



LEARN AND DO

"The great task of life is to learn the will of the Lord and then do it."

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), "The Great Commandment—Love the Lord," *Ensign*, May 1988, 4.

Some choices are easy: What cereal should I eat? What shoes should I wear? Should I watch TV or read the scriptures?

But other choices are more difficult:

Where should I go to college? When should I go on a mission? Who should I marry?

How can we make these "big" decisions when we don't know what the future holds? After all, we don't want to make a mistake. But if we are going to become like our Heavenly Father, we *have* to learn how, with His guidance, to make important decisions for ourselves.

We know Heavenly Father loves us and wants us to succeed. So when we are having difficulty discerning His will, it may be

because we are doing something to complicate the process. Here are six barriers that might interfere with our ability to receive personal revelation.

1. We haven't made a decision.

Elder Merrill C. Oaks, formerly of the Seventy, tells of an experience he had while serving as a bishop. A young woman in his ward was praying to know if she should marry the young man she was dating, but she didn't feel she had received an answer.

Elder Oaks urged her to continue praying, but he also counseled her to decide for herself. "I told her she was expecting the Lord to make the decision for her," he said, "but He won't do that. Even a decision as important

REMOVING ROADBLOCKS

to Revelation

By LaNae Valentine

*Making decisions isn't always easy.
But it's easier when you get the
obstacles out of the way.*

as marriage requires us to exercise our own agency. . . .

“I told her she must exercise her own agency by studying it out in her mind, making a tentative decision, and then asking the Lord for a confirmation of her decision.”

She eventually got her answer, explaining, “I just began to feel [more and more positive], and I knew that my prayers were being answered” (“How to Get an Answer,” *New Era*, Aug. 2001, 47).

You can't always expect the Lord to reveal things to you if you haven't studied it out in your own mind. It's your job to work through the question, come to a conclusion, and then ask Him if He agrees with you.

2. We haven't learned how to listen.

In our noisy world, we rarely take the time to listen. Good listening, however, takes effort. After studying, pondering, and praying, listen carefully to the Spirit or you could miss the answers you are seeking. Find a quiet, still place where you can approach Heavenly Father in prayer.

President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles describes the Spirit as “a still, small voice—a voice that is felt rather than heard” (“The Cloven Tongues of Fire,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 8). The Spirit has difficulty impressing a busy, racing, anxious mind. More often than not, whisperings of the Spirit will go unheard if you are too preoccupied to listen. We each could ask ourselves: What could I turn off, turn down, or tune out in order to hear the voice of the Spirit in my life? What could I eliminate from my busy life so that I would have more time to be still, to study scriptures, ponder, and pray?

3. We're too intent on wanting what we want.

Sometimes we don't recognize answers to prayer because we focus so much on our own desires. We don't see that the Lord wants us to do something else—for example, sometimes you may want to act when the answer is to wait. Sometimes, He may want us to step outside our comfort zone, and that may take courage. But



remember, when we seek the will of the Lord, we must be willing to be obedient—we must be humble and ask Him to write His will upon our hearts. It is then that the answer from a loving Heavenly Father can be spoken to the mind by the still, small voice.

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, says he has learned that “answers [to my prayers] were most clear when what I wanted was silenced by an overpowering need to know what God wanted” (“Write upon My Heart,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 86).

4. Our hearts are not prepared to receive His answers.

Elder H. Burke Peterson, formerly of the Seventy, said, “As we go through life, we oftentimes build a rock wall between ourselves and heaven. This wall is built by our unrepented sins, . . . [with] stones of many different sizes and shapes. There could be stones because we have been unkind to someone. Criticism of leaders or teachers may add another stone. . . . Vulgar thoughts and actions may add

some rather large stones in this wall” (“Prayer—Try Again,” *Ensign*, June 1981, 73).

Because of the wall we might think, “Heavenly Father doesn’t hear,” or “He doesn’t answer,” but it’s because His counsel bounces off the wall *we* built! It is our challenge to tear this wall down, through repentance, obedience, and righteousness. Then we can be in tune with the Spirit.

5. We lack faith or confidence in Heavenly Father.

Sometimes we think that others can receive answers, but we can’t. If so, we can build faith by learning that God lives, that He knows us, that He loves us, and that He has a plan for us. When you pray, picture Him as the kind, wise, understanding Father that He is. He wants you to succeed.

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles teaches that when answers don’t seem to come or come in a way that we don’t expect, we should remember that “sometimes He answers yes, sometimes no. Often He withholds an answer, not for lack of concern, but because



INTELLIGENCE AND EXPERIENCE

"I once heard a young woman in testimony meeting praise the spirituality of her husband,

indicating that he submitted every question to the Lord. She told how he accompanied her shopping and would not even choose between different brands of canned vegetables without making his selection a matter of prayer. That strikes me as improper. I believe the Lord expects us to use the intelligence and experience he has given us to make these kinds of choices."

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Revelation," *New Era*, Sept. 1982, 46.

He loves us—perfectly. He wants us to apply truths He has given us. For us to grow, we need to trust in our ability to make correct decisions. We need to do what we feel is right. In time, He will answer. He will not fail us" ("Learning to Recognize Answers to Prayer," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 30–31).

6. We don't recognize answers when they come.

How often have you had an impression and rationalized it away as your own thought? For instance, when faced with a particular challenge or problem, an impression might come as to what to do about it. Instead of acting on that prompting, many of us second- and third-guess the prompting and begin to doubt that it actually came from the Spirit.

One of our problems is we do not pay

attention to the Lord when He whispers to us on seemingly insignificant things. Then when something big comes along and we really want inspiration, we're out of practice and don't know how to receive it. President Harold B. Lee counseled, "All of us should try to . . . give heed to the sudden ideas that come to us, and if we'll give heed to them and cultivate an ear to hear these promptings we too—each of us—can grow in the spirit of revelation" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* [2000], 51).

Move the Barriers Away

As you go through life, sometimes painful or disappointing experiences will tempt you to build barricades around your heart. Feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness can become barriers if they cause you to turn your heart away from Heavenly Father. Through disobedience, you can roadblock revelation by hardening your heart.

When there are blockades between your heart and the will of your Heavenly Father, you will have difficulty choosing in accordance with God's will.

But you can, like Nephi, pray that your heart will be softened (see 1 Nephi 2:16). That removes a roadblock. You can ask Heavenly Father to heal your broken heart (see Psalm 147:3). That moves another obstacle out of the way. Keep listening to your heart, keep trusting in the Lord (see Proverbs 3:5–7), and He will help you to know what your barriers are and how to remove them. Then you'll be without roadblocks on the road to righteous decisions. **NE**

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CHOOSE TO CHOOSE

Iwish that as a teenager I had better understood how to discern the will of the Lord for me. Over the years I developed a phobia of making "wrong" choices or "mistakes," so I made decisions by default, leaving things to chance, or asking someone else rather than actively seeking the will of the Lord in my life. The Lord, however, expects us to act.

Here are some scriptures I have found that have helped me to understand that I am free to choose, and how to best use that freedom.

Alma 37:37: "Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good."

Jacob 4:10: "Seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand."

D&C 58:26–28: Agency endows us with the freedom to develop our capacity to make wise choices.