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A Child's Guiding Gift

How do we teach our children to kick off worldly influences and trust the Spirit?

A young father was literally sinking. He, his two children, and his father-in-law had gone for a walk around a lake. They were surrounded by majestic pine-covered mountains, and the sky was blue, filled with soft white clouds, emanating beauty and serenity. When the children grew hot and tired, the two men decided to put the children on their backs and swim the short distance across the lake.

It seemed easy—until the moment when the father began to feel pulled down, everything becoming so heavy. Water pushed him to the bottom of the lake, and a frantic feeling came over him. How was he going to keep afloat—and do so with his precious young daughter on his back?

His voice disappeared in the distance as he called out; his father-in-law was too far away to answer a desperate plea for help. He felt alone and helpless.

Can you imagine feeling as alone as he felt, unable to reach anything to hold on to and struggling in a desperate situation for your life and your child? Unfortunately, all of us experience some degree of this feeling when we are in situations where we desperately need to find help in order to survive and to save those we love.

Near panic, he realized that his water-saturated shoes were weighing him down. While working to stay afloat, he began to attempt to get his heavy shoes off his feet. But it was as if they were held on with suction. The laces were swollen with water, cinching the grip even tighter.

In what may have been his last moment of desperation, he managed to pry the shoes from his feet, and at last the shoes released their hold, quickly falling to the bottom of the lake. Free from the heavy weight that had been dragging him down, he immediately propelled himself and his daughter upward. He could now swim forward, moving toward safety on the other side of the lake.

At times we may all feel as if we are drowning. Life can be heavy. We live in “a noisy and busy world. . . . If we are not careful, the things of this world can [drown] out the things of the Spirit.”¹

How do we follow the example of this father and kick off some of the weight of the world we carry, so we can keep our children's heads and our own worried minds above the water?



How can we, as Paul counseled, “lay aside every weight”?² How can we prepare our children for the day when they can no longer cling to us and our testimonies—when they are the ones swimming?

An answer comes when we recognize this divine source of strength. It is a source often underestimated, yet it can be used daily to lighten our

load and guide our precious children. That source is the guiding gift of the Holy Ghost.

At age eight, children can experience baptism. They learn about and make a covenant with God. Those they love surround them as they are immersed and come out of the font with a feeling of great joy. Then they receive the unspeakable gift of the

Holy Ghost, a gift that may guide them constantly as they live for that blessing.

Elder David A. Bednar said: “The simplicity of [confirmation] may cause us to overlook its significance. These four words—‘Receive the Holy Ghost’—are not a passive pronouncement; rather, they constitute a priesthood injunction—an authoritative admonition to act and not simply to be acted upon.”³

Children have a natural desire to do good and to be good. We can feel their innocence, their purity. They also have a great sensitivity to the still, small voice.

In 3 Nephi 26, the Savior showed us the spiritual capacity of children:

“He did loose their tongues, and they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people. . . .

“ . . . They both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things.”⁴

How do we as parents increase the spiritual capacity of our little ones? How do we teach them to kick off worldly influences and trust the Spirit when we are not with them and they are alone in the deep waters of their lives?

Let me share with you some ideas.

First, we can bring to our children’s attention when they are hearing and feeling the Spirit. Let’s go back in time to the Old Testament to see how Eli did just this for Samuel.

Young Samuel twice heard a voice and ran to Eli, saying, “Here am I.”

“I called not,” responded Eli.

But “Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.”

By the third time, Eli perceived that the Lord had called Samuel and told





Samuel to say, “Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.”⁵

Samuel was beginning to feel, recognize, and hearken to the Lord’s voice. But this young boy didn’t start to understand until Eli facilitated this recognition. And having been taught, Samuel could become more familiar with the still, small voice.

Second, we can prepare our homes and our children to feel the still, small voice. “Many teachers of foreign languages believe that children learn a language best in ‘immersion programs,’ in which they are surrounded by other speakers of the language and called upon to speak it themselves. They learn not just to say words, but to speak fluently and even to think in the new language. The [best] ‘immersion’ setting for a spiritual education is in the home, where spiritual principles can form the basis for daily living.”⁶

“Thou shalt teach [the Lord’s words] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”⁷ Immersing our families in the Spirit will keep our children’s hearts open to His influence.

Third, we can help our children understand how the Spirit speaks to them. Joseph Smith taught, “If He comes to a little child, He will adapt himself to the language and capacity of a little child.”⁸ One mother discovered that since children learn differently—some learn visually, auditorily, tactilely, or kinesthetically—the more she observed her children, the more she realized that the Holy Ghost teaches her children in ways they each learn best.⁹

Another mother shared an experience of helping her children learn to recognize the Spirit. “Sometimes,” she wrote, “[children] don’t realize that a recurring thought, a feeling of comfort after they cry, or remembering something at just the right time are all ways that the Holy Ghost communicates [with them].” She continues, “I’m teaching my [children] to focus on what they feel [and act on it].”¹⁰

Feeling and recognizing the Spirit will bring spiritual capacity into our children’s lives, and the voice they come to know will become clearer and clearer to them. It will be as Elder Richard G. Scott said: “As you gain experience and success in being

guided by the Spirit, your confidence in the impressions you feel can become more certain than your dependence on what you see or hear.”¹¹

We need not fear as we see our children enter the waters of life, for we have helped them rid themselves of worldly weight. We have taught them to live for the guiding gift of the Spirit. This gift will continue to lighten the weight they carry and lead them back to their heavenly home if they live for it and follow its promptings. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Unspeakable Gift,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2003, 27.
2. Hebrews 12:1.
3. David A. Bednar, “Receive the Holy Ghost,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 95.
4. 3 Nephi 26:14, 16.
5. See 1 Samuel 3:4–10.
6. C. Terry and Susan L. Warner, “Helping Children Hear the Still, Small Voice,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1994, 19; *Tambuli*, Aug. 1994, 27.
7. Deuteronomy 6:7.
8. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 3:392.
9. See Merrilee Browne Boyack, “Helping Children Recognize the Holy Ghost,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Dec. 2013, 10–12.
10. Irinna Danielson, “How to Answer the Toughest ‘Whys’ of Life,” Oct. 30, 2015, lds.org/blog.
11. Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Spiritual Guidance,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2009, 7.