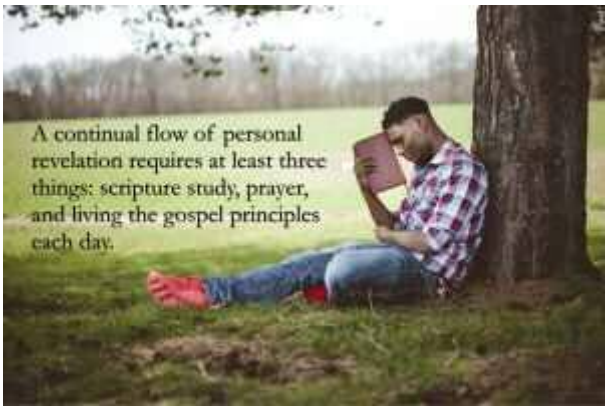

It takes some growth and experience in the gospel to become comfortable with the concept of receiving personal revelation. Just like any doctrine of the gospel, our understanding of what constitutes revelation and how we receive it changes with our experiences in life and our efforts to learn more about it. In our efforts to receive revelation almost at will, we will need to become comfortable with the Spirit. This is especially true if you are required to give priesthood blessings, teach a class, or serve in a leadership position.

Background basics

Revelation comes in many forms and in many ways. But in all cases, revelation is communication from the Holy Ghost to our soul. Whether you consider His communication as coming into your mind, into your heart, as a feeling, as a reflex, or an intuition, it is a channel that opens up from God to man to instruct and enlighten.

This is what makes teaching how to have revelation so difficult. It is different from person to person, and it can change from experience to experience. When we first start learning about how the Spirit teaches us and communicates with us, we may experience something completely differently than what we experience years later after much practice and having grown accustomed to His methods of speaking to us. What works for me may not get your attention, and what enlightens you may escape my attention altogether. It is the nature of revelation to be deeply personal. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for every situation. Some things remain relatively constant, but other aspects of revelation change as we change and grow.

The need

President Russell M. Nelson stated the following in the April, 2018 General Conference:

> Our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, will perform some of His mightiest works between now and when He comes again. We will see miraculous indications that God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, preside over this Church in majesty and glory. But in coming

> days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.
>
> My beloved brothers and sisters, I plead with you to increase your spiritual capacity to receive revelation. Let this Easter Sunday be a defining moment in your life. Choose to do the spiritual work required to enjoy the gift of the Holy Ghost and hear the voice of the Spirit more frequently and more clearly.

Here are the main points in list form:

- Some of God's mightiest works are yet to be performed.
- We will see miraculous indications that God and Christ preside over this Church.
- It will not be possible to survive spiritually in the coming days without the constant influence of the Holy Ghost.
- We need to increase our capacity to receive revelation.
- We are admonished to do the spiritual work needed to enjoy the gift of the Holy Ghost more frequently and more clearly.

If this isn't a prophetic warning, I don't know what one is. We have been warned in plain language that the need for us to be more closely tied to the influence of the Spirit is a matter of spiritual survival. It is a basic doctrine that as the blessings and power from God is increased in the world, through revelations, temple building, and the personal righteousness of the saints, so too is Satan given greater power to influence the world. The gloves, if you will, are being taken off, and the fight between God's plan of happiness and Satan's plan of domination is beginning to get real dirty. As Satan tries to blur all lines between good and evil so we can no longer tell the difference, we must become more spiritually in tune so we can see the subtle lies and avoid falling into Satan's traps.

No generation before us has had to deal with these things to this extent. And our children will have to wade through Satan's lies like we have never yet experienced. It is our obligation to learn to receive revelation so we can personally survive, as well as be able to teach the next generation how to save themselves and stay strong. They are coming to earth with greater and greater capacity for righteousness, which means they need to be taught early in their childhood how to remain clean and pure so they can be in constant communion with the Spirit.

