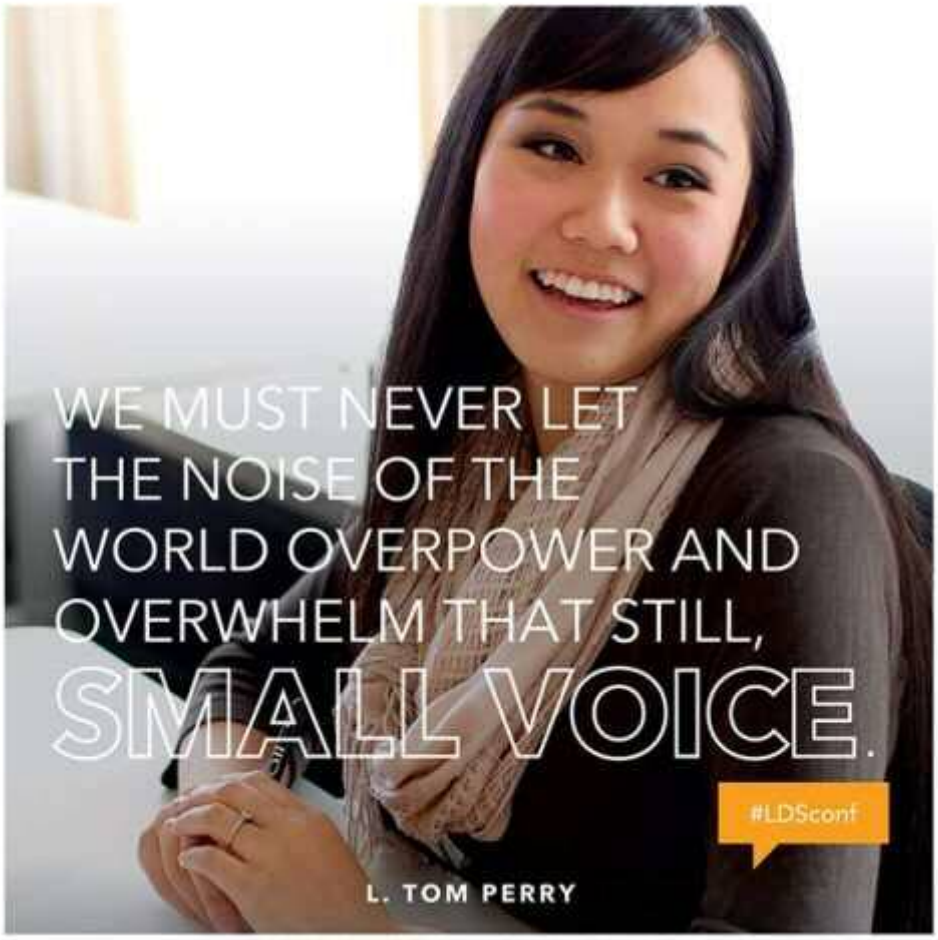

OCTOBER 2014 GENERAL CONFERENCE, LDS.ORG

We often feel less than adequate when it comes to following the promptings of the Holy Ghost. I am among those who feel like I could be doing much better than I currently am on this subject. As I sat and thought about all the ways I can be influenced by the Spirit, and what I can do about it, the following list gradually unfolded in my mind. I think you will be surprised by my ending example. I will show you proof that there are those in the world who are making a practice of following the Spirit that eclipse the efforts of many of us who have the gift of the Holy Ghost. This tells me that we are not living up to our privileges.

1

Love those whom you serve. This thought took me by surprise. What does love have to do with following the Spirit? Everything the Lord does is motivated by love. It is difficult to feel the Spirit's promptings to help those we do not love. And it is difficult to

love someone you do not serve. So if you want to learn to love someone, serve them. The influence of the Holy Spirit won't be far behind.

2

Learn to listen. We can hear with our head, hear with our ears, and hear with our hearts. When we hear with our head we receive images or pictures of what is happening or what is needed. Some who have lost an item are shown where it is. Sometimes when we are serving someone we will be shown what we need to do in order to help them. This can be either shown, as in with the eye of our understanding, or we may actually see in our mind's eye a demonstration of what we need to do to help someone.

