

# To Learn and to Teach More Effectively

*Elder Richard G. Scott*

*Elder Richard G. Scott is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.*

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With you I sense the excitement and anticipation of inspiring events as we begin the eighty-fifth annual BYU Campus Education Week. I congratulate you for your decision to participate in this extraordinary activity that you may learn and develop from the experience shared here. There is nothing quite like it in scope and quality in all the world. I share with you a constant, continuing thirst to improve and grow through all of the various means of learning that the Lord has provided for us.

As I travel throughout the world, it is evident that knowledge is power. Some use it to their own personal advantage. Many of these employ knowledge improperly, severely limiting others in the use of their agency. Yet there are those whose learning, experience, and talent are used to lift, encourage, motivate, and bless others around them. I feel confident that you are among that group. Not only will you benefit from your invested time and effort here, but others will likewise be helped by how you apply and share what you learn. You are following the admonition of the Lord: “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” (D&C 88:118).

This year's theme, "The Dawning of a Brighter Day," is so appropriate. It emphasizes the wonder of the Restoration of the gospel in this dispensation. Any student of history is aware that the Restoration of the Church with its pure doctrine, priesthood authority, and divine guidance initiated an avalanche of discovery, enlightenment, and inventions that continue to powerfully lift mankind. How grateful I am to our Holy Father for the restoration of truth that came through the Prophet Joseph Smith to benefit all mankind. Joseph Smith is a motivating example of an individual who throughout his brief life continually sought knowledge and willingly shared it with others, even though it would cost him his life to do so.

My intent is to share thoughts of how to learn and how to teach effectively.

### **How to Learn More Effectively**

There are a multitude of available paths through which we may learn and be perfected. Some of these include formal study, pondering, analysis, personal experience, careful observation, mentoring by others, observing outstanding role models, serving willingly, and learning from our own mistakes. It would be unrealistic to attempt to identify, even in headline form, the multitude of avenues through which knowledge flows and experience is gained. For that reason I have chosen to speak of what for me is the most effective path to truth and to the inexhaustible source of guidance and inspiration from our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son. That path is by spiritual guidance through the prompting of the Holy Ghost. Together we will lay a foundation to understand spiritual guidance and to discuss how to obtain it and how to share it. My sincere desire is to provide motivation for you to expand your capacity to gain knowledge, for your eternal benefit and the blessing of those with whom you will share it.

Also, there will be mentioned some of the important truths I have learned from seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And since I recognize that many of you are motivated to be here by the desire to help others learn and live truth, I will suggest ways that you might teach these truths. It would be much easier for me to do this if we could have two-way communication. Fortunately, you will almost always have the privilege of encouraging interaction with those you teach, even if it is one-on-one with a family member. Your instructions will be more beneficial and enduring when you promote that participation.

As we begin I will share a gospel truth that, if communicated effectively and used consistently in your life, would entirely justify every effort you have made to be at Education Week, if that is the only thing you do here. It will help you obtain the most benefit from this hour together, from the balance of your participation here, and in other significant events throughout your life. I notice that many of you have come prepared to take notes on what you hear. While that is of great benefit, I will share a pattern that will provide you even greater access to truth. It is summarized in this statement of principle:

*Throughout the remainder of my life, I will seek to learn by what I hear, see, and feel. I will write down the important things I learn, and I will do them.*

I suggest that you write this down. If I were to end this message at this point, you would have received one of the most meaningful ways to learn that I could impart. If the principle just shared doesn't seem that important, think again. Many of the vital lessons I have learned and treasured, I have learned by carefully following it.

### **How to Respond to Spiritual Promptings**

You can learn vitally important things by what you *hear* and *see* and, even more, by what you *feel*, as prompted by the Holy Ghost. Many individuals limit their learning primarily to what they *hear* or *read*. Be wise. Develop the skill of also learning by what you *see* and particularly by what the Holy Ghost prompts you to *feel*. Consciously and consistently seek to learn by what you *feel*. Your capacity to do so will expand through repeated practice. Significant faith and effort are required to learn by what you feel from the Spirit. Ask in faith for such help. Live to be worthy of such guidance.

Write down in a secure place the important things you learn from the Spirit. You will find that as you record a precious impression, often others will come that you would not have otherwise received. Also, the spiritual knowledge you gain will be available throughout your life. Always, day or night, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, seek to recognize and respond to the direction of the Spirit. Have available a piece of paper or a card to record such guidance.

Express gratitude to the Lord for the spiritual guidance you receive and obey it. This practice will reinforce your capacity to learn by the Spirit. It will enhance the guidance of the Lord in your life. You will learn more as you act upon the knowledge, experience, and inspiration communicated to you by the Holy Ghost.

