

# **Knowing Truth the Lord's Way:**

## **Beyond Reason and Logic**

**by Scott Morris**

[scott.morris@ldsmomentsoflight.com](mailto:scott.morris@ldsmomentsoflight.com)

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Man’s Logic and Intellect.....	3
Only Real Source of Pure Truth.....	7
Worthiness.....	8
Study it Out.....	9
Ponder it in Your Mind.....	11
Look for Scriptural Precedents, Examples, and Patterns.....	14
Believe He Will Answer.....	15
Invite the Holy Ghost and Pray.....	16
Praying With the Holy Ghost.....	17
How Shall the Answer Come?.....	18
What is it like when the Holy Ghost speaks to us?.....	20
Peace and Charity.....	21
Pure Intelligence.....	23
Enlarging and Swelling.....	23
Primary Questions.....	24
A Solid Foundation.....	26
“I’ve Never Heard That”.....	28
Fallibility Of Church Leaders.....	30
Economy of Heaven.....	32
Of the Scriptures.....	33
On Change.....	39
What of Fallibility and Change?.....	41

# **Part 1: The Truth**

An exploration of gaining true, correct knowledge that we can trust, nothing doubting.

## **Introduction**

We all like to have proof that how we see something is the “right” way to see it. We like to feel that our own conclusions are correct. We want to feel justified in our beliefs. Such was the case with me one day. Initially, my intent was to find as much proof as I could that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church on the Earth. So I went to work. Books about the reformers were reviewed in great detail. I studied some wonderful people such as William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, and Martin Luther. In addition, I did a fair amount of research online and in quite a mound of insightful and enlightening books. There began to grow an appreciable pile of what I considered proofs. There were different types of proofs such as historical, scientific, and doctrinal.

Then something magical happened. A question came to me. This question was, “If so much solid evidence exists that the LDS faith is correct, why aren't people flocking to become members of this Church?” I wondered what could cause someone to hold so tightly to their beliefs. What thing causes the most conviction that a person can have? What causes someone to know the truth of spiritual things if it is not through clear and plentiful proof? Rather than continuing to pursue my original objective of finding proofs, I changed course. My goal became to understand what causes spiritual conviction, if not plain, clear scientific, empirical, and doctrinal evidence. How can we come to know the absolute truth of a doctrine, principle, or concept?

## **Man’s Logic and Intellect**

Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato were perceived as sage and wise. They thought through the weighty, searching questions that many of us have about life. Because of this, people gave credibility to their ideas about reality and truth. A great many of these types of thinkers were also able to persuade and convince others of the truth of their ideas through logic and reason.

There are professions today that likewise rely on the ability to convince and persuade others, such as law and politics. Indeed, lawyers make a living off their ability to argue, reason, and convince others that their own point of view is correct. Politicians also put a great deal of effort into persuading large groups of people that they have their audiences’ best interests in mind.

Throughout history, people in these professions have been expert in their grasp, use, and understanding of logic, reasoning, and persuasion. Great minds proposed and expounded great swaths of ideology and logic. Many of their

propositions are still held in high regard today. They can be of immense worth to those seeking truth. I believe that many of these people were noble in their pursuit of truth and understanding.

In fact, the following is from a statement the First Presidency published on February 15, 1978: "The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohamed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals."

Many such seekers of light and truth throughout the centuries have worked to further the knowledge and understanding of themselves, their peers, and their contemporaries. We can thank Henry Ford for the many years he devoted to the development of the automobile. Thomas Edison put countless hours into his improvement of the light bulb. The Wright Brothers worked hard to make the airplane a reality. Sir Issac Newton brought us a deeper understanding of physics.

Throughout time, scientists, researchers, thinkers, and other seekers of light and truth have brought entire fields of knowledge and understanding to the awareness of humankind. We have countless fields of study available to us because of these devoted men and women.

But has every lawyer, philosopher, and politician ever to have won a debate or a legal case been correct? Has the truth prevailed in every instance?

Consider the case of Lawrence McKinney. One night in October of 1977, he was over at the house of a friend, Michael Yancy. The Police came to Yancy's residence and the next thing McKinney knew, he was being arrested for a heinous crime. He was in prison for 31 years before it was discovered that he was innocent of that crime. DNA evidence had come to light which exonerated him.

There are many others, such as Lamonte McIntyre from Kansas, who spent 23 years in prison before new information was brought to light that cleared him of any wrongdoing. The prosecutor in his case actually requested he be set free.

Dan and Fran Keller served 22 years in prison before it was determined that they were innocent and set free. Andrew Wilson also spent 32 years behind bars before his conviction was thrown out and he was released. There are many cases like these where even the most experienced and competent professionals have made mistakes and convicted the wrong people. On the [innocenceproject.org](http://innocenceproject.org) website, there are over 370 such similar cases.

Through the pursuit of truth, by the very fact that our understanding of it changes, one may conclude that the human understanding of truth is imperfect, incomplete, and may sometimes just be plain wrong.

It is as though humans are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 3:7) They keep doing their best to learn all truth, but consistently fall short.

Let's consider the de Havilland Comet aircraft as an example. Its initial debut was in 1949. Immediately, it became a successful commercial airliner. However, within a year of its appearance, there were three high-profile crashes which cost many lives. After extensive testing, it was found that the plane's square window design was the problem. The angles of these windows caused the surrounding metal to experience two to three times the amount of pressure as other parts of the cabin. This resulted in structural failure, causing the aircraft to crash.

Was this because of neglect? No. It was an error made by the top engineers of the time. They did not intentionally cause harm. It was because there was a lack in their understanding. It is possible that even the most brilliant minds have incomplete information. They may know everything there is to know on a particular topic in their time. However, those that follow after them may discover additional information or truth that was previously unknown.

As President Dieter Uchtdorf put it, "Part of our problem in the quest for truth is that human wisdom has disappointed us so often. We have so many examples of things that mankind once 'knew' were true but have since been proven false." (President Dieter Uchtdorf, *What is Truth?*, BYU Devotional, January 2013)

At the time of Galileo Galilei, there were two main schools of thought about the Universe. The Aristotelian view, which had been accepted for about 18 centuries, stated that the Earth was the center of the Universe, and everything else revolved around it. Copernicus argued that the sun was the center of the Universe, and everything revolved around it. In this case, the Copernican view is more correct than the Aristotelian, but neither is fully accurate. From modern advancements in astronomy, our observations tell us that there is no center to the Universe. The Sun orbits around a super-massive black hole in the center of our galaxy which we call the Milky Way.

Because of this and endless other examples that we could explore, we can see that man's understanding is limited and contains many flaws. This occurs even in science, which is based directly off observation. How many other incorrect precepts exist in areas that are *not* based on direct observation, such as philosophy and psychology?

Additionally, some folks have the ability to debate and convince others of their own views. What if one person has greater light and knowledge than another but the latter is much better at debating and persuasion? They have their debate, but throughout, the truth may not be presented convincingly enough by the former. The one who is better at arguing may end up victorious. Those gifted at debate and persuasion don't necessarily possess the greatest light and knowledge available. Because they are more convincing, we will tend to want to believe them. However, being gifted in argumentation does not also make them correct.

In other words, it should be evident that human understanding, logic, and argumentation are appreciably imperfect. I hope to have demonstrated that we cannot rely on debate, logic, argumentation, or intellect to arrive at a full understanding of the truth.

Can we even trust our own senses in our quest for truth? If you've ever been to a magic show, you know that our very eyes can be deceived. Many movie productions use a large amount of special effects to convince you that what you are seeing is real, even though it may not be.

Brother Victor L. Ludlow explains:

"We observe early on, however, that our bodies are imperfect and our physical senses are often deficient. Though human beings are intellectually superior to animals, many animals have more highly developed senses. As examples, people cannot see as well as cats, hear as well as dogs, or move as easily in the dark as bats."

"Furthermore, the senses we do possess are vulnerable and easily deceived. A preschooler realizes that the world seems to spin when viewed from a merry-go-round and that a stick will appear bent in water when it really isn't. Older children wonder why lukewarm water seems hot to snow-chilled fingers and why a lemon tastes especially sour when eaten after a sweet dessert. Youth have amused themselves by blindfolding a friend and offering him an apple to eat, while holding an onion under his nose, and then laughing as the confused friend naturally refuses to take a bite. There are many ways our physical senses fail us." (Victor L. Ludlow, *Principles and Practices*, 10).

Things may not always be what they seem. Our very senses can be deceived.

Thus we may see that man does not possess the ability to accurately and convincingly convey the full truth to another person. He cannot do it by persuasion, argumentation, logic, or any other method of communication possessed by man. It is just impossible.

Does this mean that we cannot discuss it and explore the truth with each other? Does this mean that we cannot share inspirational quotes and scriptures with each other or encourage each other to do what's right? Of course not. As a matter of fact, Austin Farrer writes, "For though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish." (Austin Farrer, "The Christian Apologist" in *Light on C.S. Lewis*, 26)

Even though argument and logic cannot create true conviction, they maintain a climate where belief can take root and grow. It gives us room to explore our thoughts and feelings on a given concept. But it is not enough.

## Only Real Source of Pure Truth

What then? How can one arrive at a full knowledge of the truth?