We also may have thoughts that come into our mind with instructions. These may or may not sound like your own "voice" talking to you. Sometimes we actually hear a voice. Most of the time we do not, but occasionally we do. Don't be surprised. Don't argue. Just do what it says, immediately. Often, if you receive a command or warning by a voice it is something that is imperative that it be followed right away. It is time sensitive. Then again, sometimes the voice we hear is one of comfort in a trying situation, which isn't necessarily time sensitive.

To listen with the heart you must learn to recognize how you feel. Some people take a while to sort out how they feel about something. Others can tell you right away how they feel. To each his own. But much of what comes from God comes by way of feelings. This may well be the most common way for inspiration or promptings of the Spirit to come to us.

When we are seeking a change of heart so we can learn to forgive or to tolerate something or someone, what we are seeking is a change in how we feel. This is often a gradual change that when discovered, surprises us, for we can't pin down when it happened. And for every rule, there is usually an exception. There are times when we pray for a change of heart and the prayer is answered quickly and decisively. In this way we know exactly when that change of heart took place. But normally changes of heart take time and consistent effort on our part before the Lord affects the change. It is always such a pleasant surprise when we find that the change has taken place and we didn't even notice it happening.

3

Follow your first inclination to do good. The scriptures say that everything that is good, or inviteth to do good is of God. In Moroni 7:13-16 we are taught explicitly that we can judge good from evil with a perfect understanding. Read this entire passage, but focus on the first and last verses for now.

> 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.
>
> 14 Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.
>
> 15 For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.
>
> 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.

Note that he says that "the Spirit of Christ is given to every man." The purpose of this Spirit is to lead each person to do good each day, whether they are in the Lord's Church or not. Following the Spirit of Christ and doing good each day leads to peace and joy that cannot happen in our lives any other way.

Much of what we receive from the Spirit comes by way of a desire to help or be kind, to forgive or to pardon. Sometimes His influence comes in the form of a bright idea that seems perfectly natural. When my wife was training a new missionary she was letting her companion make all the decisions that day so her companion would gain confidence in her abilities to do missionary work. As they were riding past a particular street, my wife found herself exclaiming, "Let's tract this street." They had more success on that street that day than they had experienced for quite a while. When her companion asked her how she knew to tract that street, my wife was surprised by the question, because she didn't even remember saying it. It just came out of her mouth, seemingly by itself.

Elder Ronald A. Rasband gave a talk in Conference on Sunday morning, April of 2017 entitled, "Let the Holy Spirit Guide." In that talk he said this:

> Remember the Lord's promise: "I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy." I love that assurance. Joy that fills our souls brings with it an eternal perspective in contrast to day-to-day living. That joy comes as peace amidst hardship or heartache. It provides comfort and courage, unfolds the truths of the gospel, and expands our love for the Lord and all God's children.

When we follow our first inclination to do good, the consistent result is a return of joy. That doesn't mean that what we tried to do will always be successful, but it does mean that there follows a peace of conscience that settles our soul and makes us more at home with God and His Spirit, because we have done His will.

4

Trust yourself, just as we are asked to trust the in goodness and spiritual nature of others. Sometimes people complain because they feel the Bishop isn't being inspired when he extends a calling. Think of a Bishop of a student ward who has to completely restaff the ward every semester. He can't possibly know all the new people who have moved into the ward, and to receive direct revelation on each and every calling would require more of him than any man should be expected to handle.

The Lord trusts his servants, and expects each of us to be actively seeking to do good on our own. When it is important that a particular calling be extended to a person then the Bishop may receive extra nudgings to extend that call. But when much is required in a short amount of time, the Lord expects His servants to do their best, and He will sustain them in their decisions. That doesn't lessen the effectiveness or the truthfulness of the call in any way. We are a Church of assignments, and the calling extended by the Lord's anointed servant is just as valid as a calling extended by the Lord Himself. That is true doctrine.

We often have to fly blind in this life, and the Lord will help us steer our course if we will just trust that He is influencing our decisions. Does that mean we always choose correctly? No, but it helps us learn to put our faith in the Lord by recognizing that He also has faith in us. If we do make a mistake, the Lord won't let us get far before He leads us back onto the right path. There are examples of this all throughout the scriptures and Church history. Even though we are expected to do our best, that doesn't

mean God abandons us and leaves us alone. He is always attending quietly to our needs.

