

“I Will Not Leave You Comfortless”



The Lord's promise that we can be truly comforted is more significant than we know.

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All of us who believe in Jesus Christ take some consolation in the assurances of the Savior that He will assist us in times of need—that He will bring us comfort. While we accept this basic assertion, we may also be a little like His initial Apostles who, while believing in Him, were confused or unsure about what some of His teachings really meant in their everyday lives. Stated another way, even the Apostles were uncomfortable sometimes.

As Jesus began to teach His followers about the necessity of His leaving them for a time, their discomfort increased. Sensing this, He made specific promises to them that He would eventually return and also that He would provide them with a “Comforter” in His absence (see John 14:16–18).

Members of the Church in our day receive a similar promise as we partake of the sacrament weekly. We reverently partake of the bread in remembrance of the body of the Son and witness to Heavenly Father that we are willing to take upon us the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, with the promise we make to always remember Him and keep His

commandments. If we do so, then we have the promise in return that we “may always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77). In my judgment, this is real comfort!

Most of us don’t dispute the principle or even its promise. Rather, we accept it but also may worry about how to really and reliably cause it to happen in our lives. We can narrow the gap between our doctrinal understandings and our personal applications of the doctrine. What I suggest will likely be helpful with any number of these kinds of issues, but I want to discuss what we can do to realize the Savior’s promise “I will not leave you comfortless” (John 14:18).

Qualifying for Spiritual Comfort

In recent training meetings with General Authorities, President James E. Faust talked about the necessity of our leaders having the Spirit to guide them. What he said also should apply to each of us. He made some suggestions about how we can more surely qualify to receive the blessings of the Spirit or to be spiritually comforted.

First, we need to live so that we can merit the guidance of the Spirit. This means that we



need to repent regularly of the mistakes we make and the sins we commit so that we are not living with unresolved issues that impede spiritual promptings.

For many of our missteps, our repentance can be private or limited to those we have injured. For particularly serious offenses, it is necessary that we confess to our bishop and seek his assistance in the necessary repentance process. The inspired order of the first principles and ordinances of the gospel found in the fourth article of faith reminds us that faith and repentance not only precede the ordinances of baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost but also must come before the remission of sins is possible and before constant ministrations of the Spirit in our daily lives can occur.

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Second, we must never be complacent but must always try harder. I am not suggesting that we should become victims of perfectionism, which can by itself be debilitating. *I am* suggesting that each of us really can do better in most areas of our lives as we attempt to keep our thoughts and actions more consistent with the Savior's example and direction for us.

Third, we need to exercise more faith. President Faust used the example of the children of Israel led by Joshua who were required to carry the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan River. The miracle of holding back the water so that they could pass on dry ground with the Ark of the Covenant did not occur until the soles of their feet actually touched the water (see Joshua 3:13). Exercising faith is not easy work, and we are prone to forget that achieving the benefits of faith actually requires that we exercise faith.

Fourth, we need to purge ourselves of personal aggrandizement. In other words, we need to do what is right because it is right and not to bring attention or undue credit to ourselves. Remember the Savior's counsel on giving alms: "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know

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what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:3–4). We need to do the right things for the right reasons.

Fifth, we must beware of pride and flattery. Satan knows that most are not likely to commit major crimes or even the most serious sins. But he also knows that most of us are easily tempted by pride or addicted to flattery. We must be careful to keep both feet on the ground.

Sixth, we should be humble and submissive. This does not mean to be passive or "wobbly," but it does mean that we should always remember this counsel: "Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answers to thy prayers" (D&C 112:10).

Seventh, we should always try to do that which is good for others, including praying for and serving them. Remember that the Golden Rule is old but not outdated!

Eighth, we need to learn to enjoy the fruits of the Spirit. I believe you know how you feel when you have really prayed but then also have really listened and pondered. You know how you have felt when you have borne testimony and it has touched another life as well as your own. You know how good you feel when you are able to go to the temple with your life right and your heart turned to the Lord and the Spirit. If you carefully evaluate your life and your experience, you will be surprised to recognize how often and how significantly you have been blessed by the interventions of the Holy Ghost.

Ninth, we should do works of righteousness. I could give you examples or applications, but you already know what they are. Begin modestly with more regular scripture study, even if for only a few minutes a day. If you do not pay fast offerings regularly, resolve to do so even if you can afford to give only the cost of an apple or an egg. When you begin to think a little, your list of righteous works that you can really accomplish now will grow in an amazing fashion.