Is there a being in existence that does know all of everything? Someone who knows truth perfectly? Yes! Of course there is. He is God, our Father in Heaven. He knows absolutely everything about everything. He has a comprehensive, exhaustive understanding and knowledge of any topic imaginable. There is no such thing as a foreign language to Him. He knows everything, whether in the past, present, or future.

The great news for us is that we can have access to the knowledge of God. There is a process by which he will make things known unto us if we are worthy and ask. It will not come all at once, nor could we handle it if it did. We have to receive it a little bit at a time. We then act upon that small bit, and then repeat the cycle.

Let us consider 2 Nephi 28:30, which tells us, "For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more."

We learn a bit at a time, much in the way we learned to speak or walk. There is a lot of wisdom in this approach. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith expressed his thoughts this way: "The Lord could not reveal to the Church in the beginning all the knowledge and organization which would be essential to the full and complete organization of the Church. Had this been done, it would have been like an overwhelming flood that would have brought destruction. The truth had to come piecemeal - line upon line, precept upon precept, just like knowledge comes to all of us."

This is how even the Savior himself progressed, as we learn from President Joseph F. Smith. He said:

"Even Christ himself was not perfect at first; he received not a fulness at first, but he received grace for grace, and he continued to receive more and more until he received a fulness. Is not this to be so with the children of men? Is any man perfect? Has any man received a fulness at once? Have we reached a point wherein we may receive the fulness of God, of his glory, and his intelligence? No; and yet, if Jesus, the Son of God, and the Father of the heavens and the earth in which we dwell, received not a fulness at the first, but increased in faith, knowledge, understanding and grace until he received a fulness, is it not possible for all men who are born of women to receive little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, until they shall receive a fulness, as he has received a fulness, and be exalted with him in the presence of the father?" (*In Tabernacle, March 16, 1902*)(Gospel Doctrine, 68)

We learn a small piece at a time, little bits at a time, but it is possible to know the truthfulness of any given concept or principle without any doubt whatsoever.

So how do we access the knowledge of God? There is a process that He has established to transmit His knowledge to us. It is called *revelation*. In *Articles of Faith*, James E. Talmage helps us understand what this means. He says, “*revelation* signifies the making known of divine truth by communication from the heavens.” (James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 99)

Following the process of revelation will help us along our path of truth-seeking. Let’s explore how this works.

## **Worthiness**

First, Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin explains that we have to be worthy. He said, “The windows of heaven are open wide to the faithful and righteous; nothing closes them faster than disobedience. The unworthy cannot access fully the network of revealed truth. ‘The powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.’ ‘Obedience is the first law of heaven.’ That is why Alma exhorted us to ‘be humble, ... submissive and ... diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times.’ To open the windows of heaven, we must conform our will to God’s will. Diligent, enduring obedience to God’s laws is the key that opens the windows of heaven. Obedience enables us to be receptive to the mind and will of the Lord. ‘The Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient’ are those who receive the blessings of revelation through the open windows of heaven.” (Joseph B. Wirthlin, “*Windows of Light and Truth*,” *Ensign*, Nov 1995, 75-78)

Faithfulness, righteousness, humility, and obedience are some of the first prerequisites for receiving revelation. These traits describe a form of worthiness. We need to develop each of these traits to be worthy of receiving revelation.

President Russell M. Nelson has also spoken about worthiness to receive revelation. He said, “Nothing opens the heavens quite like the combination of increased purity, exact obedience, earnest seeking, daily feasting on the words of Christ in the Book of Mormon, and regular time committed to temple and family history work.” (Russel M. Nelson, “*Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives*,” in *Conference Report*, April 2018)

President Nelson mentions purity, “exact obedience,” seeking,” and a daily study of the Book of Mormon, to list a few.

In *LDS Beliefs*, another explanation is given. It declares, “Because the Spirit is the power by which all revelation comes, one must be worthy to receive such revelation, for ‘the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples’ (Helaman 4:24). Faithful obedience to the principles and covenants of the gospel opens the door to personal revelation, while unworthiness and disobedience slams it shut.” (*LDS Beliefs*, Millet, Top, Olson, Skinner. 538)



Heavenly Father has prepared a way for us to gain access to the actual truth as He knows it. Part of this process is through personal worthiness. We need to have faithfulness, humility, obedience, and the other traits listed above to be ready to receive revelation.

In Jacob 4:13, we learn, "Behold, my brethren, he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men; for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly, for the salvation of our souls. But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old."

The Holy Ghost will *always* speak the truth to us and will never lie. Isn't that reassuring?

In Alma 5:45-46, Alma declares, "And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me."

If there's one thing we should learn from these passages, it is that the Holy Ghost (the Spirit of the Lord) is the one that will bring us great amounts of truth in plainness. It is the means whereby God speaks to each of us personally.

## **Study it Out**

We all have questions and concerns. We might wonder if buying that house is the right thing to do. We may be deliberating over whether to take the new job offer. We could be reflecting about how we can do better as a parent or employee. There are a myriad of questions like these on our minds every day. Questions we would like answers to. Questions like these are common and normal.

There could also be other types of things that occupy our thoughts. We may be studying the Scriptures about the concept of charity. We may be really struggling to understand what it is or how it works. We might even be searching for ways that we can apply charity in our lives.

We may have questions or concerns about daily life. We might be anxiously feasting upon the word of the Lord in its myriad forms. We may be studying something out of an insightful book.

Whatever the case maybe, there is something about which we wish to know more. This is the reason we are seeking revelation.

First, study as much as you can about whatever is on your mind. In D&C 9:7-9, we're told, "But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right." We are to "study it out in [our] mind[s]." Perhaps this could be what is referred to by this phrase: "treasure up in your minds continually the words of life" as found in D&C 84:85. We need to do our very best to understand as much as we can about our question, problem, or concern.

For example, let us say hypothetically that you are considering accepting a new job offer. How can you study that out? One way might be to list out the pros and cons of the job. Include things that are the most important to you. Does it offer sufficient benefits for your family? What are the hours like? Ask your potential employer questions that would affect your decision. Gather as much information about it as you can. List it all out. Counsel with trusted friends, relatives, or colleagues. Then, study your notes to see if one choice (accepting the job) seems better than the other (*not* accepting the job).

Let's take an example of this from the life of Joseph Smith. He was completely at a loss as to which church to join. He says, "how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible." (Joseph Smith History 1:12). He hadn't a clue how to proceed, but he had a great desire to know which church to join.

He went to a trusted source of direction, the Bible. He then relates, "While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*" (Joseph Smith - History 1:11. Italics added.)

Joseph Smith studied the Bible to gain some understanding about what to do about his problem. He found therein something that gave him some direction. He found out how to get his question answered.

Nephi had a similar experience. His father Lehi had a marvelous dream about the rod of iron and the tree of life. Nephi wanted to see the things his father saw and to know what they meant. Let's read a bit of his account in 1 Nephi 11:1. The first bit of this verse tells us that Nephi had heard something from Lehi, and that he wanted to see it himself: "For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen..." Nephi was thinking about what his father saw, and had an intense desire to see it, too.

To what sources may we look to "search knowledge," and seek to "understand great knowledge?" (2 Nephi 32:7). In the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 109, verse 7, we are told to "...seek ye diligently and teach one another words of

wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom, seek learning even by study and also by faith."

We should be scouring the scriptures, pondering the Prophets' words, and studying intently the General Conference edition of the Ensign. There is also an abundance of wonderful, brilliant books that one can read. There are dozens of sources of "words of wisdom," as the scripture says. We need to be constantly studying the Gospel so that we can learn and grow. This will uplift and edify. Focus on that question or concern that is on your mind. The one we spoke of earlier. Study reputable materials dealing with the topic of your question.

President Spencer W. Kimball helps us to know what knowledge we should be pursuing during our life here on the Earth:

"Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most truly vital is the knowledge of God, of his existence, his powers, his love, and his promises. Through this knowledge, we learn that our great objective in life is to build character. In fact, we learn that the building of faith and character is paramount, for character is higher than intellect, and perfect character will be continually rewarded with increased intellect."

"Thus, our real business on earth is to master self. And as we master ourselves, we will learn to master the earth and its elements. Most important, we will learn how to help others overcome and perfect themselves in all ways of living."

"In the same way, let us seek the truth. Let us first seek the truths of God, and then let us live them. Then let us seek after the truths of his earth. Let us seek learning 'by study and also by faith.' (D&C 88:118.)"

"And let us remember that it is not so much what we know that is important, as what we do and what we are. The Master's plan is a program of doing, of living, not merely knowing. Knowledge itself is not the end. It is how we righteously live and apply that knowledge in our own lives and how we apply it to help others that describes our character." (Spencer W. Kimball, "'Seek Learning, Even by Study and Also by Faith'," Ensign, Sep 1983, 3)

We should study about Heavenly Father, His attributes, His omnipotence, and the promises that He has made to us. As we do so, we will learn about how to build character and become more like God is. More important is our "becoming" than is our "knowing." It is not sufficient merely to know what God is like. We have to do everything we can to become like Him. This takes tremendous amounts of study and hard work.

## **Ponder it in Your Mind**

The next part of the process is to ponder over our question or concern.

