

LISTENING AT LAST

Name withheld

While in college, I was blessed with a challenging internship in a city far away from home. An old friend of mine was living nearby, and though we didn't share the same faith, our differences had not stopped us from being casual friends.

When I first met Madeline (name has been changed), we were both working with another young woman who was a great example of a Latter-day Saint. I remember the Spirit pointing out subtle differences between each young woman, explaining how even small choices can set a course for later in life. I have actually remembered these spiritual impressions for years.

Now back in contact after a few years, Madeline and I planned a time to get together. When the evening arrived, I became surprisingly nervous. I took a train to her city, and as I got closer, a voice inside my mind and heart said, "You're supposed to date only people who have high standards."

"This isn't a date," I thought. "I'm just getting together with an old

friend." The Spirit repeated the warning, pushing until I realized it was indeed a date and I began to wonder about my friend's current standards and lifestyle. "She knows I'm LDS," I rationalized. "She's familiar with my standards, and there won't be a problem."

I did, however, begin to wonder if the "subtle differences" I had noted before had caused our paths to diverge more than I expected. So I followed the prompting of the Spirit, and I called my friend to cancel. I was so afraid of offending her. How could I explain spiritual impressions to a friend who doesn't appreciate the mission of the Holy Ghost?

I explained that I wasn't comfortable with one of the activities we had planned and hoped this would give me an acceptable reason for getting out of the evening. She was disappointed and offered to change our plans. I was relieved and agreed to the change because I thought, "Maybe the activity was why the Spirit was warning me." But the

anxiety I was feeling would not go away.

We had a fun time that night, but from time to time, the Spirit told me the earlier warning was important. At first nothing seemed concerning, but as the evening progressed, it became clearer that while we may have come from similar backgrounds, we were headed in completely different directions. Our standards were not the same—even in small things. When

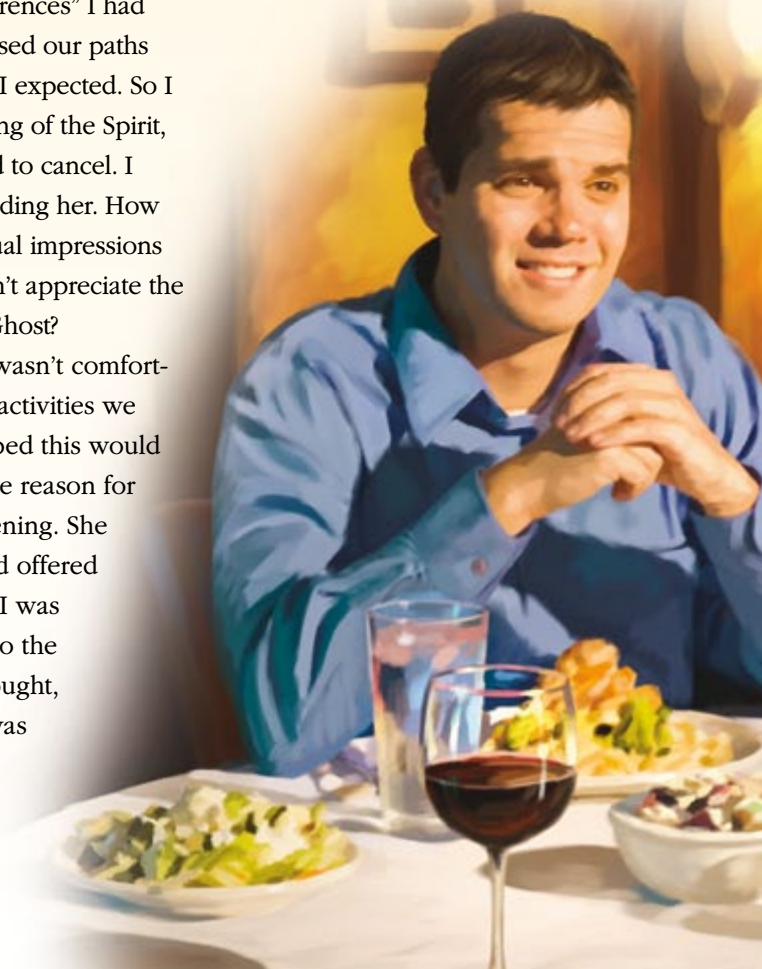


ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF WARD



BARELY OFF COURSE?

“All too often . . . we set out on what we hope will be an exciting journey only

to realize too late that an error of a few degrees has set us on a course for spiritual disaster.”

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, “A Matter of a Few Degrees,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2008, 58–59.

“She’s an old friend, and it isn’t a date,” I told myself. So why did the Spirit keep warning me I shouldn’t be there?

she ordered wine, I explained that I would rather not pay for alcohol. She respected my wishes and paid for it herself.

My spiritual anxiety continued to grow as the evening wore on. As dinner wrapped up, I was on the edge of my chair, ready to go, because I knew the evening’s last train was leaving soon and I lived too far away to take a taxi. Aware of my worry, my friend said I could sleep at her place. Now the Spirit would not leave me alone, confirming what I already knew: staying was not an option.

As I walked her home, I worked hard to look calm. “Are you sure you don’t want to stay?” she asked. I was sure. She wasn’t forward or offensive, but the Spirit quietly spoke more clearly than the sound of thunder.

I could not miss my train!

I waited until I knew she was inside, then ran as fast as I could to reach the train station in time. I couldn’t help thinking of Joseph in Egypt when he ran from temptation (see Genesis 39:7–12).

As I think back over the happenings of that night, I feel both fear and gratitude: fear for what might have been and gratitude for the companionship of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit spoke, and even though I should have done so sooner, I’m glad I finally listened.

It’s obvious that my view of the situation that night was definitely not as clear as the Lord’s. As Isaiah recorded:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

Some choices we face in life are quickly made and forgotten. There are other choices that come with lessons we would do well never to forget. I am so thankful to know that when we heed the promptings of the Holy Ghost—and when we do so immediately—we can more easily stay on the path Jesus Christ set for us to follow. ■