

What Can I Do to Receive Answers from God?

We know we can
receive revelation,
so how do we learn
to recognize it?

By Liz Stitt

Receiving revelation—personal direction for our lives—is a humbling experience. It is a privilege for us as God’s children to speak directly to Him and receive answers by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Yet even with guidance from our leaders and our own past experience with revelation, we may still wonder why we sometimes feel a lack of revelation—a lack that can lead to confusion, doubt, heartache, or discouragement. “Why won’t God answer my prayers?” we sometimes ask. “What am I doing wrong that God chooses not to speak to me as He does to others?”

But God is always willing to speak to us. Sometimes we just need to learn how to speak to Him and to listen more closely for His guidance.

Evaluate Your Questions

Sometimes I assume that God will simply give me revelation because it’s obvious that I need His help and guidance in my life. But I sometimes forget to ask for it specifically.

I pray about my housing, my career, my family, and my calling. I am single, so I try to pray about dating and to know if marriage is God’s will for me. Unfortunately, though, my focus on what really matters often comes and goes. For example, a friend once asked, “Are you even still praying about the opportunity to get married?” Although my heart was filled with “That’s none of your business” and “Of course I am” and “Who do you think you are?” the answer, as I thought about it, was no. Of course marriage is one of the desires of my heart. But for a time I had stopped praying specifically about it. Maybe it was because it hurt to keep asking for something that I never received. Maybe it felt like it wasn’t God’s plan for me and so I should stop asking.

But by kneeling and asking God whether marriage is part of His plan for me, I am often given sweet and sustaining answers. The ultimate “answer” is still inconclusive,

but asking the question opens my heart to hearing other answers along the way. The most common impression I feel is that I have a work to do and a personal ministry to fulfill and I can keep moving forward, no matter what my circumstances are.

Some time ago, I transitioned out of a young single adult ward into a conventional “family” ward. I wondered if I was “giving up” my chance to be married as I chose not to attend the older singles ward. As I prayed and asked if the opportunity for marriage would pass me by with this decision, I felt an impression from the Spirit: “I know where you are.” Heavenly Father was aware of the decisions I had made, and He knew exactly where I was and what I was doing. He knows where to find me when He needs me. But what if I hadn’t asked? What assurance would I have missed?

Practice Serious Reflection

In a Brigham Young University Women’s Conference address, Maurine Jensen Proctor said, “*Serious reflection precedes revelation.*” She continued:

“Prayer and spirituality demand mental discipline and focus. Is it any wonder that this kind of prayer does not lead to revelation: ‘Dear Heavenly Father, Thank thee for . . . did I thaw the meat for dinner? Bless us to . . . I hope this won’t take long. I have so much to do. And please bless . . . Is the party Friday or Saturday night?’

“Distractions are the enemy of pondering and serious reflection.”¹

My eight-year-old niece has also taught me about more serious reflection in my prayers. While I was caring for her one evening, we knelt as she said her bedtime prayer. Her prayer was





thoughtful and sincere. Afterward she said, “Mom has been teaching me how to say better prayers. I used to just say the same five things. Now I’m doing better.”

As I have evaluated my prayers, I’ve wondered, “Do I just say the ‘same five things?’” I now try to spend more time being grateful and reflecting seriously on what I need to talk to my Father about.

Write It Down

I like to keep a notebook of impressions I receive from general conference and other Church meetings or just in my everyday life. Most often, the impressions I receive either confirm what I already know or provide me with opportunities to serve. Many times, I’ve had people’s names come to mind and specific ways that I can help them. During talks or lessons, I sometimes learn something that was not said but that I needed to change, improve, or believe in. Writing these thoughts down provides clarity to my thoughts and accountability in following up.

I also take time in my Church meetings to write themes I hear and use them to guide my efforts that week. This is revelation.²

Ask: Is There More?

I’m a family history fan. A few years ago, I felt prompted to ask my grandparents more about my great-uncle Paul McEwan Cutler, who went missing in an air flight training mission during World War II. My grandma shared stories I’d never known and then pulled out five books—two photo albums and three family group sheet books—that I had never seen before. The albums had pictures from the early childhood of my grandpa and of his twin, Paul—but the pictures were unlabeled and had been hidden for years. The group sheets connected me to many cousins and an abundance of temple work.

That simple question about my great-uncle brought many hidden things to light. Was there more? Yes. An index box of pictures taken in the mid-to-late 1800s. Was there more? Yes. Recently we discovered some early film from the 1920s with footage of my great-great-grandfather. Was there more? Yes! My mom then found an audio recording she’d done of my great-grandmother’s life history. Is there still more? Likely.

Sometimes we get an answer and then move on with our lives. But how much are we missing when we don’t stop to ask if there is more to know?³ What are we doing with what we’ve already received, and are we ready or willing to find more?





Invite Revelation

One of my mottoes in life is something once said by Camilla E. Kimball, wife of President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985): “Never suppress a generous thought.”⁴ Sometimes I get worked up about whether some impression or thought in my mind is something from God or merely my own thinking. I feel comforted knowing that every good thing comes from God and that if I act upon those good promptings, I will be blessed for my efforts.

Even more, acting on small promptings teaches me how the Spirit speaks to me. When we get those small promptings to call someone or drop in unexpectedly and then realize we were needed in that exact moment, it gives us courage and strength to respond to more promptings. And as we respond more, we learn how the Spirit prompts and teaches. This helps us learn how the Spirit may respond when we are seeking other divine guidance.

Move Forward in Faith

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: “Sometimes the spirit of revelation will operate immediately and intensely, other times subtly and gradually, and often so delicately you may not even consciously recognize it. But regardless of the pattern whereby this

blessing is received, the light it provides will illuminate and enlarge your soul, enlighten your understanding (see Alma 5:7; 32:28), and direct and protect you and your family.”⁵

Moving forward despite our uncertainties is a demonstration of our faith and invites revelation. I’ve learned to see faith as what it really is. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). It sometimes means not knowing the answer. It often means there is no evidence. It means we need to have hope. As long as we keep going amid the uncertainties, we are showing faith. And faith and trust in our Heavenly Father will lead us to revelation. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Maurine Jensen Proctor, “Serious Reflection Precedes Revelation” (Brigham Young University Women’s Conference address, May 5, 2006), churchhistorianspress.org/at-the-pulpit.
2. See Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Spiritual Guidance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 7–8.
3. See Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Spiritual Guidance,” 8.
4. Camilla E. Kimball, in Bonnie D. Parkin, “Personal Ministry: Sacred and Precious” (Brigham Young University devotional, Feb. 13, 2007), 1, speeches.byu.edu.
5. David A. Bednar, “The Spirit of Revelation,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 90.



GROWING INTO THE PRINCIPLE OF REVELATION

“Pray in the name of Jesus Christ about your concerns, your fears, your weaknesses—yes, the very longings of your heart. And

then listen! Write the thoughts that come to your mind. Record your feelings and follow through with actions that you are prompted to take. As you repeat this process day after day, month after month, year after year, you will ‘grow into the principle of revelation’ [*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 132].”

President Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2018, 95.