To illustrate the concept of "pondering," I'd like to borrow part of a talk given

President Marion G. Romney at General Conference in the general priesthood session, April 7, 1973. He says:

"As I have read the scriptures, I have been challenged by the word *ponder*, so frequently used in the Book of Mormon. The dictionary says that *ponder* means 'to weigh mentally, think deeply about, deliberate, meditate.' Moroni thus used the term as he closed his record:

"Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things... that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men... and *ponder* it in your hearts.' (Moro. 10:3, Italics added.)

"Jesus said to the Nephites:

"I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words....

"Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and *ponder* upon the things which I have said, and ask of the Father, in my name, that ye may understand....' (3 Ne. 17:2-3. Italics added.)

"*Pondering* is, in my feeling, a form of prayer. It has, at least, been an approach to the Spirit of the Lord on many occasions. Nephi tells us of one such occasion:

"For it came to pass,' he wrote, 'after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat *pondering* in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceeding high mountain....' (1 Ne. 11:1. Italics added.)

"Then follows Nephi's account of the great vision he was given by the Spirit of the Lord, because he believed the words of his prophet father and had such a great desire to know more that he pondered and prayed about them.

"President Joseph F. Smith tells us that 'on the third of October, in the year nineteen hundred and eighteen, I sat in my room *pondering* over the Scriptures....' He had particular reference at this time to Peter's statement that Christ 'went and preached unto the spirits in prison' (1 Pet. 3:19) while his body lay in the grave.

"As I *pondered* over these things which are written,' President Smith continued, 'the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great....' He then gives us an account of the great vision concerning missionary work among the spirits of the dead. (*Gospel Doctrine* [Deseret Book Co., 1939], p. 472. Italics added.)"

Brother Victor L. Ludlow explains it to us this way:

"Pondering is not only an important element of both prayer and scripture study, it is also an opportunity to receive revelation in and of itself.

Pondering involves a careful consideration of a concept, thinking deeply about it, especially in terms of its validity, significance, or outcome. Christ recognized how searching for such insights can instruct through the Spirit. When he saw that his listeners were having difficulty understanding all he taught, he asked them to go 'home and ponder.' (3 Ne. 17:3.)

"In order for pondering to be a means of revelation, we must search in faith for the truthfulness and importance of the things we ponder. For example, we may ponder, 'Is Joseph Smith a true prophet?' As our mind wanders through different mental channels in an effort to understand this and related principles, various spiritual promptings in harmony with gospel truths will attend the ponderings. As we ponder further, we can also receive revelation on how to act upon these truths. The Lord's counsel for pondering is, 'You must study it out in your mind; ... and if it is right ... your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.' (D&C 9:8.) Pondering is an important subsidiary step leading to revelation." (Victor L. Ludlow, "Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel," 94)

Pondering is indeed a very important part of personal revelation.

Let's refer again to Joseph Smith's experience. In Joseph Smith - History 1:12, he says, "Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I *reflected on it again and again*, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. (Italics added.)"

He tells us that he "reflected on it again and again." This is an example of pondering. He thought about it, wondered about it, and contemplated it over and over. He really wanted to know the answer.

Let's also go back to Nephi's experience and read the next bit from 1 Nephi 11:1: "For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat *pondering in mine heart...* (italics added)"

In Nephi's experience, he sat pondering in *his* heart, just like Joseph Smith had. Usually, it is helpful to do this in a quiet place, apart from anyone else. Somewhere that is quiet and has no distractions. Where the mind is free to explore and focus on a single concept or principle.

As you learn, study, and treasure up, you may wish to know the truth of the concept being presented. You think about the concept, working it over in your mind. You think about it from different perspectives. This is the idea behind "pondering." It is exploring the height, depth, width, and meaning of a given principle. We may even ponder other related or relevant concepts.

## **Look for Scriptural Precedents, Examples, and Patterns**

Not only should we study it out and ponder it in our minds, but it is also wise and helpful look for scriptural precedent. As we are studying a certain concept or principle, we would do well to search the scriptures for patterns regarding our topic. This is what we are doing here as we look at the experiences of Joseph Smith and Nephi. Look for examples of the topic you are studying or want to know more about. Discover how the Lord works with that particular thing. What patterns does He use?

President Russell M. Nelson showed an example of looking for scriptural precedents in a recent talk. He explains, "The Prophet Joseph Smith set a pattern for us to follow in resolving our questions. Drawn to the promise of James that if we lack wisdom we may ask of God, the boy Joseph took his question directly to Heavenly Father. He sought personal revelation, and his seeking opened this last dispensation. In like manner, what will your seeking open for you? What wisdom do you lack? What do you feel an urgent need to know or understand? Follow the example of the Prophet Joseph. Find a quiet place where you can regularly go. Humble yourself before God. Pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father. Turn to Him for answers and for comfort." (Russell M. Nelson, *"Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,"* in Conference Report, April 2018)

In this instance, he is suggesting that we refer to the experiences of Joseph Smith, as we have been doing.

As another example, let's consider the brother of Jared. He had a problem with the barges he had built. He was concerned that there wouldn't be any light in them. He took this problem to the Lord. The Lord told the brother of Jared to solve that particular problem himself.

It was Brother Hugh Nibley's belief that the brother of Jared had read about Noah's experience with the ark in the Old Testament. When the Lord asked the brother of Jared what he would do about the lack of light, he considered previous precedent. He simply did what Noah had done.

Let's take a look at Genesis 6:16, which says in part, "A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above." If we look at footnote 'a' for "window," we learn that the Hebrew word from which "window" is translated is *tsohar*. Also it says, "Some rabbis believed it was a precious stone that shone in the ark." Therefore, this could have been a precedent followed by the Brother of Jared to solve the problem of how to have light in the barges.

In addition, it is contrary to the economy of Heaven to reveal something more than once when we have it available as a revelation in writing already.

This is a concept which Joseph Smith declared in his letter to a Brother Carter, written in Kirtland, dated April 13, 1833 stating, "And again we never inquire at the hand of God for special revelation only in case of there being no previous

revelation to suit the case." (History of the Church, Vol.1, Chapter 24, 338)

The Lord will assuredly reveal things to us. However, we should scour the Scriptures to see what has been revealed about our question, first. We should research what has been revealed on the topic, learn about it, and do our best to understand it.

## **Believe He Will Answer**

Another requirement for this process is to fully believe that God can and will answer you. He wants us to learn and grow. He wants us to progress. Why would He have put us here and gone through all that trouble only to abandon us and leave us to figure it all out by ourselves? Understand with your whole heart that He will answer you. This is the beginning of having faith in the process of revelation. We have faith that the Lord will answer us.

Again, let's take a look at the experience of Joseph Smith. In Joseph Smith - History 1:13, we read, "At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to 'ask of God,' concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture."

Joseph believed that Heavenly Father would answer his prayer. What about Nephi? In 1 Nephi 11:4-5, we can see that Nephi believed, as well. He tells us, "And the Spirit said unto me: Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken? And I said: Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father." As a matter of fact, both Joseph Smith and Nephi fully believed with all their hearts.

The Lord wants to communicate with us. President Nelson informs us, "One of the things the Spirit has repeatedly impressed upon my mind since my new calling as President of the Church is *how willing the Lord is to reveal His mind and will*. The privilege of receiving revelation is one of the greatest gifts of God to His children. Does God really want to speak to you? Yes! 'As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course ... as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints.'" (Russel M. Nelson, "*Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives*," in Conference Report, April 2018. Italics added.) The Lord wants to talk to us. He wants to teach us as much as we can handle.

We learn the desire of God to communicate with us in D&C 42:61, which declares, "If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal."

The Lord further explains this in D&C 76:5-10, where he says:

"For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those

who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory. And to them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom. Yea, even the wonders of eternity shall they know, and things to come will I show them, even the things of many generations. And their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught. For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man.”

Do you see how much Heavenly Father wants to reveal? He really will if we’ve done our part. Believe this with all your heart.

### **Invite the Holy Ghost and Pray**

The next thing you should do as part of your faith is to invite the Holy Ghost to be with you. The Holy Ghost is the great Revelator. If the Lord is going to answer your question, He will do it through the Holy Ghost. Do everything you can to invite the Spirit into your setting. One of the most common ways of doing this is to sing a hymn. This is why we open many of our meetings with hymns. They invite the Holy Ghost into our meeting. That’s what we want to do here: Invite the Holy Ghost to be with us as we pray to the Lord.

Finally, you will ask God, in prayer, to reveal the truth of that concept to you. Let Him know what you will do with the answer. Let Him know that you will write it down and act upon it. In some cases, if a principle is true, that may mean that you have to change something in your life. Such is the case with investigators of the Gospel who may struggle with problems relating to the Word of Wisdom. They will have to change some things in their lives to do the will of the Lord. Be willing to change whatever you need to so that you are living in accordance with the answer you receive.

This process is discussed briefly in the Bible. Let’s take a look at James 1:5-6, which says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” We ask Heavenly Father, believing that he will answer us. Note his feelings about a wavering heart.

This same process is given in the Book of Mormon. Let’s turn to Moroni 10:3-5 which informs us:

“Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how



merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things."

Let that last verse sink in: "And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of *all* things." That means anything for which you have a question. Anything for which you may lack understanding or have a doubt or may not fully comprehend – what a scripture means, what a concept means, whether you should take the new job, and *all* other things.