I would caution us all to avoid making this too complicated. It really is not! You usually know what it is you need to do when you carefully and prayerfully think through the process of obtaining the direction of the Spirit.



Y*ou can enjoy the fruits of the Spirit when you go to the temple with your life right and your heart turned to the Lord.*

Discerning Promptings

The question that we might often have, which I believe is not only understandable but also honorable, is “How can I really know when I am being directed or led by the Spirit?” You will know as you become more closely familiar with the ministrations of the Holy Spirit. It is possible, however, to be confused on occasion, even with the best of intentions. I invite your careful consideration of the suggestions President Faust made. If your life and your heart are right, you can be more comfortable that you are on the right track.

Let me also offer a test you might apply as you seek guidance on a particular matter or as you feel impressions coming, even when you did not consciously seek them. While you may still have questions after you apply these four criteria, you will be able to know when feelings have not come from the proper source. If the answer to the four questions that I suggest you apply to your promptings is always yes, then you can continue to pray, ponder, and seek confirmation until you are finally sure. If the answer to any of the four questions is no, then you can have confidence that the feeling you have had is not from the Holy Ghost.

1. Is the feeling or impression you have consistent with the pronouncements of the Lord found in the scriptures? The Lord has given us wonderful and extensive guidance in the scriptures. Because the focus of these inspired writings is on doctrine and principle, the specific application

is usually left with us. For example, we know that keeping the Sabbath Day holy is a commandment, but how we do it, in part—and even in some places in the world, when we do it—is left to our best judgment. We need to know the doctrines well and be exposed to them regularly so that we are not misled. Most individuals who believe that they have doctrinal issues with the Church do not really know the doctrine!

2. Is your inspiration consistent with the statements and counsel of the living prophets? It is a serious mistake to take the counsel of living prophets lightly or to disregard it. We need to know what they have said and thus we have the responsibility to listen to general conference, read their words in the Church magazines, and pay attention to their statements and pronouncements. A rather common error made even by some who consider themselves faithful members is to say that “the Brethren really do not understand my circumstances and therefore their directions do not apply to me.” A much better approach is to have the attitude, “given the experience and closeness to the Lord of His servants, I will try to understand and apply to my own situation their counsel and direction.” When we take that approach, we will almost always understand and appreciate the wisdom of their direction in helping us avoid serious error.



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3. Is the prompting you feel consistent with your own area of responsibility?

It is a too common misjudgment to develop feelings or express opinions that are outside the scope of our own stewardship. A bishop receives revelation only for his ward, not another. Only the President of the Church receives the Lord’s direction for the entire Church. A father and mother are entitled to divine direction related to their own family, but the neighbors are not instructed through them. We will frequently see others’ mistakes and achievements—as they will see ours—but revelation is always restricted to our own proper sphere.

4. Have you respected the agency of others? On occasion we may receive promptings that affect us and may also involve others. This opens the potential for confusion unless we clearly understand the doctrines and principles of agency and revelation. As missionaries, many of us have felt prompted that certain investigators know what we have taught is true and that they should accept baptism and confirmation. This is a sweet experience that often inspires us to work and pray harder to assist the investigators with their challenges. Ultimately, however, the investigator must also receive the impression and act on it. However impressive the spiritual feelings of the missionary, the investigator must experience the “mighty change of heart” for the conversion

to really occur. Missionaries are required to provide the environment in part and share their testimonies, but they are not authorized to dictate individual decisions or impose their own impressions that would violate the agency of another.

Patience in Progress

A few passages of scripture may help us in our thinking. The Lord has said, “I will hasten my work in its time” (D&C 88:73). He has also said, “But all things must come to pass in their time” (D&C 64:32). We need to hasten when we can but must also recognize the need for patience in our progress. Likewise, we need to prioritize and appropriately stretch ourselves as we strive to improve but also remember the Lord’s counsel that you “do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided” (D&C 10:4).

The Lord’s promise that we can be truly comforted is more significant than we know. The gift of the Holy Ghost is one of the fruits of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ that can make a reality of our plea:

Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,

Help me find the way.

Teach me all that I must do

To live with him someday.

(“I Am a Child of God,” *Hymns*, no. 301) ■



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

1. Display a bowl of sugar and a bowl of salt. As a family, list ways to determine which is which. Compare this list with the four questions in the section “Discerning Promptings.” Have family members share how they can know when the Spirit is influencing them.

2. Have family members draw or share examples of times when they have felt the influence of the Spirit. Invite all to share their experiences. Bear your testimony of the importance of expressing gratitude for spiritual experiences.