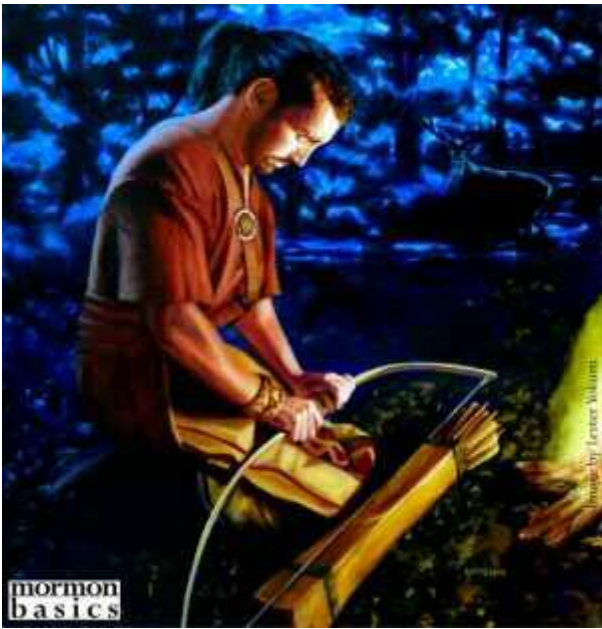




The High Council has been asked to speak on the topic of seeking an outpouring of the Spirit in our Stake. As I have reviewed the suggested Conference talks and scriptural references, I have come to realize that I have woefully missed the mark in my previous efforts to seek the companionship of the Spirit in my life.

To this end, I would like to spend some time talking about what is required to attract the companionship of the Holy Ghost, as well as what offends Him. All quotes come from one of the two talks given by Elder David A. Bednar or

President Henry B. Eyring in the October, 2010 General Conference. The links are at the bottom of the article.

My personal misconceptions

As I was studying the materials for this talk, it occurred to me that I have made a mistake. I caught myself asking myself what I needed to do for the Holy Ghost to be able to lead me more often. It suddenly dawned on me that I had been allowing the Spirit only one role in my life, and that is to tell me what to do next.

The Spirit's role is far more comprehensive than that of a field guide. The Spirit is here to comfort me, to help me comprehend spiritual things I hadn't considered before, to bring things I have learned before into my mind when I need them, and to help me see life from an eternal perspective rather than from just a mortal or temporary perspective. He is also here to activate within me spiritual gifts so I can learn to think the way my Father in Heaven thinks. For example, He awakens within me a greater compassion for others, opens my eyes to service opportunities, helps me feel greater patience and tolerance for others, teaches me longsuffering, and helps me learn to love like my Savior loves. His role is to guide me through the transformation from purely mortal to a mortal who has become holy.

All these years I have been thinking of the Spirit as someone I turn to when I don't know what step to take next. I've been using Him like I would use a Google account, as

reference material when I needed it. What I now see is that I cannot live a truly Christian life without involving the Spirit in every phase of my life. I need Him far more than I ever realized before.

About offense

In studying about the Spirit, I ran across references that talk about offending the Spirit. Something didn't seem quite right. The way we take offense seems to be different than the way the Spirit takes offense. This got me thinking about the nature of an offense.

If you offer me an offense, an insult or slight, a criticism or condemnation of some kind, if I accept it or take it, then I have made your offense my own. To take offense is to bring someone else's slight into our soul and make it part of us. We brood over it, nurse it as a personal wound, and incorporate it into our life. Taking an offense changes us, and not for the better.

Think of it in terms of receiving, versus accepting a gift. If someone gives me a gift, I may have physical control of the gift, but if I never use it then I haven't really received the gift, for I haven't taken it into myself to enjoy and appreciate. Instead of being grateful for the gift, I let it sit in storage and never look at it or think about it. For all intents and purposes the gift may as well never have been given.

When someone offends me and I take offense, I accept the full burden of the hurt they either did or did not intend for me. It is poison to my soul that I willingly ingest. I swallow the poison of the offense of my own free will.

But look at how the Spirit is offended. He does not take the hurt into himself. When we do something that offends the Spirit, He doesn't love us any less. Yes, He is grieved because of our actions, and our repulsive or distasteful behavior may be disgusting to Him, causing Him to pull away from us, but He neither takes it personally, nor does he let it corrupt his own soul. The Holy Ghost cannot tolerate sin any more than our Father or Christ can tolerate sin. This is why repenting of our sins is required if we want the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

Seeking the companionship of the Spirit

Baptism into the Lord's church is only the first half of the ordinance. "Baptism by immersion is "the introductory ordinance of the gospel, and must be followed by

baptism of the Spirit in order to be complete” (Bible Dictionary, “Baptism”).” When a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood lays his hands on my head and says, “Receive the Holy Ghost,” what must I do to receive Him?

