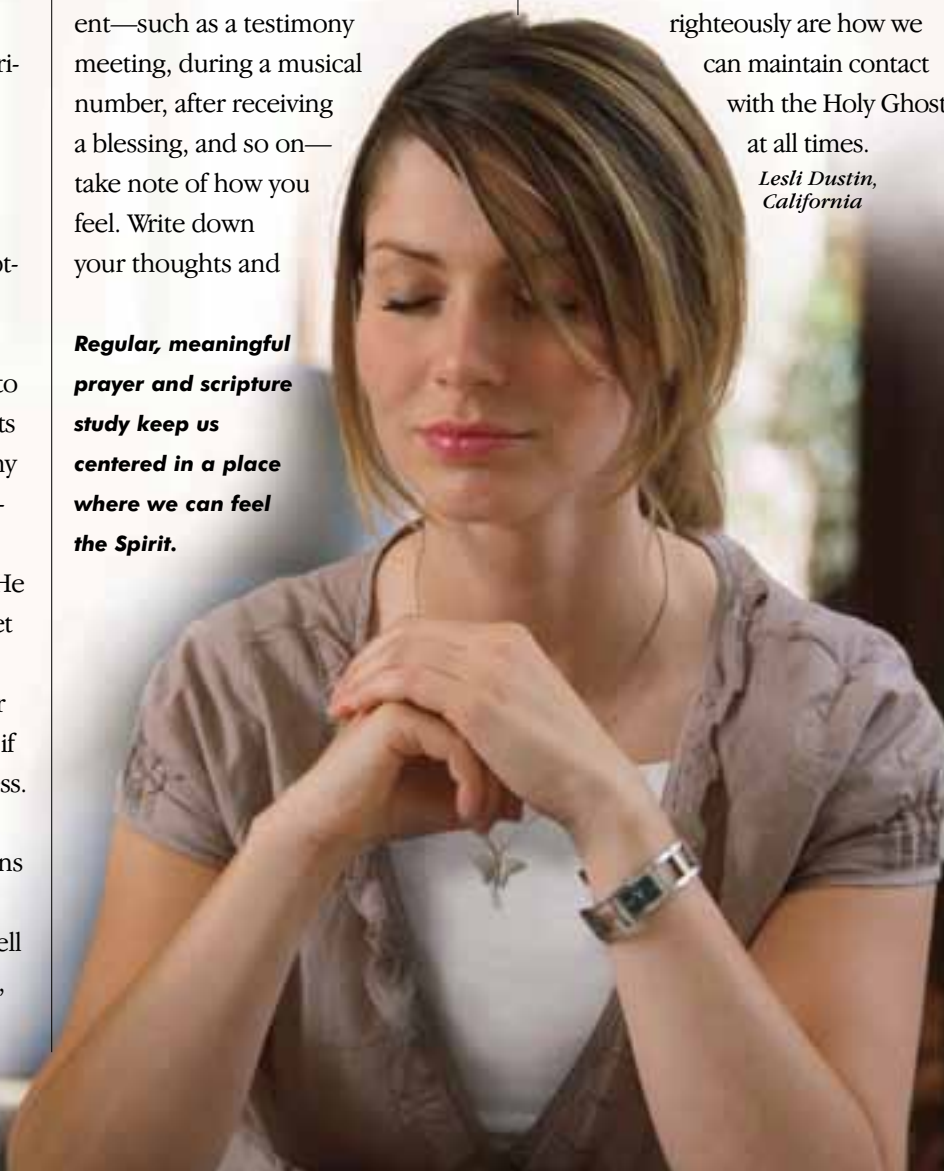
Regular, meaningful prayer and scripture study keep us centered in a place where we can feel the Spirit.

feelings. This way you learn what the Spirit feels like, as it can be different for you than for someone else.

As you learn to recognize this feeling, the second step is putting yourself in a place where you can receive revelation. This is why regular, meaningful prayer and scripture study are so vital—they keep us centered in a place where we can feel the Spirit. Doing

these things every day and living righteously are how we can maintain contact with the Holy Ghost at all times.

Lesli Dustin, California



PHOTOGRAPH BY HENRIKALS

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Sometimes we want so much to be guided by the Spirit that we forget the Lord will not make our decisions for us. At times I have been almost paralyzed worrying about whether what I feel is “the Spirit.” Regardless of where a thought comes from, it is up to me to use my agency responsibly in considering my resources and choosing the best course.