President Nelson tells us, "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.'" (Russel M. Nelson, "*Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives*," in Conference Report, April 2018)

Aren't we blessed to have the Holy Ghost in our lives?

## **Praying With the Holy Ghost**

As discussed, we should invite the Spirit to be with us as we pray. However, we should also be praying as prompted by the Holy Ghost.

In *Talking with God* by Robert L. Millet, he outlines this beautifully:

"Perfect prayer is offered to God the Eternal Father, in the name of his Only Begotten Son, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Most of us are well aware that God the Father is the ultimate object of our worship and that our prayers should be directed to him. And we know that we are to pray to Father in the name of the Son. But perhaps we are not quite so familiar with the idea that our prayers, in order to meet the divine standard, should be prompted, guided, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In other words, as with all forms of divine communication, including sermons, gospel lessons, and so forth, prayers should be carried out under the direction of the third member of the Godhead."

"But why would we need God to give us the very words to use in addressing him? Simply stated, 'the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered' (Romans 8:26), or more correctly, 'with striving which cannot be expressed.' Paul continued, 'And he that searcheth the hearts

knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God' (Romans 8:27). In other words, often we pray for our wants, when in truth it would be wise to pray for our needs. But we generally are unable to discern what is most critical in our lives, what thoughts and feelings and yearnings lie deep within our soul and are not readily accessible to the conscious mind."

"We need help. We need mediation. And that is where the Comforter, the Revelator, comes in. The Holy Ghost can, if we are open and teachable and patient, make known to us the things of greatest import, the things upon which God would have us ponder and reflect and pray over. If we will be still, if we will be quiet, if we will be attentive, if we will be sensitive during and after our prayer, we may find our words reaching beyond our thoughts, just as occurred in the New World during the visit of the risen Lord to the Nephites: 'And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus prayed unto the Father, he came unto his disciples, and behold, they did still continue, without ceasing, to pray unto him; and they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire' (3 Nephi 19:24)."

Praying by the Spirit can make our prayers so much more powerful. We will be attuned to the Lord's will if we are able to do this. Since the Lord knows what we need to pray for, he will reveal this to us through the Holy Ghost as we pray. What an enlightened, elevated way to pray. We should strive for the ability to do this on a consistent basis.

## **How Shall the Answer Come?**

The answer comes through the power of the Holy Ghost, as we learned from Moroni 10: 3-5, above. Also, let's take a look at John 14:26, which instructs, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." It is the Holy Ghost that teaches us.

In 1 Corinthians 2:9-14, we are informed:

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also 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."

If we are to understand spiritual things, or the things of God, that knowledge must come from the Holy Ghost. This scripture clearly states that it cannot come from man's wisdom, which we have previously established. When Peter testified of Christ, Jesus told Peter that his testimony had come from God. This is, in fact, the only way to get a real testimony of true things. It takes spiritual communication to understand spiritual things.

Another illustration of this comes from Jennifer C. Lane. She says:

"For many Greeks, the logical conclusion of their assumptions was that God could not and would not take on a mortal body, suffer, and then be resurrected. For many Jews, the logical conclusion of their assumptions was that God had already declared the terms of salvation through the Torah and that there was no need for any further revelation. Paul and other New Testament authors could not through logic persuade either Greeks or Jews of the truthfulness of the gospel, because their audience was starting with completely different ideas about the nature and revelation of God. Instead, as Paul explains, the testimony of Christ's Atonement had to be given and received 'not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Corinthians 2:4)." (Jennifer C. Lane, *Jews and Greeks*", 35th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, 72)

Again we see that a knowledge of the truth cannot come only from logic, reasoning, or intellect. It must come from the Holy Ghost. That's the only way to receive truth, especially of spiritual things.

Brother Tad R. Callister understands this point very well. He has said, "When all is said and done, the Spirit is the ultimate evidence. It is the decisive, determining factor - not archaeology, nor linguistics, and certainly not the theories of man. The Spirit has no bias, no prejudice; rather, it has but one driving concern - to bear witness of the truth, regardless of the difficulty one may have in accepting it. In essence, the Spirit is that one indisputable piece of evidence in the courtroom of truth that cannot be discredited, diluted, or denied. It speaks for itself without the need of any external confirmation or corroboration." (Tad R. Callister, *A Case for the Book of Mormon*, 66-67)

Let's read another excellent example of this in Matthew 16:15-17. It says

"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Christ told Peter that no one could have told him that, but that Heavenly Father had revealed it to him by the power of the Holy Ghost."

King Benjamin's people also understood this principle in Mosiah 5:2, which tells

us, "And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually."

The Holy Ghost was so strong with these people that they believed King Benjamin. They had a powerful testimony of his words. Their hearts were changed so that all they wanted was to do good. Were they perfect? No, but they really wanted to do what was right.

In fact, Brigham Young taught that the Holy Ghost teaches us the truth of all things. From the Journal of Discourses, Volume 12, pp. 207-208, we read, "Instead of considering that there is nothing known and understood, only as we know and understand things naturally, I take the other side of the question, and believe positively that there is nothing know except by the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether in theology, science, or art."

On another occasion, President Young taught, "All true wisdom that mankind have they have received from God, whether they know it or not. There is no ingenious mind that has ever invented anything beneficial to the human family but what he obtained it from that One Source.... There is only one source from whence men obtain wisdom, and that is God, the fountain of all wisdom; and though men may claim to make their discoveries by their own wisdom, by meditation and reflection, they are indebted to our Father in Heaven for all." (Journal of Discourses, 13:148.)

Brother Hugh Nibley said it this way, "Science, philosophy, and common sense all have a right to their day in court. But the last word does not lie with them. Every time men in their wisdom have come forth with the last word, other words have promptly followed. The last word is a testimony of the gospel that comes only by direct revelation. Our Father in heaven speaks it, and if it were in perfect agreement with the science of today, it would surely be out of line with the science of tomorrow. Let us not, therefore, seek to hold God to the learned opinions of the moment when He speaks the language of eternity." (Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1987), 134.)

Ultimately, all truth comes from God through the Holy Ghost. Communication with the Holy Ghost seems rather critical, does it not?

## **What is it like when the Holy Ghost speaks to us?**

How does the Holy Ghost communicate with us? Let's read Doctrine and Covenants 8:1-3, which tells us, "Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive a knowledge concerning

the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which has been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit. Yea, behold, I will tell you in your *mind* and in your *heart*, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground. (Italics added.)"

Substitute your own name in where "Oliver Cowdery" appears. The Lord tells us that we receive the answer in our minds as thoughts and in our hearts as feelings. But what is this experience like? How can we recognize it?

Brother Jerry Perkins tells us, "One key to recognizing the Spirit is to realize that it influences the mind and the feelings at the same time. The Spirit gives us ideas in our minds that we feel good about in our hearts, or feelings in our hearts that are reasonable to our minds. There is an interaction of reason and emotion that the scriptures underscore." (Jerry Perkins, *God Tailors Revelation to the Individual*, p. 263)

Ask God whether the concept is true. Ask Him to help you know the truth about that principle. He will tell you in your mind and in your heart. The answer will appeal to your intellect as well as to your emotions. You will feel it and know it.

Another scripture passage that helps us to know when a thought comes from the Lord is found in Moroni 7:13 and 16, which tell us:

"13 But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God."

"16 For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God."

If the thought or impression satisfies these criteria, these verses assure you that it is inspired of God. This is one sure way to know that your prayer has been answered, or that you are being directed by the Spirit to do something.

## **Peace and Charity**

Sometimes, the answer is so subtle, it is easy to miss. We can learn of what the Holy Ghost feels like in Galatians 5:22-23, which says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

It is a feeling of peace. It greatly enhances our most worthy traits. We become patient. We want to do what's right. We feel charity towards other people. This is one of the most common ways that I have personally felt the Spirit in my own life. Others' experiences may differ, but this seems to be one of the most

common ways to feel it.

Many people may misunderstand the magnitude of the answer. They may be looking for something dramatic, amazing, or otherwise grand. Most of the time, however, the answer comes in a very mild way.

President Spencer W. Kimball explains this to us this way: "The burning bushes, the smoking mountains, the sheets of four-footed beasts, the Cumorahs, and the Kirtlands were realities; but they were the exceptions. The great volume of revelation came to Moses and to Joseph and comes to today's prophets in the less spectacular way - that of deep impressions, without spectacle or glamour or dramatic events. Always expecting the spectacular, many will miss entirely the constant flow of revealed communication." (In Munich Germany Area Conference Report, 1973, p. 77, as quoted by Graham W. Doxey, in Conference Report, October 1991, pp. 32-33)

Look for the quiet answer. Look for the peaceful, warm feeling. That is how the Holy Ghost will communicate to most of us. It will nearly never be something awesome or incredible. It will be soft, peaceful, almost imperceptible.

On the same topic, Elder Thomas S. Monson explained, "Rarely is the assurance communicated by a flashing sign or a loud voice. Rather, the language of the Spirit is gentle, quiet, uplifting to the heart and soothing to the soul. At times, the answers to our questions and the responses to our daily prayers come to us through silent promptings of the Spirit. We listen for that still, small voice." (in Conference Report, April 1985, pp. 85-86)

It literally is "a still, small voice."

In the Book of Mormon, we read of other similar descriptions of the Holy Ghost. Let's first take a look at 3 Nephi 11:3, which says, "And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn."