Now remember, to receive him is to take him into our life and make him an integral part of who we are, not just a temporary visitor. There are certain activities that will offend the Spirit and drive him away. There are also activities that will invite His presence and participation in our life. Here is a short list of things we can do to invite the Spirit to be an active participant in our life:

1. Acts of kindness. All things that come from God lead people back to God. Anything that is good comes from Him, so when we perform acts of kindness of any type and variety, we invite God’s Spirit to be with us. This is a simple thing we can do to fulfill the sacramental prayer. In the sacrament prayers we promise to take upon ourselves the name of Christ and always remember him, and keep his commandments so we may always have his Spirit to be with us.

When we deliberately do good and bless the lives of others, are we not showing gratitude and respect for the good Christ did for us? Are we not standing in for Him and doing the good He would do if he were here in our place? This is the covenant we made at baptism.

2. Prayer and scripture reading. Prayer is our special gift from God to allow us to communicate directly with Him while we are away in mortality. This is a special time for us to express our gratitude for his many blessings, to talk to him about how our life is going, discuss our challenges and rejoice in our blessings. Our personal prayers are a sacred time and opportunity for us to draw closer to the Lord through reflecting on the events of our day.

Scriptures are the words of God and contain great power to teach us wisdom and offer direction and comfort to our souls. When combined with the Spirit, they can teach us all things that we should do. The Spirit inspired the words the prophets wrote, so studying His words invites Him to be near. Never underestimate the power of scripture study to bring us closer to God.

Referring back to the baptismal covenant and sacramental prayer, Elder Bednar said,

Consider the reasons we pray and study the scriptures. Yes, we yearn to communicate in prayer with Heavenly Father in the name of His Son. And yes, we desire to obtain the light and knowledge available in the standard works. But please remember that these holy habits primarily are ways whereby we always remember Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son and are prerequisites to the ongoing companionship of the Holy Ghost.

3. Pondering. One of the least used skills for inviting the Spirit to be with us is the act of pondering. To ponder is to spend time thinking about spiritual things. It is the process of trying to understand and place in perspective how one teaching affects and is related to another teaching.

Pondering is how we come to learn the doctrines of salvation. It is not enough to simply read the scriptures. That would be like reading the dictionary but never learning any of the words it contains. There is power in our prayer experiences and in our reading of the scriptures, but most of that power will go forever unlocked and untapped if we don't spend time seeking understanding through pondering.

“Several years after the Prophet Joseph Smith was martyred, he appeared to President Brigham Young and shared this timeless counsel: “Tell the people to be humble and faithful and [be] sure to keep the Spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the small still voice; it will teach [you what] to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it. They can tell the Spirit of the Lord from all other spirits. It will whisper peace and joy to their souls, and it will take malice, hatred, envying, strife, and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good, bring forth righteousness, and build up the kingdom of God. Tell the brethren if they will follow the Spirit of the Lord they will go right” (Teachings: Joseph Smith, 98).

Learning to listen to that “small still voice” is what it is all about. We all feel and sense the Spirit in a slightly different way, so we each need to discover how He speaks to us for ourselves. For me, it is often a small, quiet voice from behind me, like someone whispering over my shoulder. The whisper will be an impression that something feels right. It may also be a statement in my thoughts, like a suggestion to do something or just a statement of fact. Sometimes it is a feeling of gratitude or a realization of a blessing I hadn't noticed before. But always it comes with the fulfillment of Joseph Smith's promise that it takes away “malice, hatred, envying, strife, and all evil” from my

heart. It always is accompanied by a sense of peace and goodness that fills my soul with joy.

Learning to listen to the Spirit and recognize when it is the Spirit speaking to us takes practice and time. My mother used to teach us that anytime you have an inclination to do good, especially when it is the first thing that pops into your head, that is the Spirit urging you to do something. When we follow this initial impulse to do good, then we are learning to follow the Spirit. This leads us to my last point on how to invite the Spirit into our lives.

4. Invite the Spirit. It is important to note that the Lord never forces himself on us. We must be actively seeking Him out. Only then, by His own laws, does he have permission to fully engage with us.

