

LOST IN THE FORBIDDEN

By Sarah Keenan

I was in the middle of the Forbidden City in Beijing, China. Only minutes before, I had been surrounded by friends and teachers, but I was suddenly completely and utterly alone.

I immediately understood the danger I was in. A solitary 15-year-old American stood out like a sore thumb in the bustling palace museum. I had come to China with other high school classmates on a school-sponsored trip, and our teachers and guides had warned us numerous times about the possible dangers of touring a foreign country if we were not careful.

I walked around the area, pushing through crowds of tourists—Chinese and foreigner alike—and stood on my tiptoes trying to look for the matching



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red and white shirts that each member of our group wore. But I saw nothing. Somehow, my group had slipped away without me and I had no idea what direction they had gone in. I sat down and watched the entrances and exits. Ten minutes passed, then 30, then 45. No one from my group appeared.

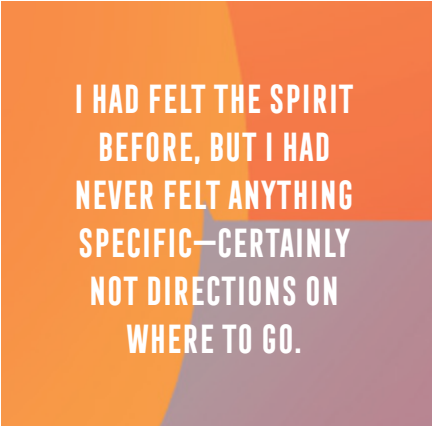
Someone grabbed my hand. I looked up to see a short woman with slightly crazed eyes and long fingernails. She pulled at my hand. “Follow me,” she said in broken English. “Pretty girl, follow me.”

I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach. “Get back,” I yelled, pulling my hand back. Before she could grab it again, I raced through an exit and entered another section of the city.

I ran for a while until I was even more lost than before. I sat on a nearby step, away from the groups of people, and started to cry. I knew a few words of Chinese but certainly not enough to get directions back to our hotel, somewhere on the other side of the sprawling city of Beijing. And at this point, I was not even sure where an exit was.

Amid tears, I started to pray. I admitted that I had been foolish to wander from the group, even for a moment, and I pleaded with Heavenly Father to help me find a way back to my group.

I stood up and walked back in the general direction I had come from.



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I did not receive any immediate revelation—and I was unsure of what that revelation would sound or feel like even if I *did* receive it. I had felt the Spirit before, a warm feeling after serving someone or hearing a talk in church, but I had never felt anything specific—certainly not directions on where to go. I started walking forward uncertainly, continuing the prayer in my heart.

I finally reached a fork in the road. I started to go right when I heard a voice whisper, “Stay.”

The voice was so soft that I almost disregarded it completely as one of my own thoughts. But it contained a sureness that I certainly didn’t feel at the moment. “Sit on that bench,” the voice said. I looked up and saw a bench in the middle of the fork. I went over and sat down. Only three minutes later, a familiar white and red shirt appeared in the crowd and waved toward me. It was our tour guide for the day.

I jumped up from the bench I was sitting on. I was so happy I almost hugged the woman.

“We have been looking for you for an hour!” she said. “Where were you?”

As she led me back to my group, I explained to her where I had been,

starting with my separation from the group and ending with my decision to sit down instead of going right at the fork in the road.

“You’re very lucky,” she said. “If you had gone right at that turn, it would have taken you in the opposite direction from the rest of the group. The city is so big, I would never have been able to find you.”

I left China a few weeks later, managing to not get lost again during the trip, but I have thought back many times to the moment when I heard the voice of the Spirit whisper to me. It was not the kind of prompting I had received before, but it is what the Lord knew I needed in order to avoid going down a wrong path. I also recognized how easy it would have been to ignore it if I had not been listening.

Since that day, I have heard the Spirit many times in many different ways, warning me of both physical and spiritual danger. Sometimes I have seen the consequences of following or disobeying that voice like I did that first day in the Forbidden City. More often, I haven’t been able to see the results. But I have learned that when I humble myself and am willing to listen, the Lord will help me recognize the Spirit’s promptings and He will guide me back to where I need to be. With Him, I am never alone. **NE**
The author lives in Utah, USA.