

Opening the Heavens

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Of the Seventy



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Do you want to feel the love of God more powerfully in your life? Do you want to feel more in tune with His Spirit? Do you want to have the heavens opened to you daily?

There is a way you can feel a daily renewal of God’s everlasting love and drink from “the fountain of living waters” (1 Nephi 11:25). It follows a pattern set by the Prophet Joseph Smith when he went to a grove of trees early one morning in 1820 seeking answers to his questions. I speak of a morning devotional time spent in prayer, meditation, and scripture study. If you have a devotional every morning, even if only for a few minutes, you will be deeply blessed. I know this to be true.

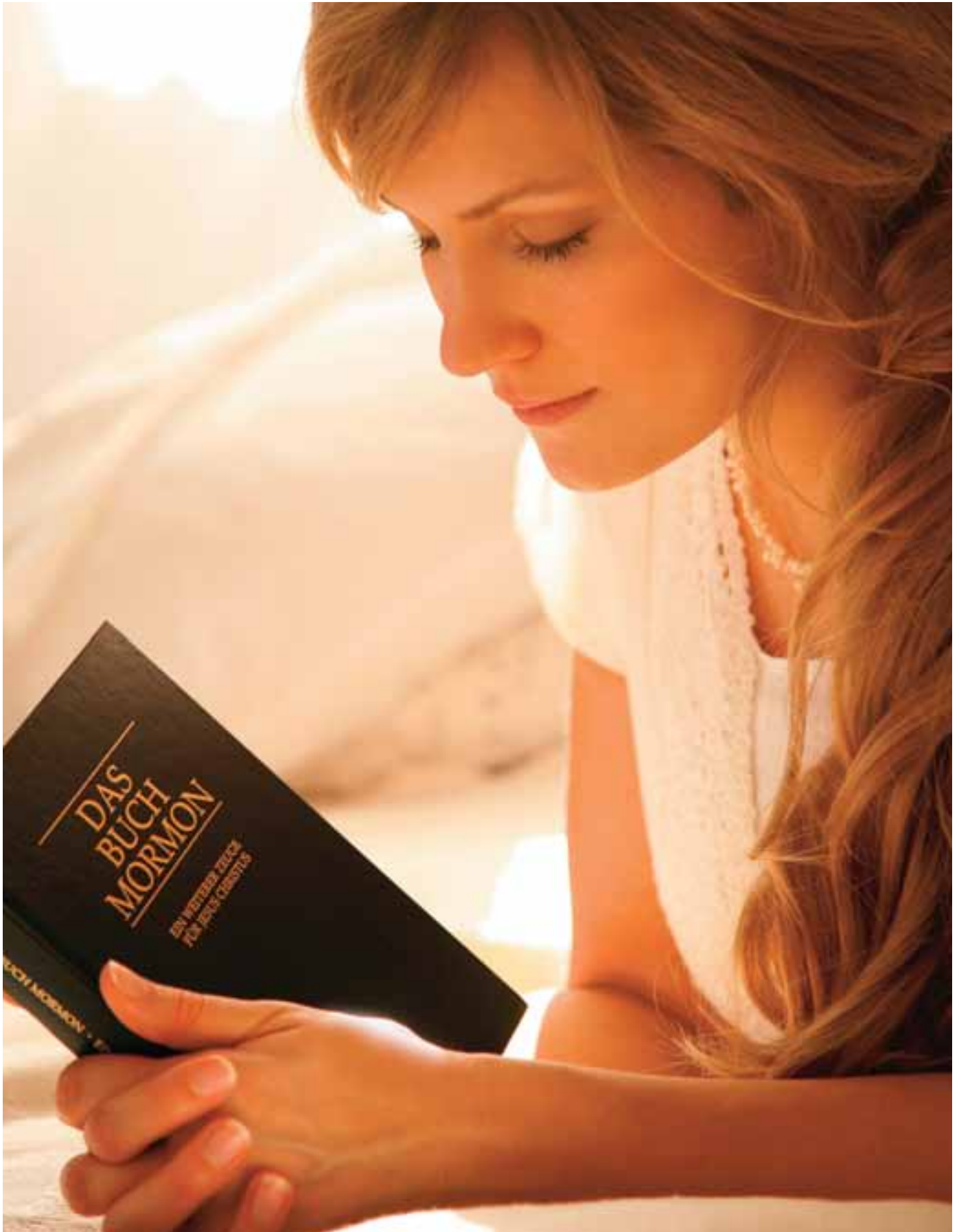
Escaping the Noise and the Tumult

The Prophet Joseph Smith once made this interesting observation about opening the heavens: “The manifestations of the gift of the Holy Ghost, the ministering of angels, or the development of the power, majesty or glory of God were very seldom manifested publicly, . . . but most generally when angels have come, or God has revealed Himself, it

has been to individuals in private, in their chamber; in the wilderness or fields, and that generally without noise or tumult.”¹

Unfortunately, modern life is filled with noise and tumult. Our society provides so many distractions that unless we make the time and effort to extract ourselves from them, the voice of the Spirit may not get through to us. That is why on a spring day in 1820, Joseph Smith left his home early to enter a grove of trees so he could pray in quiet seclusion about a question of religion. The answer came with astonishing clarity when both Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him, ushering in the dispensation of the fulness of times (see Joseph Smith—History 1:14–19).

In similar ways, the key to gaining the spiritual strength we need lies in what President Thomas S. Monson once described as entering a “sacred grove” of our own. He was teaching bishops, but the counsel applies to all members of the Church: “Every bishop needs a sacred grove to which he can retire to meditate and to pray for guidance. Mine was our old ward chapel. I could not begin to count the occasions when on a dark night