This illustrates the point that the Holy Spirit manifests in a very calm, soft way. Another example can be found in Helaman 5:30-31. This passage says, "And it came to pass when they heard this voice, and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul - And notwithstanding the mildness of the voice, behold the earth shook exceedingly, and the walls of the prison trembled again, as if it were about to tumble to the earth;"

These passages also point out that the voice is not something that is dramatic,

but is something that is soft, peaceful, mild, and gentle.

## **Pure Intelligence**

Sometimes, when the Holy Spirit speaks to you, it brings concepts and ideas into your mind. They are usually things that you know but may not have thought about for some time. They may be something you just barely learned. Or, in some cases, these thoughts may be realizations of things you did not know before.

The Doctrine and Covenants explains it this way, "enlighten thy mind" (6:15), "peace to your mind" (6:23); "study it out in your mind" and "cause your bosom to burn" (9:8); and "enlighten your mind" and "fill your soul with joy" (11:13).

Joseph Smith describes the process of revelation thus: "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, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.,) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; 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. " (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Three 1838-39, p.151)

President Harold B. Lee described it this way: "When there come to you things that your mind does not know, when you have a sudden thought that comes to your mind, if you will learn to give heed to these things that come from the Lord you will learn to walk by the spirit of revelation." (Area Conference Report - Mexico City, 1972. p. 49)

## **Enlarging and Swelling**

There are times that the Holy Ghost can cause us to feel an emotional or intellectual expanding within us. You feel as though your understanding is enlarged. You may feel emotionally that there is a swelling sensation within you.

This is described in Alma 32:28 which says, "Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me."

The sensation is one of uplifting, enlarging, and expanding.

For a further explanation, let us turn to President Brigham Young. He says, "There is only one way to obtain power and influence in the Kingdom of God, and only one way to obtain foreknowledge, and that is to live so that influence will

come from our Creator, enlightening the mind and revealing things that are past, present and future pertaining to the earth and its inhabitants, and to the dealings of God with the children of men; in short, there is no source of true information outside of the Spirit of Revelation; it maketh manifest all things, and revealeth the dispositions of communities and of individuals. By possessing this Spirit, mankind can obtain power that is durable, beneficial, and that will result in a higher state of knowledge, of honor, and of glory. This can be obtained only by strictly marking the path of truth, and walking faithfully therein." (In Tabernacle, March 8, 1863, JD 10:104-105)

Another insightful description comes from Elder Parley P. Pratt. He explains:

"The Gift of the Holy Ghost adapts itself to all these organs or attributes. It quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections and adapts them by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops beauty of person, form and features. It tends to give health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being." (Parley P. Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology, p. 61)

How do we know the Holy Ghost is speaking to us? In Moroni 7:13, we read:

"But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God."

If we pray about something, and we have feelings that fit those criteria, chances are that we are on the right track.

## **Primary Questions**

The process of learning spiritual truth is simple. We begin by pondering a principle or concept that we have studied. Next, we should invite the Holy Ghost to be with us. We must be willing to accept whatever answer that the Lord is going to give us. We must be willing to change our lives in accordance to that answer. When we are ready, we should ask God to let us know if that concept or principle is true.

In the case of a positive answer, we might feel peace in our hearts. In many cases in my own life, this is how such answers have come. In the case of a negative answer, we may feel that something is not quite right, or we may be confused.

Why does the Lord use this pattern? It is because of how powerful an effect it has on us. President Joseph Fielding Smith has said, "Therefore, the seeing, even the Savior, does not leave as deep an impression in the mind as does the testimony of the Holy Ghost to the spirit. ... the impressions on the soul that come from the



Holy Ghost are far more significant than a vision. It is where spirit speaks to spirit, and the imprint upon the soul is far more difficult to erase.” (Seek Ye Earnestly [Deseret Book Co., 1970], pp. 213–14.)

What questions should we start with? There are many voices that will steer you in all sorts of directions for questions to ask the Lord. Did this really happen, or is that really true? What about the other thing? To begin with, we seek answers to the fundamental, primary questions.

These types of questions form the foundation of our beliefs. They give us a firm base upon which we can build our testimony. Once they are answered, other, secondary types of questions can be automatically answered, or do not need answering.

Elder Lawrence E. Corbridge counsels us, “Begin by answering the primary questions. There are primary questions and there are secondary questions. Answer the primary questions first. Not all questions are equal and not all truths are equal. The primary questions are the most important. Everything else is subordinate.” (Elder Lawrence E. Corbridge, “Stand Forever”, BYU Devotional, January 22, 2019)

The following are some examples of these core questions:

- Is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the true Church of God here on the earth today?
- Was Joseph Smith a true prophet?
- Is the Book of Mormon true?
- Is the current president of the Church the true prophet of God here on the earth today?
- Are the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price true books of scripture?
- Was every president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints between Joseph Smith and the current prophet a true, chosen, and ordained prophet of God?

Why these questions?

President Nelson has some counsel on this point. He explains, “You don’t have to wonder about what is true. You do not have to wonder whom you can safely trust. Through personal revelation, you can receive your own witness that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, that Joseph Smith is a prophet, and that this is the Lord’s Church. Regardless of what others may say or do, no one can ever take away a witness borne to your heart and mind about what is true.” (Russel M. Nelson, “*Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives*,” in Conference Report, April 2018)

Elder Corbridge makes the following insight:

"By contrast, the secondary questions are unending. They include questions about Church history, polygamy, people of African descent and the priesthood, women and the priesthood, how the Book of Mormon was translated, the Pearl of Great Price, DNA and the Book of Mormon, gay marriage, the different accounts of the First Vision, and on and on.

If you answer the primary questions, the secondary questions get answered too, or they pale in significance and you can deal with things you understand and things you don't and things you agree with and things you don't without jumping ship altogether."

If we know that the LDS church is true, we can automatically accept on faith that the doctrines of that church are true. This scripture-based truth is found in D&C 1:38: "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same." If we ever wonder whether a given doctrine is true, we can fall back on our answer from God as to the truthfulness of the Church. Should we really care to, we can go through the process we discussed earlier about receiving revelation. If we know that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, we can accept each of his teachings as true. If we know that the Book of Mormon is true, we know that all precepts contained therein are pure truth. If we know that we have a true prophet of God here on the earth today, we can automatically accept by faith that anything he tells us is true.

Here's Another valuable thought from Elder Corbridge:

"Answers to the primary questions do not come by answering the secondary questions. There are answers to the secondary questions, but you cannot prove a positive by disproving every negative. *You cannot prove the Church is true by disproving every claim made against it.* That will never work. It is a flawed strategy. Ultimately there has to be affirmative proof, and with the things of God, affirmative proof finally and surely comes by revelation through the spirit and power of the Holy Ghost."

Search out the answers to the primary questions. That is the way that you will build up a solid testimony. Answering the secondary questions will not help you develop a strong testimony. They are a waste of time.

## **A Solid Foundation**

Receiving an answer to questions like these through the revelatory process provides several truly magnificent benefits. First, we do not have to rely on man's limited understanding to seek out the truth. Debates will not discover the full truth. We have a channel direct to God that we can use to ask about the truthfulness of anything. Second, we don't need to go through this process for every single little point of doctrine that comes up. We certainly can on occasion when we feel like we want to gain a personal conviction of something. But if we have an affirmative answer to the questions mentioned above, that thoroughly

covers every question that arises that stems from those root questions. If these things are true, the whole corpus provided by these sources is true.

Also, you may have occasions when you have doubts, or do not know the answer to something. Because you already know that you have received your answers about the truthfulness of the scriptures, the Church, and the prophets, you can be at peace with not knowing the answer to that particular question. You can say, "I don't know the answer to this (yet), but I know that the scriptures, the Church and the prophets are true, so I am ok with not knowing this right now. I will take its truthfulness on faith." For this reason, you can see why our testimony does not rest upon others' actions, arguments, or their opinions of us. It cannot rest upon reason alone, as we have already established. Conflicting viewpoints, questions, and doubts are all swallowed up in your testimony if you receive the witness of the Holy Ghost to the truth of something. This is because that is the only true, real way that the Lord can tell you something. That's the only way you can know in your heart that it's true.

People who don't understand this call it "blind faith." Nothing could be further from the truth.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf shared the following about so-called "blind faith":

"Latter-day Saints are not asked to blindly accept everything they hear. We are encouraged to think and discover truth for ourselves. We are expected to ponder, to search, to evaluate, and thereby to come to a personal knowledge of the truth.

"Brigham Young said: 'I am ... afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by him. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security. ... Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates.'" (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *What Is Truth?*, BYU Devotional, January 2013)

We are to receive revelation through the power of the Holy Ghost. That's the only way to learn the truths of Heaven. You have already accepted that the current Prophet is a true prophet. Therefore, you accept the things the Prophet tells us as coming from God. Or you may choose to receive a confirmation of their truth through revelation by an appeal to Heavenly Father.

As you gain a testimony of the scriptures, the Church, and the prophets, you can accept through faith which sources you can go to for additional truth. For example, you can accept that the General Conference edition of the Ensign will provide you with true doctrine. You can accept that any book written by any prophet back to and including Joseph Smith is going to teach you true principles.

