



# THE QUEST FOR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE



BY PRESIDENT BOYD K. PACKER

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I will tell you of an experience I had before I was a General Authority that affected me profoundly. I sat on a plane next to a professed atheist who pressed his disbelief in God so urgently that I bore my testimony to him. "You are wrong," I said. "There is a God. I *know* He lives!"

He protested, "You don't *know*. Nobody knows that! You can't *know* it!" When I would not yield, the atheist, who was an attorney, asked perhaps the ultimate question on the subject of testimony. "All right," he said in a sneering, condescending way, "you say you know. Tell me *how* you know."

When I attempted to answer, even though I held advanced academic degrees, I was helpless to communicate.

When I used the words *Spirit* and *witness*, the atheist responded, "I don't know what you are talking about." The words *prayer*, *discernment*, and *faith* were equally meaningless to him. "You see," he said, "you don't really know. If you did, you would be able to tell me *how* you know."

I felt, perhaps, that I had borne my testimony to him unwisely and was at a loss as to what to do. Then came the experience! Something came into my mind. And I mention here a statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith: "A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas . . . and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

Such an idea came into my mind, and I said to the atheist, "Let me ask if you know what salt tastes like."

"Of course I do," was his reply.

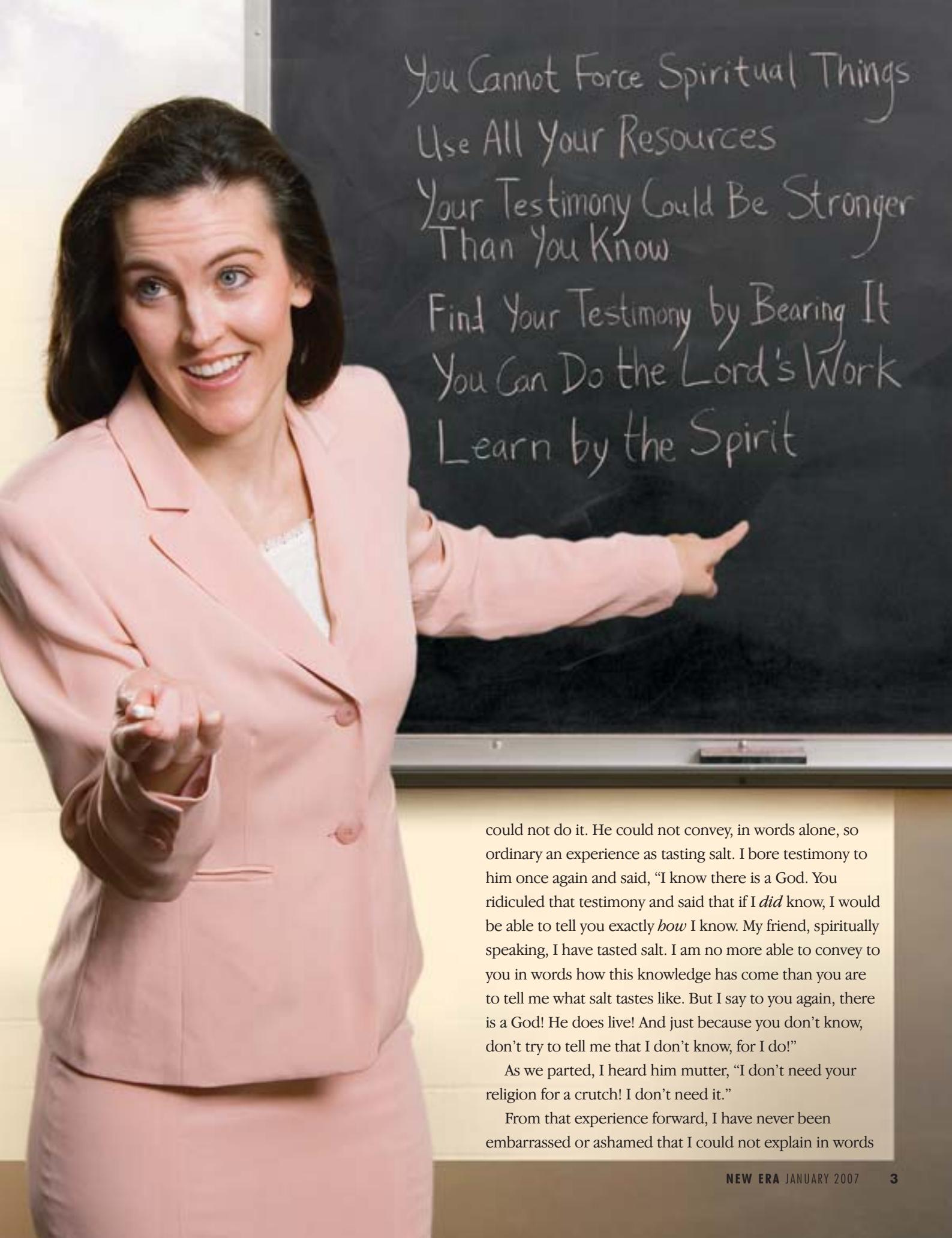
"Then," I said, "assuming that I have never tasted salt, explain to me just what it tastes like."