at a late hour I would make my way to the stand of this building where I was blessed, confirmed, ordained, taught, and eventually called to preside. The chapel was dimly lit by the streetlight in front; not a sound would be heard, no intruder to disturb. With my hand on the pulpit I would kneel and share with Him above my thoughts, my concerns, my problems.”²

Of course, these “sacred grove” moments do not duplicate what happened to the Prophet Joseph in the Sacred Grove. We don’t enter into these devotional times expecting to see the Father and the Son any more than Joseph Smith did. But we can trust that Heavenly Father will answer our prayers; how He answers them, however, is up to Him.

There is great power in setting aside quiet, prayerful, meditative time. In the stillness that accompanies our pondering, we can come to know the Father and His Son (see Psalm 46:10; D&C 101:16).

The Power of Morning Prayer and Scripture Study

When I served as a mission president in Hawaii, I had many opportunities to speak with young elders and sisters struggling to become better missionaries. I remember one missionary who became deeply discouraged. His missionary work had become unbearable to him, and he started doubting his testimony. He came to me with the request to send him home.

Instead, I asked him to follow the example of Nephi in pondering and praying about his concerns and desires (see 1 Nephi 10:17; 11:1). This is a practice I have followed for many years and a practice many other General Authorities of the Church follow.

I asked the missionary to go to his apartment and do the following:

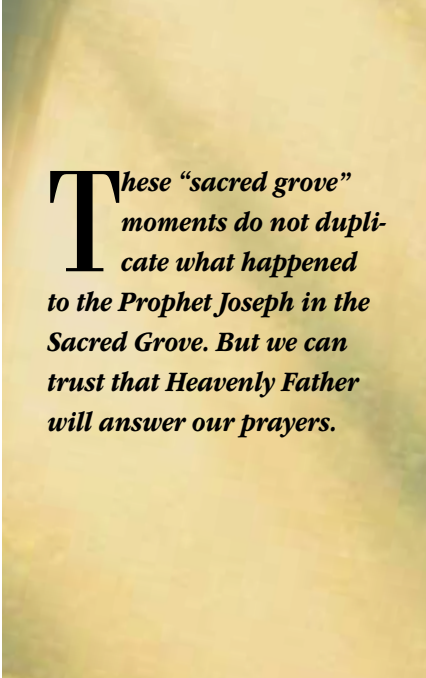
- Rise from his bed early—in his case, a few minutes before 6:30 a.m.
- Exercise for a few minutes.
- Wash his body and shave—make himself clean.
- Dress for the day.
- Go to a quiet place inside his apartment.
- Kneel, subdue his spirit before Heavenly Father, and call upon Him. Talk with Him in reverent prayer.
- Wait for His holy inspiration, pondering the scriptures or a recent general conference talk and think about the specific problems he faced.