Elder Tad R. Callister says it this way:

"Once we have crossed the line of doubt and come to know that the

doctrinal teachings of the Church are true, then we don't have to agonize over and dissect every statement of the prophets. We don't have to weigh them against our finite standards of justice or our limited understanding of eternity — instead we can accept them as the will of God and move forward in a positive, constructive way. The profound doctrinal teachings of the Church are a powerful witness that our prophets are inspired, and thus, we can trust their counsel."

Now, it is important to understand that you will not get all truth at once. We learn this from 2 Nephi 28:30, which tells us, "For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have."

And in D&C 50:24 we learn a similar concept. It says, "That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."

You have to continually study those things that God has revealed to you that are true. Most especially this includes the Scriptures. Other edifying, uplifting, and wholesome sources should also be used. This can be anything produced by the Church, the Prophets, or the Apostles. We should seek wisdom out of the best books, as we learn in D&C 88:118. This verse tells us, "And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith."

Also, in the 13th Article of Faith, we read, "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. *If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.*" (italics added)

As you study these materials over time, your testimony will become stronger and stronger.

## **"I've Never Heard That"**

Once in awhile, you may come up against something that you have never heard before. These types of situations raise what we call secondary questions. There are countless questions of this type. In many instances, such questions are not faith-promoting. They are designed to confuse you and make you question your testimony.

However, there is no reason that they should cause any doubts to be raised in your mind. You might hear something about Joseph Smith, for example, that you have never heard before. When that happens, you can fall back on your

testimony that he was a true prophet of God.

For example:

Did he marry a 14-year-old girl? Yes. However, this doesn't bother us because we already have a testimony that he was a prophet of God.

See: Todd M. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. pp. 487, 499. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997

Did he translate the Book of Mormon with a stone placed in a hat? Yes. Why would that have any effect on our testimony? We know that he was a prophet.

See: David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, Richmond, Mo.: n.p., 1887, p. 12.

Did he search for buried treasure? Yes. He says as much in his own history. However, we have already received a witness that he was a prophet of God.

See: Joseph Smith - History 1:56

This new information won't bother you because whether it's true or not, you already have had the Spirit of the Lord reveal to your heart that Joseph Smith was a real, true prophet of God. Nothing that you hear about him will change that testimony. The same thing goes for anything new you hear about current prophets or the Book of Mormon. Once you have a testimony that it's true, you can fully rely on that testimony. Should you hear something that you have never heard before, it has no relevance to the testimony that you have already received.

Everyone has questions, concerns, or something about which they are pondering. Why not follow the Lord's prescribed manner of gaining answers to these questions? Think about and ponder your question. Then, study it out as much as is reasonably possible. Once you feel like you have the answer to your question, present it to the Lord. Invite the Spirit to be with you as you pray. Pay very close attention to your thoughts and feelings as you are praying and afterwards. This process is how you can come to know the truthfulness of any concept presented to you. It must be by faith, and cannot be proven with logic, philosophy, or debate. The Lord will reveal the truth of all things to you through the power and Gift of the Holy Ghost.

## **Part Two: Truth Despite Fallibility and Change**

What to do when leaders are not perfect and changes occur within the Church.

### **Fallibility Of Church Leaders**

It seems that there are some members in the Church who want to believe that its leaders do not or should not make any mistakes. People want to view these leaders as being infallible. After all, if God speaks with them, can He not just tell them the right thing to do the first time?

Or does He allow them to make mistakes in their leadership callings? Do they not grow and progress as any other person does? Mankind consists of imperfect human beings. Our Church leaders do the very best that they know how and the Lord consecrates their efforts. They certainly are not infallible.

Joseph Smith taught, "I told them I was but a man, and they must not expect me to be perfect; if they expected perfection from me, I should expect it from them; but if they would bear with my infirmities and the infirmities of the brethren, I would likewise bear with their infirmities." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Joseph Smith, 268)

The leaders of the Church do the absolute best that they can. They are some of the best people on the earth today. But they are in no way infallible. They make mistakes, just like the rest of us do.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf tells us:

"Some struggle with unanswered questions about things that have been done or said in the past. We openly acknowledge that in nearly 200 years of Church history—along with an uninterrupted line of inspired, honorable and divine events—there have been some things said and done that could cause people to question.

"And, to be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes. There have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine. I suppose the Church would be perfect only if it were run by perfect beings. God is perfect, and His doctrine is pure. But He works through us—His imperfect children—and imperfect people make mistakes.

"It is unfortunate that some have stumbled because of mistakes made by men. But in spite of this, the eternal truth of the restored gospel found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not tarnished,

diminished, or destroyed." (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Come, Join with Us," Ensign, November 2013, 22-23.)

Leaders of the Church are human beings, just like the rest of us. We all make mistakes. So do they. However, that does not mean that the Gospel as taught by the Church is any less than perfectly true.

President Brigham Young also had some thoughts on the matter. He said, "Can a Prophet or an Apostle be mistaken? Do not ask me any such question, for I will acknowledge that all the time, but I do not acknowledge that I designedly lead this people astray one hair's breadth from the truth, and I do not knowingly do a wrong, though I may commit many wrongs, and so may you. But I overlook your weaknesses, and I know by experience that the Saints lift their hearts to God that I may be led right." (The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2009), 3:1418)

Again, there may be leaders of the Church who, no matter their best efforts, they are not perfect in every way. But President Young knew that the members of the Church were praying for him, as we should be doing for our current Prophet. We should be doing everything we can to sustain, uphold, and uplift him.

Let us discuss two examples of some mistakes that have been made. One by a Prophet, and one by a General Authority. When Joseph Smith had translated 116 pages of the Book of Mormon, he lent them to Martin Harris. This resulted in the loss of these pages. From Joseph Fielding McConkie, we read, "It will be recalled that Joseph Smith was severely disciplined by the Lord for the loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon. Because of the Prophet's disobedience, the Lord withdrew his Spirit from Joseph Smith and allowed him to walk in darkness (see D & C 10:2; 19:20). Speaking of those events the Lord said, 'How oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men.... You should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary, and he would have been with you in every time of trouble' (D & C 3:6-8)." (Answers: Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions, Joseph Fielding McConkie)

So even Joseph Smith made some mistakes. How could we hold anyone else to a higher bar? They are growing and learning and progressing just like everyone else is.

Let us consider a case involving Bruce R. McConkie. He had written and published a book called "Mormon Doctrine" during the presidency of David O. McKay. The story continues:

"McKay's first step was to obtain a copy of the book and study it. One of his secretaries noted, 'He went through the whole thing. He had paper clips [on the pages where he had a question], and there were hundreds of them there' Then he summoned two senior apostles, Mark E. Petersen and Marion G Romney. 'I asked them if they would together go over Elder Bruce R. McConkie's book, *Mormon Doctrine* and make a list of the corrections that should be made preparatory to his sending out an addendum to all members of the Church who have purchased his book.' Having a General Authority send such an addendum would have been unprecedented, an indication of the seriousness with which McKay took McConkie's breach of propriety.

"Peterson and Romney took ten months to critique the book and make their report to the First Presidency. Romney submitted a lengthy letter on January 7, 1960, detailing what he felt were the most egregious errors in the book and noting: 'Its nature and scope and the authoritative tone of the style in which it is written pose the question as to the propriety of the author's attempting such a project without assignment and supervision from him whose right and responsibility it is to speak for the Church on 'Mormon Doctrine.'" On the same day, Peterson gave McKay an oral report in which he recommended 1,067 corrections that 'affected most of the 776 pages of the book.'" (David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism, Prince & Wright, 50)

Eventually it was all sorted out, but President McKay certainly felt that it was an appreciably large mistake.

Though there are more examples, it would be error to dwell further upon our wonderful leaders' mistakes.

## **Economy of Heaven**

If these men are not perfect, why does God use them for his purposes? Whatever imperfect man can do to accomplish God's work, God will have him do. Let's take a look at an excerpt from Jesus the Christ regarding the raising of Lazarus:

"The procedure throughout was characterized by deep solemnity and by the entire absence of every element of unnecessary display. Jesus, who when miles away and without any ordinary means of receiving the information knew that Lazarus was dead, doubtless could have found the tomb; yet He inquired: 'Where have ye laid him?' He who could still the waves of the sea by a word could have miraculously effected the removal of the stone that sealed the mouth of the sepulchre; yet He said: 'Take ye



away the stone.' He who could reunite spirit and body could have loosened without hands the cerements by which the reanimated Lazarus was bound; yet He said: 'Loose him, and let him go.' All that human agency could do was left to man. In no instance do we find that Christ used unnecessarily the superhuman powers of His Godship; the divine energy was never wasted; even the material creation resulting from its exercise was conserved, as witness His instructions regarding the gathering up of the fragments of bread and fish after the multitudes had been miraculously fed." (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage)

This is part of the economy of heaven. If there is any part of the plan that man can do, he will be asked to do it. Even an imperfect servant of God.

Tad R. Callister explains, "Because a divine law of heaven is that God expects us to do all we can, and what we cannot do, then God will help with the balance." (The Blueprint of Christ's Church, Callister, 264).

Think of everything that happened with the plates and their translation into the Book of Mormon that we have today. Think of how much human effort went into that process. The plates had to be made. Word upon word had to be inscribed into them. They had to be protected and maintained. Mormon and Moroni had to abridge them. Then, there was everything that Joseph Smith did.