Sometimes we need to use our faith to make the best decision we can, effectively taking a step into the darkness, asking the Lord to bless and protect us. Through repeated experiences like these, we come to better recognize the whisperings of the Holy Ghost.

Jonathon English, Tennessee

I have found that if a thought has one or more of the following characteristics, it has a high probability of being a prompting. Then I act on it, as long as it is safe and righteous.

- The thought increases your awareness of a situation so you can make a good decision.

- An insistent righteous thought seems to come back after you have dismissed it.

- The thought prompts you to act in a more logical way, even if you don’t see anything wrong with your current way.

I will probably never know whether some of the thoughts I have acted on were promptings, but I do not mind. Sometimes the promptings we get are to benefit other people, and we do

not see the fruits of our actions.

However, I find contentment and comfort in knowing that

I will receive

further instruction from the Spirit because I have diligently strived to heed the promptings I have already been given.

Meaghan James, Washington

One way I have learned to recognize promptings is by keeping a daily journal and recording spiritual thoughts. I identify the specific feeling or thought and write down what I think it means and what I should do about it. If it is an answer to a specific question I have asked, I record that and the fact that I feel it is the answer. Then I act upon it when the opportunity is presented. It can be moments, days, or years later when I see the outcome. I record that spiritual verification also.

With this practice I am able to recognize new inspiration more readily.

Donna K. Maxwell, Utah

Each week while partaking of the sacrament, we

Each week while partaking of the sacrament, we are taught that if we take upon us the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments, we will have His Spirit to be with us.



are taught that if we take upon us the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments, we will have His Spirit to be with us (see Moroni 4–5). By entering this covenant, we can step forward in faith with the assurance that our righteous feelings and actions become “one” with the desires of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Instead of worrying about where a prompting originates, we can listen and act for righteousness’ sake.

Sheran K. Milius, Colorado

Here are some distinguishing characteristics of spiritual promptings:

Consistency. Spiritual promptings are consistent with gospel principles. Doctrine and Covenants 11:12 teaches, “Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.”

Clarity. We learn in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that “God is not the author of confusion.” Instead, like the good seed described by Alma, the good word of God can “enlighten [our] understanding” (Alma 32:28).

Remembrance. Once during a period of concern, I knelt in prayer. As I prayed, a relevant passage from my patriarchal blessing came immediately into my remembrance. At other times of need, relevant scriptures have come to mind, offering much-needed guidance.

Peace. Doctrine and Covenants 6:23 teaches, “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have

HUMILITY PRECEDES INSPIRATION



“Each of us is influenced strongly by our own desires and preferences. We may even

mistake these influences as the ratification or prompting of the Holy Ghost. It is therefore significant when we feel prompted to do something contrary to our personal preference. That is good evidence of authenticity. Conversely, a feeling that seems to confirm a person in some action he or she strongly desires should be received with caution and subjected to more than one test of validity. In that circumstance a person could well ask himself, ‘Am I humbly submitting myself to the will of my Heavenly Father and asking for his guidance, or am I proudly submitting my will to my Heavenly Father and asking for his approval?’ Humility is more likely to receive inspiration; pride is more likely to be deceived and fall.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “I Have a Question,” Ensign, June 1983, 27.

than from God?” Peace is another sign of the Holy Ghost.

Krista Oakes, Texas

There is more to this process than simply figuring out the right answers.

Heavenly Father wants us to know Him. We come to know Him by seeking His voice among all the voices clamoring for our attention and then by choosing that voice above all others.

I have made many mistakes in trying to learn discernment. Mistakes occur in the course of practicing a skill; they show us our weaknesses so we can be humble and teachable.

This is a lifelong endeavor, but that does not mean we have to wait an entire lifetime to succeed. If we are prepared when we knock, the door will be opened. I believe our Heavenly Father is so desirous of having us return to His presence that He will make use of every opportunity we give Him—“even if [we] can no more than desire” to receive His direction (Alma 32:27). It generally begins with small and simple things.

Kiersten Olson, Utah

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Q&A feature will focus on the following question:

With all the difficulty in the world, I often find myself feeling anxious and worried. How can I find peace during troubled times?

If you’d like to contribute your ideas and experiences, please label them “finding peace” and follow the submission guidelines under “Do You Have a Story to Tell?” in the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words, and submit them by April 13.