Reading, praying, pondering, and doing good, are all indications that we desire the Spirit's presence in our life. But we also need to specifically ask for His presence, his interference, his guidance, direction, comfort, and power.

Unlike a husband with his wife, the Lord can, in fact, read our minds, but we are still required to make the first move and request the presence of the Spirit in our lives. This is all part of our baptism and sacrament covenant to take upon ourselves Christ's name and always remember Him. If we will do this then we are promised the Holy Ghost will come and dwell with us always.

Now that we have looked at what invites the Spirit into our lives, let's look briefly at what offends the Spirit and will drive him away. Here are a couple of things that will cause the Spirit to turn away from us.

1. The spirit of criticism. As I pondered on these two Conference talks and read the recommended scriptures, it came into my mind that I am quick to criticize. Don't get me wrong, I am not a sour puss. I don't grump around and condemn all that I see, but I am at times still possessed of a critical spirit.

A critical spirit is one in which you are quick to find fault. We think to ourselves, with some sense of smugness, "Well that could have been done better." Or we might think, "If I was in charge I would have done it such and such way." Sometimes we might even think to ourselves that a person did an okay job, but we feel we are being kind not to

criticize their obvious flaws in the talk they just gave or in how they just taught their lesson, or whatever it was someone just did. It is a feeling of superiority.

The danger in being critical is that it doesn't just extend to one person. When we are possessed of a critical spirit it also extends to our priesthood leaders and our loved ones. It is a quiet, yet deadly spiritual poison.

We may even say nice things outwardly, while listing inwardly all the faults we found with whatever was just done. Most people don't ever see the level of critiquing that takes place in our hearts and in our heads. This is offensive to the Spirit and will keep Him at bay.

2. Spiritual apathy. Not caring enough to pray individually or as a family, or to read the words of the prophets, or attend the temple, or to spend time pondering on the things of eternity, etc., are all signs of spiritual apathy. The spiritually apathetic person doesn't show up for ward cleaning assignments or service projects, they may be lax about their payment of tithes and offerings or home or visiting teaching (ministering).

To be apathetic is to not care. We can be basically good people, doing decent things, but if we are not actively seeking to include the Spirit in our life, He will only be on the fringes of our daily activities. Revelation doesn't often happen from the fringes, and it is through revelation from the Holy Ghost that we make all our progress towards becoming like our Father in Heaven.

There are more things I could talk about that offend the Spirit, but I want to make a point about how we actually get the Spirit to be with us. Spiritual apathy drives the Spirit away. It takes us being aware of our state of spirituality to actually be able to invite the Spirit on a regular basis. We must be aware that we are consciously doing good, consciously making sure we pray, study, and ponder. We need to be aware of our weaknesses, like being apathetic or critical of others.

There is nothing more valuable to us in this life than the gift of the Holy Ghost. Without this gift we cannot return to our Father in Heaven. Without this gift we cannot be forgiven of all our sins and become holy before the Lord. It is critical to our own salvation that we learn to daily seek His presence in our lives, for comfort, guidance, knowledge, for spiritual gifts, and for the change in our attitudes and heart that are

required to become like Christ. These things don't happen by accident. They happen because we deliberately seek them.

Final Thoughts

In Alma 16:16-17 we read that after the wicked city of Ammonihah had been destroyed, Alma and Amulek had great success in preaching to the people. They established the church and it experienced great prosperity.

16 And there was no inequality among them; the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming—

17 That they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

This was about 110 years before Christ visited the Americas, yet Mormon says the Lord poured “his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming.”

We may not be here in mortality when the Lord comes to rule and reign, but he is already preparing the hearts of the people to make ready for that day. We are entering the days leading up to Christ's second coming, and we need to become personally prepared.

The Lord does not do last minute preparations. What will be taught to the generation that will see His coming will possibly be taught to them by us, the generations who precede his coming. We need to learn these lessons and prepare ourselves to be ready, and to teach our children how to be prepared for that sacred day. This will take active participation in those things that invite the Lord's Spirit into our lives.

I invite all within the sound of my voice to decide each and every day to do something that will bring you a little closer to the Spirit each day. Make this a daily habit, and the Lord will bless you in ways you have never considered possible.

References

[“Serve with the Spirit” \(Pres. Henry B. Eyring, Oct. 2010\).](#)

[“Receive the Holy Ghost” \(Elder David A. Bednar, Oct. 2010\).](#)

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