And it is important to remember that just as each of us is learning to do good, as we would like to think the Lord would do in our place, we also have to remember that others are trying to do the same thing we are. Mistakes will happen, but fortunately there is forgiveness and repentance to fix them.

5

Learn to have faith in the innate goodness of others, despite what may appear on the surface of things. Learning to forgo what appear to be obvious failings and trusting in others' ability to do what is right will sometimes lead to disappointment. It will also often lead to pleasant surprises. Learning to put our faith in others, knowing their weaknesses, will increase our love and respect for them, which in turn, increases the influence of the Spirit in our own life because we are learning to love as the Savior loves.

Another description of this process is tolerance. The Lord has a high level of tolerance for our mistakes, and He expects us to develop a high level of tolerance for those who are also seeking to do good, but still make the occasional mistake along the road to being a better person.

6

Study, pray, ponder, and consider. When we are faced with challenges in this life, the Lord expects us to do our own due diligence. He does not just hand out blessings and answers to prayer without there being first some efforts made on our part. He expects us to try to figure it out for ourselves if we can. The more time we spend pondering the things of eternal importance, the more sensitive we will become to the whisperings of the Spirit.

7

Acknowledge the Spirit when we recognize we have felt it. Remember how worn out you become when the influence of the Spirit is extra strong? This feeling is

universal. It happens to everyone who is new to that level of the Spirit. With time and exposure to the Spirit we become accustomed to it, and it no longer leaves us drained. Joseph Smith had this same experience with many of his visions. His encounters left him without any physical strength. After his First Vision Joseph had to lay on the ground until he had the strength to get up and go home. After years of exposure to heavenly communications he and Sidney Rigdon experienced the vision now known as Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It is about the three degrees of glory. This kind of vision was new to Sidney. When the vision concluded this was recorded of the state of the two men.

> "Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time, in the midst of a magnificent glory, but Sidney sat limp and pale, apparently as limp as a rag. Observing such at the close of the vision, Joseph remarked smilingly, 'Sidney is not used to it as I am'" (quoted in Carter E. Grant, The Kingdom of God Restored, pp. 156–57).

When we first encounter the Spirit we are bowled over by the power we feel. The feelings we have are unmistakable. And this is the same, whether we are in the Church or outside of the Church. As we gain practice in dealing with the Spirit His influence becomes more and more subtle. Why? Because He doesn't need to hit us over the head with a sledge hammer if a tickle will do. The more we learn to think and act like Christ, the less physically obvious the Spirit's influence becomes. Sometimes there will be those experiences that we consider to be profound. In such experiences the Spirit's influence will be almost tangible, but we can't expect it to be like that every time.

The grand key

The grand key to learning to follow the Spirit is that we must first and foremost WANT to do so. We can only learn to follow the Spirit if doing so is the desire of our hearts. It takes effort, and lots of practice. Following the Spirit is not a mental exercise, it requires physical work. We have to be actively serving others, for it is in the act of serving and doing good that the Spirit can step in and give us directions.

Here is a special video of someone who is a practicing Christian. His experience demonstrates every principle I have talked about in this article. I encourage you to watch it, and remember that the Lord also influences those not of our faith with the Spirit as well. We just have more access to the Spirit because we have the gift of the Holy Ghost. Click the name of the NFL player who followed the Spirit. Derek Carr, at the time of this writing was/is a quarterback for the Oakland Raiders. This is proof to

me that the Lord uses anyone who is willing to listen to the Spirit in order to bless the lives of His children everywhere.

Final Thoughts

Following the Spirit need not be as mysterious as it may have always seemed to be. This article has listed seven concrete things we can be doing to assist us in being more sensitive to His promptings. Much of it boils down to us being willing to have the faith to step out and do what we are prompted to do.

The Spirit knows what is coming in the future. We do not. So when the Spirit tells us to do something, it is with that knowledge of what that prompting will lead to. Not knowing the future requires us to put faith in the Spirit's directions to do as He directs us. When we follow the Spirit our confirmation of the truthfulness or the correctness of our action usually comes in hindsight. When we acknowledge over and over again that following the Spirit's promptings leads to good things happening, it makes it easier in the future to follow those promptings without question, knowing from past experience that it always leads to something good.

Click the link below to

print a PDF copy of the file.

7 Ways to Follow the Spirit