

# Personal Revelation: The Teachings and Examples of the Prophets

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*Personal revelation is the way we know for ourselves the most important truths of our existence.*



**A**s we begin the concluding session of this historic conference, I join you in expressing gratitude for the privilege of sustaining President Henry B. Eyring as a counselor in the First Presidency, Elder Quentin L. Cook in the Quorum of the Twelve, and Elder Walter F.

González in the seven Presidents of the Seventy. I offer them my love and support and testify that they are called of God by a living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, “according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy.”<sup>1</sup>

The events of these past two days teach us the need for revelation in the Lord’s work and personal revelation in our own lives. Personal revelation is the way we know for ourselves the most important truths of our existence: the living reality of God, our Eternal Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ; the truthfulness of the restored gospel; and God’s purpose and direction for us.

Much of what I know about personal revelation I have learned from the examples of the prophets, both ancient and modern. This afternoon I would like to share a few of these personal examples and pray that they will inspire each of us to seek the blessings



of personal revelation in our own lives.

As a young regional representative, I was assigned to assist Elder Marion G. Romney in reorganizing a stake. During the long, quiet ride to the conference, our conversation turned to the spiritual dimensions of our assignment. Elder Romney taught me about how the Lord blesses us with revelation. “Robert,” he said, “I have learned that when we are on the Lord’s errand, we have His blessings to accomplish whatever we are asked to do.” Elder Romney further explained that we would arrive in the distant city, kneel in prayer, interview priesthood holders, kneel in prayer again, and the Holy Ghost would reveal to us the person whom the Lord had chosen to be the new stake president. He promised me it would be one of the great spiritual experiences of my life, and it was.

Each of us has been sent to earth by our Heavenly Father to merit eternal life: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”<sup>22</sup> How do we know the Father

and the Son for ourselves? By personal revelation. Personal revelation is the way Heavenly Father helps us know Him and His Son, learn and live the gospel, endure to the end in righteousness, and qualify for eternal life—to return back into Their presence.

You may ask, “How do we seek personal revelation?” Paul counseled the Saints to rely on the Spirit rather than the wisdom of the world.<sup>3</sup> To obtain that Spirit, we begin with prayer. President Lorenzo Snow had studied the gospel for several years before joining the Church. But he did not receive a witness until two or three weeks after his baptism when he retired in secret prayer. “The Spirit of God descended upon me,” he said. “O, the joy and happiness I felt, [for] I then received a perfect knowledge that God lives, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and of the restoration of the holy Priesthood, and the fulness of the Gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

I have learned that prayer provides a firm foundation for personal revelation. But more is required. While still a regional representative, I had the

opportunity to learn from another Apostle, Elder Boyd K. Packer. We were assigned to reorganize a stake and began by kneeling in prayer together. After interviewing priesthood leaders and having prayer, Elder Packer suggested that we walk around the building together. As we walked, he demonstrated a vital principle of seeking personal revelation—the principle the Lord taught Oliver Cowdery: “Behold, . . . you must study it out in your mind.”<sup>5</sup> We pondered our assignment, counseled together, and listened to the voice of the Spirit. When we went back, we prayed and studied further, and then we were prepared to receive revelation.

Revelation comes on the Lord’s timetable, which often means we must move forward in faith, even though we haven’t received all the answers we desire. As a General Authority, I was assigned to help reorganize a stake presidency under the direction of Elder Ezra Taft Benson. After praying, interviewing, studying, and praying again, Elder Benson asked if I knew who the new

president would be. I said I had not received that inspiration yet. He looked at me for a long time and replied he hadn't either. However, we *were* inspired to ask three worthy priesthood holders to speak in the Saturday evening session of conference. Moments after the third speaker began, the Spirit prompted me that he should be the new stake president. I looked over at President Benson and saw tears streaming down his face. Revelation had been given to both of us—but only by continuing to seek our Heavenly Father's will as we moved forward in faith.

Early in my Church service, Elder Harold B. Lee taught this lesson when he came to organize a new stake in the district where we were living. Elder Lee asked me, as a newly sustained bishop, if I would join him at a press conference. There, an intense young reporter challenged Elder Lee. He said to him, "You call yourself a prophet. When was the last time you had revelation, and what was it about?" Elder Lee paused, looked directly at him, and responded in a sweet way, "It was yesterday afternoon about three o'clock. We were praying about who should be called as the president of the new stake, and it was made known to us who that individual should be." The reporter's heart changed. I will never forget the Spirit that came into that room as Elder Lee bore his powerful witness of revelation that can be received by those faithfully seeking to do the Lord's will.

As faithful children, youth, parents, teachers, and leaders, we may receive personal revelation more frequently than we realize. The more we receive and acknowledge personal revelation, the more our testimonies grow. As a bishop, my testimony grew each time I received revelation to extend callings to ward members. That testimony has been strengthened each time I witness General Authorities

and officers, Area Seventies, and stake presidents called or given new assignments. More importantly, I am strengthened by the personal revelations I receive in my role as a son of God, a husband, and a father. I am so thankful for the guidance and direction of the Spirit in our home as we seek for direction in family matters.