He had to hide and protect them. He had to translate them. He and Oliver Cowdery had to get the manuscript to the typesetter. They had to find means to pay the printer to have them printed. Would it not have been easier to just reveal the words of the Book of Mormon directly to Joseph Smith and have him write them down? Again, that goes contrary to the economy of heaven. As Elder Talmage stated, "All that human agency could do was left to man."

## **Of the Scriptures**

Our eighth Article of Faith states: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God." But are the Bible and the Book of Mormon perfect?

No. Even the Scriptures are not free from error. Regarding the Book of Mormon, Joseph Fielding McConkie explains, "Moroni said, 'Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been' (Morm. 9:31). Of the restored gospel the Lord said,

'These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; and inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed; and inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent; and inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time' (D & C 1:24-28). (Answers: Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions, Joseph Fielding McConkie)

It's not a perfect book, nor does it make the claim to be. As a matter of fact, it explicitly says that it is *not* perfect. It was prepared through the Lord's prophets, who were human beings, just as fallible as you or I. This may be the reason that there have been literally thousands of corrections made in the text of the Book of Mormon since the first edition was printed.

Consider Mormon 8:12:

"And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these. Behold, I am Moroni; and were it possible, I would make all things known unto you."

Neither is the Bible perfect. However, unlike the Book of Mormon, it does not expressly state its fallibility. Nonetheless, we can consider some of the ways that we know that the Bible has some imperfections in it. First let's take a look at some verses that contradict each other.

Acts 9:7 - "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man."

Compare to:

Acts 22:9 - "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me."

Then, we have the following:

Job 7:9-10:

"9 As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more.

10 He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more."

Compare to:

Matthew 27: 52-53:

"52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."

And finally:

Acts 1:16-18:

"16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out."

Compare to:

Matthew 27:3-5:

"3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.

5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself."

There are more, but this should suffice for our purposes here. Another way we know that the bible is imperfect is by all of the scriptures it mentions that are not contained therein. Let's consider a list of them:

- book of the Wars of the Lord (Num. 21:14)
- book of Jasher (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18)
- book of the acts of Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:41)
- book of Samuel the seer (1 Chr. 29:29)
- book of Gad the seer (1 Chr. 29:29)
- book of Nathan the prophet (1 Chr. 29:29; 2 Chr. 9:29)
- prophecy of Ahijah (2 Chr. 9:29)
- visions of Iddo the seer (2 Chr. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22)
- book of Shemaiah (2 Chr. 12:15)

- book of Jehu (2 Chr. 20:34)
- sayings of the seers (2 Chr. 33:19)
- an epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, earlier than our present 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9)
- possibly an earlier epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 3:3)
- an epistle to the Church at Laodicea (Col. 4:16)
- and some prophecies of Enoch, known to Jude (Jude 1:14)

That is a lot of missing scripture. The Bible is not complete as we have it. The Book of Mormon even tells us that things have been taken out. Nephi tells us this in 1 Nephi 13:26,28-29:

"26 And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

28 Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God.

29 And after these plain and precious things were taken away it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles; and after it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles, yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen with the Gentiles which have gone forth out of captivity, thou seest—because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book, which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men, according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God—because of these things which are taken away out of the gospel of the Lamb, an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them."

As we have seen, many plain and precious things have been removed from the Bible. We can see evidence of this in analysis of the Bible itself.

Elder Alexander B. Morrison has this to say about the changes in the Bible that are mentioned in 1 Nephi 13:

"Most of the changes, as one might expect, are the result of human error, carelessness, or fatigue on the part of the scribe or copyist. Misspellings and the inadvertent omission or duplication of a word or a line clearly fall

into that category. Most copyists in the early centuries of the Christian era were not trained to do the work but were simply the literate members of a congregation. Origen, a third-century Christian Father, complained about the copies of the Gospels to which he had access: "The differences among the manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they make additions or deletions as they please." (Elder Alexander B. Morrison, *"Plain and Precious Things"*, 35th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, 12)

The Book of Mormon also tells us that there is scripture that we haven't even received, yet. 2 Nephi 29:12-13 says:

"12 For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

13 And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews."

We have scriptures from the lost tribes of Israel that we have yet to receive.

Numerous things have been changed in the Bible, as well. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Joseph Smith, 327).

He also said, "From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Joseph Smith, 9-10)

For a quick example, let's take a look at Matthew 5:22 in the King James Version, which says, "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

Note the phrase "without a cause." This phrase does not appear in some of the other translations of the Bible, such as the Revised Standard Version, the

American Standard Version, and the New International Version. So is it supposed to be there or not?

Fortunately, we can turn to revelation as we have discussed in the first part of this book. This is exactly what Joseph Smith did as he corrected the Bible. If we look at footnote 'b' for verse 22, it says, "JST Matt. 5:22 and 3 Ne. 12:22 omit the words 'without a cause.'" Because of revelation, we know that this phrase does not belong.

Elder Tad R. Callister brings this to our attention:

"The King James Version of the Bible was first published in 1611, but few people use this original edition. Most people are surprised to learn that the 1769 edition of the King James Version produced by Benjamin Blayney, which is in common use today, contains approximately 16,000 corrections from the original edition. The Revised Version of the Bible, another popular edition of the King James Bible, contains another 36,000 changes."

That is a whole lot of changes. Elder Alexander B. Morrison explains why such changes should not bother us. He says:

"These examples of changes in the New Testament scriptures over the years—and many more could be mentioned—underline what to me is an important issue: scripture itself is not sufficient authority for one's Christian faith. To that must be added at least two things: the whisperings of the Spirit—that Spirit which teaches the truth and testifies of it—and the traditions and teachings of modern-day prophets and Apostles." (Elder Alexander B. Morrison, *"Plain and Precious Things"*, 35th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, 18)

Brother Robert L. Millet stated:

"We do not believe the Bible must be transmitted perfectly to be spiritually normative and eternally valuable. Errors in the Bible should not tarnish its image for Latter-day Saints. For that matter, while we accept the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price as holy scripture, we would not rush to proclaim their inerrancy. The greater marvel is that an infinite and perfect God can work through finite and imperfect humans to deliver his word to his children." (Robert L. Millet, "What the Bible Means to Latter-day Saints," in *The King James Bible and the Restoration*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 1-10.)

Brother Millet summarizes the thought eloquently. Even though there is ample evidence that the scriptures have been altered, or have errors in them, we still

know that they are true. We hold them in the highest regard as sacred volumes of holy writ containing God's will for mankind.

Elder Morrison also has some thoughts on the matter. He explains:

"To Latter-day Saints, the Bible is much more than a 'human document.' We revere and respect it. We honor it. We recognize that it is not complete nor entirely accurate, but hopefully we never forget that latter-day revelation sustains, supports, and verifies the biblical account of God's dealings with His children.

"To me, at least, the authorship of James, and for that matter the other books of the New Testament as well, is of far less importance than the messages and testimonies of the Holy Messiah which they bear. I honor them as holy scripture, the word of God given for our edification and instruction, 'as far as [they are] translated correctly' (Article of Faith 8). The testimony of the Holy Ghost, which teaches us 'all things' (John 14:26) and testifies that Jesus is the Only Begotten Son of the Father (John 15:26), is independent of who the author of a particular book was."

(Elder Alexander B. Morrison, *"Plain and Precious Things"*, 35th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, 6, 14)

Even in its imperfection, the Bible still contains the word of God to us.

## **On Change**

The Church is often held to the standard of perfection, as well. Some might say, "Why would God allow imperfections in His Church? Surely, if the Church were true, there would be no imperfections in it or any need to make changes to its practices, policies, or structure."

Here, we must go back to the nature of humankind. We all have weaknesses and challenges. The leaders of the church are no exception. As the Church is led by imperfect men, there are going to be things in it that need to be changed from time to time. As a matter of fact, let's take a look at some of the things that have changed in the Church since it was restored:

- Beginning in 1852, the Church began practicing polygamy, but in 1890, the practice was discontinued when the Manifesto was issued.
- After the Church was first organized the Prophet Joseph Smith was called to be an Apostle and the First Elder of the Church. Oliver Cowdery was called to be an Apostle and the Second Elder of the Church. This was constituted as the leadership of the Church at that time. This was later changed such that there is now a Prophet and his two Counselors that

make up the First Presidency which lead the Church. Accompanying them is the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

- Primary, Priesthood, and Sunday School used to be on different days of the week. It was then changed such that they all met on Sunday for what was then known as the 3-hour block.
- There have been numerous changes to the temple ceremony throughout the Church's history.
- There have been many changes to the Church's General Handbook of Instructions over the decades.

Most recently, we have had extensive changes:

- Meetings used to take up 3 hours on Sunday. Now, Sunday meetings consist of two hours.
- Home Teaching was dissolved and Ministering instituted.
- At the ward level, the High Priests now meet with the Elders' Quorum.
- Young men used to be ordained to the Priesthood when they turned 12 years old. Now, they are ordained to the Priesthood in January of the year they turn 12. In nearly all cases, this means that they are 11 years old at the time of their ordination.
- Any member holding a current temple recommend, including a limited-use recommend, may serve as a witness to a proxy baptism.
- Any endowed member with a current temple recommend may serve as a witness to a living or proxy sealing.
- Any baptized member of the Church, including children and youth, may serve as a witness to the baptism of a living person.