After some thought, he said, "Well, I, uh, it is not sweet and it is not sour."

"You've told me what it isn't, not what it is."

After several attempts, of course, he

***There is a God!  
He does live! Even  
if it is difficult to  
explain in words  
alone how I know  
that, I know through  
the power of the  
Holy Spirit.***

A woman with dark hair, wearing a pink blazer over a white lace-trimmed top, stands in front of a chalkboard. She is smiling and pointing her right index finger towards the board. Her left hand is tucked into her pocket. The chalkboard behind her is covered with handwritten, cursive-style text in white chalk. The text reads:

You Cannot Force Spiritual Things  
Use All Your Resources  
Your Testimony Could Be Stronger  
Than You Know  
Find Your Testimony by Bearing It  
You Can Do the Lord's Work  
Learn by the Spirit

could not do it. He could not convey, in words alone, so ordinary an experience as tasting salt. I bore testimony to him once again and said, "I know there is a God. You ridiculed that testimony and said that if I *did* know, I would be able to tell you exactly *how* I know. My friend, spiritually speaking, I have tasted salt. I am no more able to convey to you in words how this knowledge has come than you are to tell me what salt tastes like. But I say to you again, there is a God! He does live! And just because you don't know, don't try to tell me that I don't know, for I do!"

As we parted, I heard him mutter, "I don't need your religion for a crutch! I don't need it."

From that experience forward, I have never been embarrassed or ashamed that I could not explain in words



***We should not expect revelation to replace the spiritual or temporal intelligence that we have already received. Nor should we expect that the Spirit will get our attention by shouting or shaking us. Rather it whispers, as it did with the prophet Samuel.***

alone everything I know spiritually. The Apostle Paul said it this way:

“We speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:13–14).

#### **The Still, Small Voice**

The voice of the Spirit is described in the scriptures as being neither “loud” nor “harsh” (3 Nephi 11:3). It is “not a voice of thunder, neither . . . a voice of a great tumultuous noise,” but rather, “a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper,” and it can “pierce even to the very soul” (Helaman 5:30) and “cause [the heart] to burn” (3 Nephi 11:3). Remember, Elijah found the voice of the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but was a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12).

The Spirit does not get our attention by shouting or shaking us with a heavy hand. Rather it whispers. It caresses so gently that if we are preoccupied we may not feel it at all.

Occasionally, it will press just firmly enough for us to

pay heed. But most of the time, if we do not heed the gentle feeling, the Spirit will withdraw and wait until we come seeking and listening and say in our manner and expression, like Samuel of ancient times, “Speak [Lord], for thy servant heareth” (1 Samuel 3:10).

#### **You Cannot Force Spiritual Things**

There is something else to learn. A testimony is not thrust upon you; a testimony grows. We become taller in testimony like we grow taller in physical stature; we hardly know it happens because it comes by growth.

You cannot force spiritual things. Such words as *compel*, *coerce*, *constrain*, *pressure*, and *demand* do not describe our privileges with the Spirit. You can no more force the Spirit to respond than you can force a bean to sprout or an egg to hatch before its time. You can create a climate to foster growth, nourish, and protect; but you cannot force or compel: you must await the growth.

Do not be impatient to gain great spiritual knowledge. Let it grow, help it grow, but do not force it or you will open the way to be misled.

#### **Use All Your Resources**

We are expected to use the light and knowledge we already possess to work out our lives. We should not need a revelation to instruct us to be up and about our duty, for we have been told to do that already in the scriptures; nor should we expect revelation to replace the spiritual or temporal intelligence that we have already received—only to extend it. We must go about our life in an ordinary, workaday way, following the routines and rules and regulations that govern life.

Rules and regulations and commandments are valuable protection. If we need revealed instruction to alter our course, it will be waiting along the way as we arrive at the point of need. The counsel to be “anxiously engaged” is wise counsel indeed (see D&C 58:27).