I promised this young elder that if he did this and immersed himself in the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, for a few minutes every day, he would experience feelings of joy and would receive strength to go on.³

A few days later he came to see me. His eyes filled with tears as he told me of his experiences during his early-morning devotional time. He served wonderfully as a servant of the Lord and completed an honorable mission. His wife recently told me that he continues to rise early to have private time with his Heavenly Father.

I taught this same principle to each of the missionaries over whom I had the privilege to preside. I was concerned that we were not doing all we could to bring the light of the gospel to the Hawaiian people. Within a relatively short time after the missionaries started this practice, the number of referrals we received from members increased, teaching opportunities went up, and the number of baptisms in our mission doubled and then tripled. All of this happened because the missionaries' efforts were magnified by power of the Holy Spirit.

I know from personal experience the spiritual power that can flow into your life if you follow this practice.



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You will feel the love of God and a cleansing, purifying regeneration of your spirit (see 1 Nephi 11:22–25; D&C 50:28–29). You will experience moments of revelation, when the Spirit whispers to your spirit what you need to do to be a better father, a better mother, a better son or daughter, a better disciple of Jesus Christ.

Finding Solutions to Everyday Problems

I know a good member of the Church who has a successful marriage and six beautiful children. She is trying to be the best companion she can be to her husband and the best mother she can be to her children. She is an

effective Young Women leader in her ward. But sometimes she feels she isn't good enough. She becomes discouraged and feels an emptiness of soul.

She came to me one day with her husband and described the powerlessness she feels at such times. She had discussed her concern with her priesthood leaders and especially her husband but had yet to find relief. I suggested that after her husband left for work and their children were in school, she find a place in her home and there reverently and humbly visit with Heavenly Father. I suggested that she express her gratitude to God for her blessings and then wait for His holy inspiration. She committed to do this daily.

Sometime later I received a letter from her. She said that as she went to her knees in those quiet moments each day and dropped her burden at Heavenly Father's feet, He took her concerns away. She felt of her great worth to Him and learned more of “the healer's art”⁴ as He healed her soul.

Greater Understanding of the Atonement

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A number of years ago, Elder Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had an experience while visiting the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana, USA. At the time, he needed inspiration and strength to help the people in that community.

One night he had a dream in which he was ushered into a room, where he saw “the most glorious being I have ever conceived of, and was taken forward to be introduced to Him. . . . He smiled, called my name, and stretched out His hands toward me. If I live to be a million years old I shall never forget that smile. He put His arms around me and kissed me, as He took me into His bosom, and He blessed me until my whole being was thrilled. As He finished I fell at His feet, and there saw

the marks of the nails; and as I kissed them, with deep joy swelling through my whole being, I felt that I was in heaven indeed. The feeling . . . then was: Oh! If I could . . . go into His presence and receive the feeling that I *then* had . . . , I would give everything that I am and ever hope to be!

“I know—as I know that I live—that He lives.”⁵

I don’t know if you will have that same kind of experience in this life. But I do know that if you continue to meet daily with Heavenly Father in the private chambers of your home, you will come to know Him and our Savior in ways you couldn’t otherwise (see 3 Nephi 19:16–23, 25–29). May you do so and have the heavens open to you in whatever glorious ways your Heavenly Father has prepared for you. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 121; see also *History of the Church*, 5:30–31.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “The Bishop—Center Stage in Welfare,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 90.
3. See “Thy Spirit, Lord, Has Stirred Our Souls,” *Hymns*, no. 157.
4. See “Lord, I Would Follow Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 220.
5. In Melvin R. Ballard, *Melvin J. Ballard: Crusader for Righteousness* (1966), 66.