Additionally, organizational changes have been made in the office of the Seventy, Area Authority, and Area Authority Seventy:

"...in October 1986, President Ezra Taft Benson made the following announcement:

"In harmony with the needs of the growth of the Church across the world, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles have given prayerful consideration to the role of the stake seventies quorums in the Church and have determined to take the following action relative thereto:

"... The *seventies quorums in the stakes of the Church are to be discontinued*, and the brethren now serving as seventies in these quorums



will be asked to return to membership in the elders quorums of their wards. Stake presidents, in an orderly fashion, may then determine who among such brethren should be ordained to the office of high priest.

"The work continued to expand, and six years later, in preparation for further fulfillment of the role of the Seventies, President Gordon B. Hinckley said in the April 1995 general conference:

"Now in the ongoing of this work, administrative changes sometimes occur. The doctrine remains constant. But from time to time there are organizational and administrative changes made under provisions set forth in the revelations.

"For instance, twenty-eight years ago the First Presidency was inspired to call men to serve as regional representatives of the Twelve ... to train our stake and ward leaders in the programs of the Church that they in turn might train the membership in their responsibilities before the Lord.

"More recently the Presidency were inspired to call men from the Seventy to serve in Area Presidencies. As the work grows across the world, it has become necessary to decentralize administrative authority to keep General Authorities closer to the people. We now have such Area Presidencies well established and effectively functioning.

"It is now felt desirable to tighten up the organization administered by the Area Presidencies. Accordingly, we announce the release—the honorable release—of all regional representatives effective August 15 of this year.

"Now we announce the call of a new local officer to be known as an area authority. These will be high priests chosen from among past and present experienced Church leaders. They will continue with their current employment, reside in their own homes, and serve on a Church-service basis. The term of their call will be flexible, generally for a period of approximately six years. They will be closely tied to the Area Presidencies. They will be fewer in number than have been the regional representatives. We are guided in setting up this new corps of area officers, as were our Brethren before us in the calling of regional representatives, by the provision contained in the revelation on priesthood, section 107 of the Doctrine and Covenants." (A History of the Latter-day Seventy, Elder L. Aldin Porter)

There have been many more changes above and beyond this list. This is just to give the reader an idea of the types of changes that have occurred within the Church during its history.

## What of Fallibility and Change?

So, what do we do with all of this imperfection? How do we reconcile the changes made throughout the Church's history? When a Church leader makes a mistake, does that mean the Church is not true? Those are actually the wrong questions. What we should really be asking is, "Am I able to trust the Giver of the Law, the One who guides the Church?" Do we give Christ room to instruct the prophet to make these changes? Do we allow the Giver of the Law to be greater than the law? Do we gain a personal testimony that Jesus Christ leads His Church by revelation here on the Earth?

Joseph Smith taught, "That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. God said, 'Thou shalt not kill;' at another time He said, 'Thou shalt utterly destroy.' This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire." (History of the Church, Joseph Smith, 5:134-135)

Perhaps this is one reason that absolute truth is not necessarily attainable. It may change dependent upon our circumstances.

Sometimes, we get in this habit of trying to ascertain what absolute truth is. Believe it or not, this type of thinking comes from the Greek influence during the time of Christ. This is often referred to as the Hellenistic period. The Greeks thought in terms of absolute truth as an abstract idea.

For example, in your mind's eye, imagine a perfect square. You can see each of the sides are exactly the same length, and that each corner is exactly 90 degrees. Or take the concept of  $2+2$ . It will always be 4. The Greeks thought in terms of truth as immutable ideas such as these. This type of thought, inherited from the Greeks, drives our need to have truth as an absolute, unchangeable thing.

Dr. Jeffery L. Thayne and Dr. Edwin E. Gantt give some good insight:

"Not only do our beliefs hinge on different premises, but the premises of our *questions* matter as well. Many of the questions above are rooted in a single premise: They assume that *truth* is a set of abstract ideas or doctrines that never change.

"This may seem like common sense, and if so, that is because most of us accept this view unquestioningly. But this may be one of the 'philosophies of men' that can subtly change the way we think about the gospel, and ultimately ensnare us in doubt. This view has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy. The Greeks saw things that do not change as more

fundamental than those that do, and this led them to focus on abstract ideas as 'truth.'

"In the view we articulate in this book, truth is not a set of abstract ideas, but a living, breathing Person who loves us as His children. This view is inspired by Hebrew thought, which did not separate the search for truth from our journey to God. And once we adopt this view—even provisionally—all of our questions change. *Not all of our questions will be answered, to be sure.* But the way we frame the questions will change so that they no longer tilt us towards doubt. We explain how this is so throughout the rest of this book.

"But perhaps more important, this book may help you to reframe the way you think about your relationship with God. Our hope is that all of our readers will center their faith more on the Savior Jesus Christ and the covenants they have made with God, and less on abstract lists of doctrine or beliefs. We echo the words of Nephi, who wrote, 'For the fulness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved' (1 Nephi 6:4)" (Who Is Truth?, Thayne & Gantt, 15-16)

We should be evaluating our relationship with the great Giver of the Law rather than focusing on whether a given point of doctrine is dead-on correct, or whether this or that new policy is the right thing to do. We can receive our own testimonies of these changes. The first part of this book goes over that entire process. It talks about how to gain a testimony of a thing about which we have a question, or something that is weighing on our minds.

And why would we even be bothered by changes that occur? We explicitly state in the Ninth Article of Faith that "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." Such revelations, in this context mean that things will most certainly change! We believe in revelations that correct the Bible, as did Joseph Smith's Translation. We believe in all the revelations that will yet come. They might be to make changes in existing canon, programs, or policies. The Ninth Article of Faith allows for all of this.

Let's turn now to 2 Nephi 29:7, which says, "Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?"

The Lord has given a portion of his word "unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth." So far, the scriptures mentioned in this verse have not been brought forth. Also, we have the sealed part of the plates that Joseph Smith did not translate. There appears to be much that has yet to come forth.

The Lord never gives us more than we can handle. There have been times when He has changed His law as given to the people. Sometimes, these changes come so as to give us something that we can understand and live as a Church.

The Lord will give us milk before meat. Let's take a look at some scriptures that illustrate this principle:

D&C 19:22 - "For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must not know these things, lest they perish."

1 Corinthians 3:2 - "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able."

Hebrews 5:12-14:

"12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

1 Peter 2:2 - "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"

The Lord gives us just the right amount of His law and commandments for us to live at that moment. We could not handle the full and perfect truth all at once even if we wanted to. We learn "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." (2 Nephi 28:30)

We grow and progress in the principles of truth. We do our best with the little that we get at a time. Gradually, we get more and more. Over time, we are able to handle the "meat."

What if God did give us the full law all at once? We would be responsible to live it. Not being able to, we would stand completely condemned. The Lord gives us laws that we *can* live, laws that we can aspire to live, rather than the law in its full perfection. This would be utterly impossible. We would end up in a very

hopeless state. Perhaps the scriptures can clarify:

"3 For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.

4 Ye call upon my name for revelations, and I give them unto you; and inasmuch as ye keep not my sayings, which I give unto you, ye become transgressors; and justice and judgment are the penalty which is affixed unto my law." (D&C 82:3-4)

We have to live whatever law we have been given. If we do, we will get marvelous blessings. If not, we are in danger of missing out on blessings we otherwise might have had.

Even though our priesthood leaders are not infallible, they are the men that the Lord has chosen. They are doing their best to do the will of the Lord. If we take the law as given to us by priesthood leaders as God's will, we will be blessed:

"What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same." (D&C 1:38)

"I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise." (D&C 82:10)

If we live the law that has been given to us through his servants, we will be blessed. If not, we may find ourselves in an undesirable condition.

We should remember that even though our leaders are not perfect, we have sustained them. This means that we uphold and support them. We do whatever we can to help them be successful in their calling.

We should do our very best to live by every word that comes out of the mouths of both our local leaders and the leaders of the Church.

Marion G. Romney said, "I remember years ago when I was a bishop I had President Heber J. Grant talk to our ward. After the meeting I drove him home... Standing by me, he put his arm over my shoulder and said: 'My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it.' Then with a twinkle in his eye, he said, 'But you don't need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray.'" (Marion G. Romney (quoting Heber J. Grant), Conference Report, October 1960, 78)

Commit yourself to obey what the prophet says. If we so live, we will always be

safe.

Speaking of the Apostles in the same manner, Elder James E. Faust said, "The keys I speak of never rust. These are the keys of life and salvation in the kingdom of God. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, "I will give you a key that will never rust, if you will stay with the majority of the Twelve Apostles, and the records of the Church, you will never be led astray.'" (Sunday Afternoon Session, 2 October 1994, The Keys That Never Rust, Elder James E. Faust Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

Even though our leaders are not perfect, we still sustain and support them. We are blessed for following their counsel. We should do as they direct, because their word is as though it came from the Lord himself. They will never lead us astray. The scriptures themselves may have imperfections. However, studied properly, they bring the Holy Ghost into our lives. The scriptures are God's word to us. Changes in the Church mean that it is being led by constant revelation. This is something that should be celebrated.