This paragraph was added years after I wrote this article. An example of President Nelson's warning and promise given above can be seen with the onset of the COVID pandemic. Everything shut down and we had to survive by having church at home for a long period of time. Interestingly, the church was prepared for just such a thing to happen. No one else in the world was. Everything was in place for the Saints to continue to worship in their own homes. This home-centered church required that we have more interaction with the Spirit than ever before. We were warned to prepare ourselves a good two years before it happened, and it doesn't mean that the prophet's warning won't be repeated in other scenarios in the future. I'm just saying that his prophecy came to pass in just two years in this case.

A basic spiritual truth

Notice that I said we have to remain clean and pure so we can be in constant communion with the Spirit. How vague is that? Spirituality is a personal experience between you and the Spirit. No one can give you a checklist that if you do item one on the list then spiritual result one will follow. It isn't that simple. In the gospel, all doctrines and principles are tied to one another. They all affect one another. So by doing some simple basics, many other things can happen that to the untrained eye don't seem to be related. But they are all related.

A prime example is our testimony of the Book of Mormon. Once we receive a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon what else follows? If the Book of Mormon is, in fact, the word of God then he who translated it is a prophet of God. That means he had the power of God to do God's work. Hence the priesthood of God is found in this Church. And those who were called by that prophet were called of God, which means the priesthood power is still in this Church and we are still led by a prophet. And there is much more tied to this chain we can't get into here. To deny any one part of that chain of logic is to deny all of it. To deny the prophetic calling of President Nelson is to deny that the priesthood who called him to that position is valid, which invalidates the priesthood of Joseph Smith himself. And without God's authority to do what Joseph Smith did then he couldn't have translated God's word and be approved of God, so the Book of Mormon becomes just another work of man. The logic has to flow both directions.

The power of doing the basics in the gospel cannot be overstated. Following are three basic habits that are universally needed by anyone ever hoping to receive personal revelation.

Reading the scriptures with a real desire to understand them is critical. Regular study is required, not just reading a few verses each Sunday in a class. Regular study means we are seeking answers, trying to understand doctrines that have eluded us, and trying to understand how the lessons discussed by the prophets can affect our lives in the present. It is a thoughtful, and purposeful awareness that we are always trying to learn more about the Lord and His ways. It's not called scripture study just because we are sitting in a chair when we do it. It is scripture study because there is real mental labor involved.

Constant diligence in our personal prayers, with a focus on expressing gratitude and on listening and looking for the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that come during or after the prayer are essential to our progress. If the essence of revelation is a recognition of the communication that comes from the Spirit then we need to become aware of His presence in our lives as a daily practice. This becomes easier when we keep our weekly sacramental promise to remember Christ *always* so his Spirit can *always* be with us. The reality of this promise fits the practice.

Active participation in practicing the principles of righteousness is vital to our learning and our ability to stay connected to the Spirit. This means we are conscientiously choosing to keep all the commandments we have been taught. I refer to this as deliberate discipleship. We are trying to live like the Lord wants us to live, being kind to others and seeking to bless the lives of all those with whom we come in contact.

These basic practices, when combined, create a synergy that opens spiritual doors of opportunity. Among these opportunities is a greater flow of personal revelation. It is important to remember that our purpose in life is to develop a godly character, a Christlike character. Characters are only created through the way in which we live every day of our lives. That means we have to practice what we preach.

How does it work?

How does a cook become a great cook? It takes constant practice in the kitchen. It requires experimentation, repetition, dedication, and patience. Over time this practice becomes second nature, and the ability to think, feel, and behave like a world-class cook comes naturally. Such a cook, when a new situation arises where a process or procedure

is called into question, just has a sense for what needs to be done and how it should probably be handled. And usually they are right.

This same process applies to any field of endeavor, whether brick masons, builders, plumbers, lawyers, office managers, etc. The more we practice a thing, the more we come to understand the underlying principles involved in doing it well. Spiritually speaking, even revelation takes this kind of practice. When we first try to exercise our faith to find out if the Book of Mormon is true, the witness that finally comes is something that cannot be denied. Even if the witness comes in small doses and experiences, when combined, we cannot deny what has happened to us, for we are changed because of our experiences.

How does revelation come?