## Your Testimony Could Be Stronger

### Than You Know

Now, do not feel hesitant or ashamed if you do not know everything. Nephi said, “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17).

There may be more power in your testimony than even you realize. The Lord said to the Nephites:

“Whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were

baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, *and they knew it not*” (3 Nephi 9:20; emphasis added).

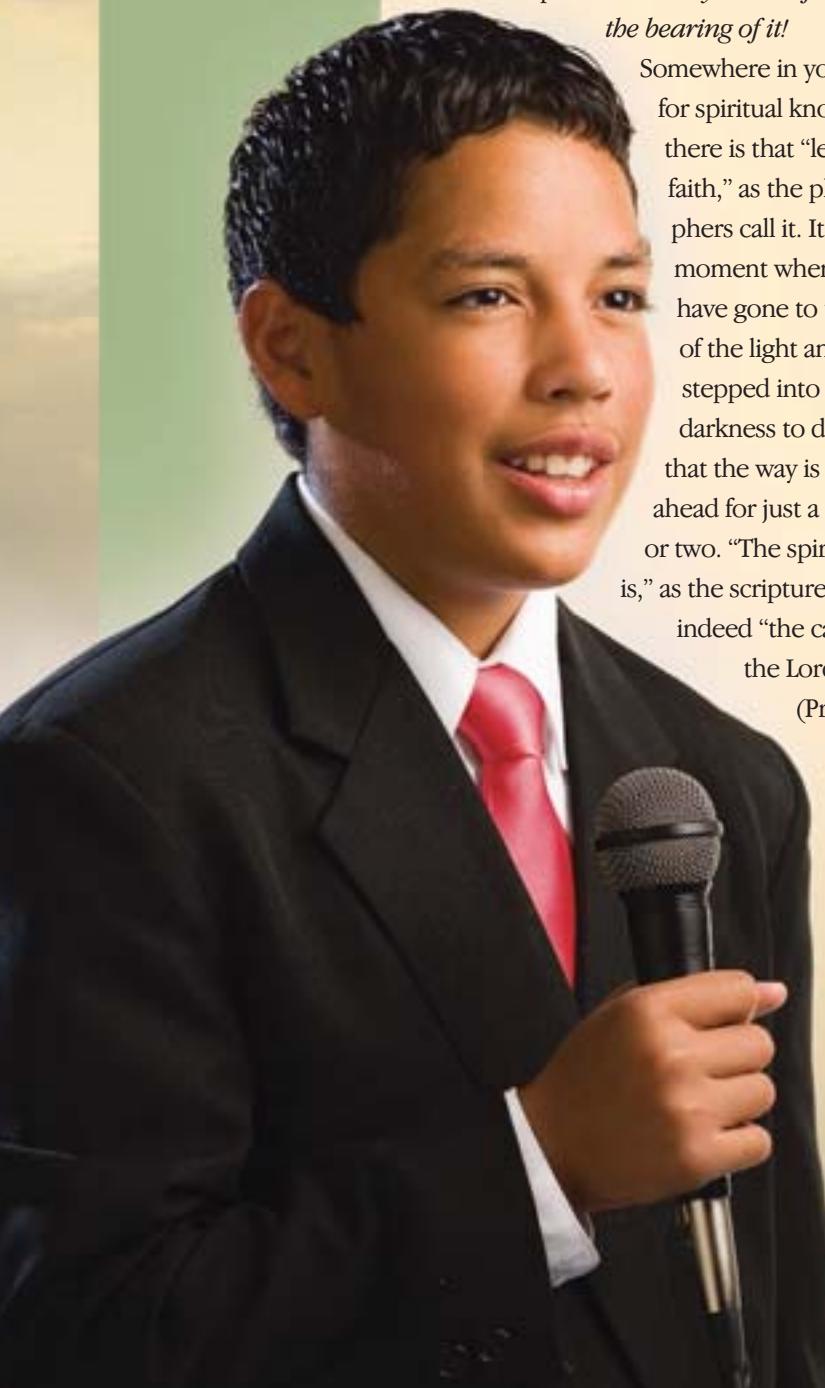
Several years ago I met one of our sons in the mission field in a distant part of the world. He had been there for a year. His first question was this: “Dad, what can I do to grow spiritually? I have tried so hard to grow spiritually, and I just haven’t made any progress.”