For all of us, our personal revelations reflect the pattern of revelation received by prophets, as recounted in the scriptures. Adam and Eve called upon the name of the Lord and received personal revelation, including knowledge of the Savior.<sup>6</sup> Enoch, Abraham, and Moses sought for the welfare of their people and were given marvelous revelations recorded in the Pearl of Great Price.<sup>7</sup> Elijah's personal revelation came through the still, small voice;<sup>8</sup> Daniel's came in a dream.<sup>9</sup> Peter's personal revelation gave him a testimony that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>10</sup> Lehi and Nephi received revelations about the Savior and the plan of salvation, and virtually all of the Bible and Book of Mormon prophets received revelations to warn, teach, strengthen, and comfort them and their people.<sup>11</sup> After much prayer in the temple, President Spencer W. Kimball received the revelation on the priesthood.<sup>12</sup> And after praying about providing temple blessings to more members of the Church, President Hinckley received revelation about the building of smaller temples.<sup>13</sup>

Prophets receive personal revelations to help them in their own lives and in directing the earthly affairs of the Church. Our responsibility is to seek personal revelations for ourselves and for the responsibilities the Lord has given us.

These past weeks President Hinckley has been seeking revelation about the callings that would be announced in this conference. About a month ago in our Thursday temple meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, I listened as

President Hinckley offered a simple, sincere prayer for spiritual guidance. The answer to his heartfelt prayer has now been presented to all of us.

Do we see the pattern of revelation in the lives of prophets? Are the threads of that pattern also woven through our lives?

We know that the pattern centers on the Atonement.<sup>14</sup> We receive the blessings of the Atonement when we repent of our sins and keep the commandments. This we covenanted to do when we were baptized, and we renew that covenant each week as we partake of the sacrament. As we continue in righteousness, we qualify ourselves to say with Samuel, "Speak, [Lord]; for thy servant heareth."<sup>15</sup> And the Lord answers, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."<sup>16</sup>

We prepare to receive personal revelation as the prophets do, by studying the scriptures, fasting, praying, and building faith. Faith is the key. Remember Joseph's preparation for the First Vision:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. . . .

"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."<sup>17</sup>

By unwavering faith, we learn for ourselves that "it is by faith that miracles are wrought."<sup>18</sup>

Generally, those miracles will not be physical demonstrations of God's power—parting of the Red Sea, raising of the dead, breaking down prison walls, or the appearance of heavenly messengers. By design, most miracles are spiritual demonstrations of God's power—tender mercies gently bestowed through impressions, ideas, feelings of assurance, solutions to problems, strength to meet challenges, and comfort to bear disappointments and sorrow.

These miracles come to us as we endure what the scriptures call a "trial of [our] faith."<sup>19</sup> Sometimes that trial is the time it takes before an answer is

received. When President David O. McKay was a young man herding cattle, he sought a witness, but it did not come until many years later while serving his mission in Scotland. He wrote, “It was a manifestation for which as a doubting youth I had secretly prayed . . . on hillside and in meadow. It was an assurance to me that sincere prayer is answered ‘some-time, somewhere.’”<sup>20</sup>

The answer may be “Not now—be patient and wait.”

I testify that on the hillside or the meadow, in the grove or closet, now or in the eternities to come, the Savior’s words to each of us will be fulfilled: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”<sup>21</sup> While we are commanded not to seek after signs, we are commanded to “seek . . . earnestly the best gifts.”<sup>22</sup> These gifts include the Holy Ghost and personal revelation. That revelation will come “line upon line, precept upon precept,” as the Savior said, and “unto him that receiveth [the Lord] will give more.”<sup>23</sup>

As we go forth from this conference, I call upon each of us to seek more and receive more of the Spirit of God. The Savior prayed that His disciples in the New World would receive that Spirit. Then, as an example to all of us, He departed from His disciples and in prayer thanked His Heavenly Father for bestowing it.<sup>24</sup> Let us follow His example and pray for the Spirit of God, giving thanks for its marvelous blessings in our lives.

I bear my special witness that Jesus Christ lives and leads His Church through a living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. I know—I know—that President Hinckley leads this Church by revelation. In the words of Alma, “Behold, I say unto you [these things] are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days. . . . And now I do know of



myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me . . . ; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.”<sup>25</sup>

That each of us may receive that Spirit, obtain the blessings of personal revelation, and know for ourselves that these things are true is my heartfelt prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. Alma 8:24.
2. John 17:3.
3. See 1 Corinthians 2:11–16.
4. Quoted in Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (1884), 8.
5. D&C 9:8.
6. See Moses 5:4–11.
7. See Genesis 18:23–33; Exodus 3:1–3; 32:31–33; Moses 1:1–2, 24; 6:26–37; 7:2–4; Abraham 1:1–2, 15–19.
8. See 1 Kings 19:11–12.
9. See Daniel 2:16–20.
10. See Matthew 16:15–17.
11. See 1 Nephi 2:16; 11:1–2; for additional examples, see Mosiah 3:1–4; Alma 43:23; Helaman 7–8; 10:2–4; 3 Nephi 1:10–13; Mormon 8:34–35; Ether 3:1–6, 13–14, 25.
12. See “Letter of the First Presidency Regarding Revelation on the Priesthood,” *Tambuli*, July 1978, 31; “Revelation on Priesthood Accepted, Church Officers Sustained,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 16.
13. See “Some Thoughts on Temples, Retention of Converts, and Missionary Service,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 49.
14. See Acts 9; Mosiah 27; Alma 36.
15. 1 Samuel 3:10.
16. Matthew 13:16.
17. James 1:5–6.
18. Moroni 7:37.
19. Ether 12:6.
20. Quoted in Francis M. Gibbons, *David O. McKay: Apostle to the World, Prophet of God* (1986), 50.
21. Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; see also 3 Nephi 14:7.
22. D&C 46:8.
23. 2 Nephi 28:30.
24. See 3 Nephi 19:19–23.
25. Alma 5:46.