If revelation is communication from the Holy Ghost to me then any form of that communication can be considered revelation. Why? Because nothing in the realm of spiritual understanding can be grasped and comprehended by the carnal mind unless revealed by the divine. In order for us to comprehend any spiritual principle it must be revealed to us. In other words, we must be enabled or allowed to understand it. The more we obey the gospel principles by how we live, being obedient to the commandments, practicing the laws of happiness in our daily lives, and so forth, the more the Spirit will open our minds so we come to grasp the meaning and import of various doctrines. What you understand this year from your good life will be different from what I come to grasp this year. It is all customized to each person's needs and worthiness.

Spiritual understanding can come from a visitation of a heavenly being. Understanding can come from a vision or an audible voice speaking to us. It can also come from a voice in our head that isn't our own. It is almost like having a trusted friend there talking to you on the phone - not present, but you can tell what they are saying. The Spirit can also teach us through feelings and urges. We may suddenly feel right about a course of action or we may suddenly have a stupor of thought that blocks us from being able to move forward in an action.

We may suddenly have the urge to do a particular thing. Sometimes these urges seem to make no sense at the time, but we can't get it out of our head until we do it. And

sometimes the Spirit gives us reflexes of good. We are in a situation and suddenly we find ourselves doing something good for someone or we have an urge to bring someone home and help them. No real thought was involved, we just did it like a reflex. I have had experiences while teaching where my mind suddenly opened up and I began to comprehend how certain principles tied together. As I talked about what I was comprehending, I found myself teaching myself about doctrines I had never fully understood before. And all this was happening in real-time in front of a class. What a rush!

These are just some of the ways the Spirit can teach us what we need to do. But always, whatever we are directed to do brings with it a feeling of peace or assurance that it is right and good.

A key

One of the keys to receiving revelation, especially in real-time, is to be aware of what is happening. In 2 Nephi 32:9 it says this:

> 9 But behold, I say unto you that ye must pray always, and not faint; that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.

When we seek to do good the Lord will bless us in our efforts. That is His promise. By verbalizing our desire to do what God wants us to do, it strengthens our commitment to that very thing, just like bearing our testimony actually strengthens our testimony. I would like to speak to those who need to give priesthood blessings, but for the women, the principle is the same for those who need to teach a lesson or serve in any ministering capacity.

It is important to note that we can receive revelation when we need revelation. Receiving revelation need not be something that relies on the whims of God. We need not go through our lives hoping He will someday reveal truth to us when He feels like it. The gift of the Holy Ghost doesn't work like that. The point of the gift we have been given at baptism is that as we draw nearer to the Spirit through living the basics of the gospel faithfully, He will make the truths of eternity more readily available to us. He will be there with us to open our mouths when we need to preach, to fill our minds with

truth when we study or have need of His knowledge. The Holy Ghost is the Testator, He who witnesses of the truth of all things. It is His part in the Godhead to bring us along the path to a knowledge of God. The Holy Ghost is not stingy with His gift. He is generous, more generous that we sometimes are willing to acknowledge.

My point here is that when we have been trying to live up to our privileges as members of God's kingdom on earth, we can do certain things and expect to have the Spirit participate with us in teaching us when we need it. Yes, there are times when we are left to struggle on our own so we can learn certain lessons, but those are NOT the rule. They are the exception. When we have been studying the scriptures and praying, paying our tithes and offerings, living the gospel and not just giving lip service to it, we can actually expect to have the Spirit's help to open our minds and mouths when the need is there.

How do I recognize revelation?

How do I know if I am receiving revelation? I was taught by my mother to always follow the first inclination to do good. Once I have practiced always following the first inclination to do good, the Spirit knows that this is a way for Him to communicate with me. Since all good, and all desire to do good comes from God, this is an easy in for the Spirit to connect with us.