That was his perception: to me it was otherwise. I could hardly believe the maturity, the spiritual growth that he had gained in just one year. He “knew it not,” for it had come as growth, not as a startling spiritual experience.

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### Find Your Testimony by Bearing It

It is not unusual to have a missionary say, “How can I bear testimony until I get one? How can I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the gospel is true? If I do not have such a testimony, would that not be dishonest?”

Oh, if I could teach you this one principle: *a testimony is to be found in the bearing of it!*

Somewhere in your quest for spiritual knowledge, there is that “leap of faith,” as the philosophers call it. It is the moment when you have gone to the edge of the light and stepped into the darkness to discover that the way is lighted ahead for just a footprint or two. “The spirit of man is,” as the scripture says,

indeed “the candle of the Lord”

(Proverbs 20:27).

## FIRE IN MY HEART

BY TYLER ANDRUS

I took me until I was 15 to publicly bear my testimony. I had never doubted the truthfulness of the gospel, but my first year of seminary gave me the beginnings of my own testimony of the Church and the Book of Mormon.

During the summer after that first year of seminary, our stake held a youth conference at a campsite. The conference concluded with a testimony meeting in which I had no intention of bearing my testimony. Soon the Spirit began to whisper that I needed to get up and bear my testimony. I suppressed it, but I had a continued feeling that I should get up. I finally decided that I would bear my testimony, and as I did a warm feeling came over me so much so that I felt a burning in my bosom. I had a fire inside my heart.

I have since learned the importance of bearing my testimony, as every time I do my testimony grows. I will continue to make bearing my testimony a lifelong practice. **NE**

It is one thing to receive a witness from what you have read or what another has said; and that is a necessary beginning. It is quite another to have the Spirit confirm to you in your bosom that what you have testified is true. Can you not see that it will be supplied as you share it? As you give that which you have, there is a replacement, with increase!

To speak out is the test of your faith.

Bear testimony of the things that you hope are true, as an act of faith. It is something of an experiment, like the experiment that the prophet Alma proposed to his followers. We begin with faith—not with a perfect knowledge of things. That sermon in the 32nd chapter of Alma is one of the greatest

messages in holy writ, for it is addressed to the beginner, to the humble seeker. And it holds a key to a witness of the truth.

The Spirit and testimony of Christ will come to you for the most part when, and remain with you only if, you share it. In that process is the very essence of the gospel.

Is not this a perfect demonstration of Christianity? You cannot find it, nor keep it, nor enlarge it unless and until you are willing to share it. It is by giving it away freely that it becomes yours.

#### You Can Do the Lord's Work

There is great power in this work, spiritual power. The ordinary member of the Church, like you, having received the gift of the Holy Ghost by confirmation, can do the work of the Lord.

Years ago a friend told this experience. He was 17 years old and with his companion stopped at a cottage in the southern states. It was his first day in the mission field and was his first door. A gray-haired woman stood inside the screen and asked what they wanted. His companion nudged him to proceed. Frightened and somewhat tongue-tied, he finally blurted out, "As man is God once was, and as God is man may become."

Strangely enough, she was interested and asked where he got that. He answered, "It's in the Bible." She left the door for a moment, returned with her Bible. Commenting that she was a minister of a congregation, she handed it to him and said, "Here, show me."

He took the Bible and nervously thumbed back and forth through it. Finally he handed it back saying, "Here, I can't find it. I'm not even sure that it's in there, and even if it is, I couldn't find it. I'm just a poor farm boy from out in Cache Valley in Utah. I haven't had much training. But I come from a family where we live the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it's done so much for our family that I've accepted a call to come on a mission for two years, at my own expense,

to tell people how I feel about it."

After half a century, he could not hold back the tears as he told me how she pushed open the door and said, "Come in, my boy. I'd like to hear what you have to say."

#### Learn by the Spirit

There is so much more to say. I could speak of prayer, of fasting, of priesthood and authority, of worthiness—all essential to revelation. When they are understood, it all fits together—perfectly. But some things one must learn individually, and alone, taught by the Spirit.

I know by experience too sacred to touch upon that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that the gift of the Holy Ghost conferred upon us at our confirmation is a divine gift. The Book of Mormon is true! This is the Lord's Church! Jesus is the Christ! There presides over us a prophet of God! The day of miracles has not ceased, neither have angels ceased to appear and minister unto man! The spiritual gifts are with the Church. Choice among them is the gift of the Holy Ghost! **NE**

*From a talk given at a seminar for new mission presidents on June 25, 1982.*

#### NOTE

1. *History of the Church*, 3:381.

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