When a thought enters my mind, and I argue with it, sometimes it vanishes, never to return. Experience with this situation will teach you when you have just brushed aside the Spirit and when it was a trivial thought. Unfortunately, you have to discover and master this process through practice. Sometimes when we have a thought that enters our mind and we try to dismiss it, it persists. I was once saying a prayer with my wife, and I had a thought come into my mind to say a certain thing. I felt it did not apply to me so I brushed it aside. Suddenly I couldn't think of a thing to say. It was like someone had turned off the light on a lighted path and I couldn't go forward. I wrestled with the thought I had been given, and finally chose to just say it. As soon as I had said it I had a flood of other things I was able to pray about. That was such a singular experience that I never forgot it.

Sometimes when we are teaching or giving a blessing the Spirit puts a phrase or statement in our head and you will not be able to go on until you have said it. After all, you have prayed before hand that you will say what the Spirit wants you to say, and you

have prayed for His guidance, right? So when something comes into your head to say, don't fight it. Don't argue with it. Just say it and move on. Sometimes we are moved to say things that make no sense to us at the time, but someone in the class or the person receiving the blessing may be getting just what the Spirit wants them to hear.

What happens when we are left alone?

One of the most frightening experiences in teaching or in giving blessings is to feel like we are left to struggle on our own. This same thing happens to Bishops from time to time. The Lord expects each of us to learn to do good on our own, without having to be directed every step of the way. We must learn to feel what is right and act accordingly. If we don't learn this lesson we can't become godly in our conduct. But we are not left completely alone.

When the Lord leaves us to practice doing and being good on our own, He still provides us with backup. President Nelson, also in the April, 2018 Conference quoted Doctrine and Covenants 132:47.

> 47 And again, verily I say, whomsoever you bless I will bless, and whomsoever you curse I will curse, saith the Lord; for I, the Lord, am thy God.

What does that mean to say "whomsoever you bless I will bless?" When I receive a calling from the Bishop, and I suspect it was more out of desperation than revelation, does that mean I have a fallen Bishop on my hands? Of course not! Sometimes our leaders have to exercise their judgment and just do what they feel is right to fulfill the duties of their calling. God expects us all to do that. Bishops are no different. Does that mean that we are somehow left alone in our calling because it didn't come by way of direct revelation to the Bishop? No. The Lord has promised that when the priesthood holder blesses someone (assuming they are a worthy person) God will honor that blessing and bless that person.

Sometimes, when giving a blessing, we feel unsure as to the direction the Lord wants to go in the blessing. It is at this point that it becomes our responsibility to "feel" after the Spirit (like groping in the dark for something you are sure is there, but haven't yet found it) and decide for ourselves what we think the Spirit would want to say to this person. There have been times when I started down one road in a blessing only to be brought up short and corrected by the Spirit. It has been my experience that He will not

let us stray far from the path before giving us a course correction when we are in the performance of our duties (whether or not it is priesthood related). And the revelation that comes is the same in type and manner that a person receives when teaching a class, when praying with the Spirit, or when engaging in a neighborly conversation with the Spirit's help. It comes as an impression, or as thoughts placed in our minds from outside our own thoughts, or as an image, or as an understanding that you need to express. The ways are many, but the end result is the same. With practice we come to recognize and be comfortable with this form of communication with the Spirit.

Final Thoughts

Personal revelation is just that, personal. How I receive revelation may not be your method. I don't have dreams, but others do. I don't entertain visitors in the night, but I have known others that have regular visits from beyond the veil. We each have to learn what is "normal" for us. How the Spirit speaks to me will be slightly different than His method for speaking with you. There will be times in my life when I hear thoughts that are not my own, and other times when the eyes of my understanding are opened and I can comprehend spiritual truths almost visually.

No matter how we receive truth in our lives, we must be seeking for it and be worthy of it. Seeking to comprehend the things of God is a conscious choice we have to make and then live for (deliberate discipleship). But in all cases it requires practice, practice, practice. And by definition that also means we will fail many times. That is the nature of practicing. The question is, do you continue to try to learn from those failures, and recognize when you were successful?

Whether we are giving blessings or trying to learn how to teach, we won't learn how to do it until we step up to the plate and pick up the bat and prepare to swing. Becoming spiritually active requires a desire to know and to follow the promptings of the Spirit, so when He speaks, listen and obey!

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Some Basics of Personal Revelation