Spiritual guidance is direction, enlightenment, knowledge, and motivation you receive from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is personalized instruction adapted to your individual needs by One who understands them perfectly. Spiritual guidance is a gift of incomparable worth bestowed upon those who seek it, live worthy of it, and express gratitude for it.

The scriptures define how to qualify for spiritual guidance. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wisely counseled, “However talented men may be in administrative matters; however eloquent they may be in expressing their views; however learned they may be in the worldly things, they will be denied the sweet whisperings of the Spirit that might have been theirs unless they pay the price of studying, pondering, and praying about the scriptures.”<sup>1</sup>

Over time, through prayer and pondering applicable scriptures, I have found the following pattern for gaining spiritual direction helpful.

To acquire spiritual guidance and to obey it with wisdom, one must:

- Seek divine light in humility
- Exercise faith, especially in Jesus Christ
- Strive diligently to keep His commandments
- Repent constantly
- Pray continually
- Hearken to spiritual guidance
- Express gratitude for guidance received

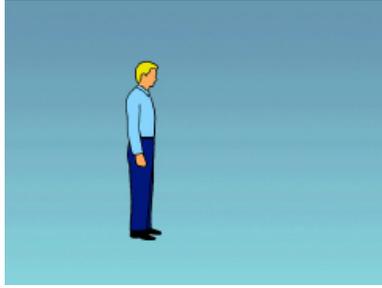
May that suggestion be of some benefit in your quest for spiritual guidance.

### **Teaching Others to Learn from the Spirit**

Now we will review how others could be taught the principle of learning I mentioned earlier that you can use. First, I would encourage each one taught to write down the principle: *Throughout the remainder of my life, I will seek to learn by what I hear, see, and feel. I will write down the important things I learn, and I will do them.*

Then I would explain how to use each of the three avenues of communication, to hear, to see, and to feel. Further I would seek to commit each one to live that principle, for every student who would consistently do that would be blessed with greater inspired direction in his or her life.

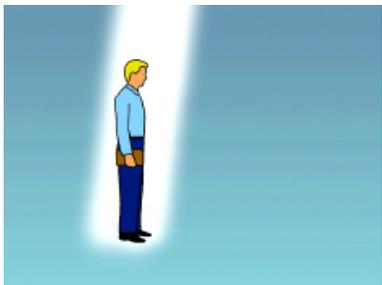
I would then illustrate with the following series of graphics how to enhance learning.



1. My intent is to show some ways you can help others to qualify to be led by the Spirit and to realize that when that direction comes, it should be recorded and obeyed.

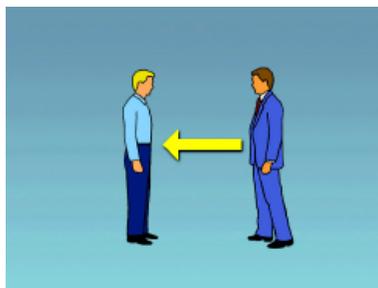


2. Those you teach live in a world subject to challenges and temptations. I am convinced that without the help of the Spirit an individual will have difficulty avoiding transgression in the world today. Should the wrong choices be made, that person becomes bound by sin.



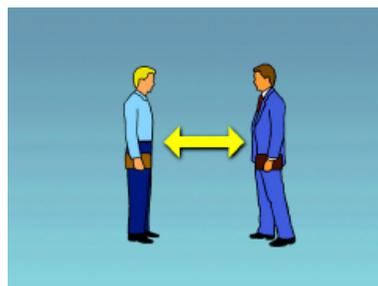
3. You can encourage a student to live so as to be influenced by the Spirit and to recognize its guidance in order to be blessed by obedience to its direction. You can play a vital role in that process.

As you teach the appropriate doctrine and help explain how the Lord communicates through the Spirit, your students will *experience* being led by the Spirit. They will learn the principles upon which such communication is based. As they apply those principles, they will make the correct choices in life.



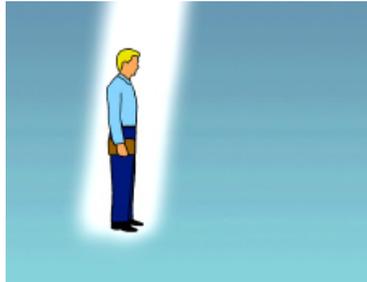
4. All too often a teacher's relation to a student is one of giving counsel with little or no interaction. Often there is no explanation of the reasons why there are commandments, rules, and standards. The teacher becomes just a talking head.

Most of the teaching in the world is based on one of the five senses—hear, see, touch, smell, or taste. In your classroom, you can teach by the power of the Spirit.

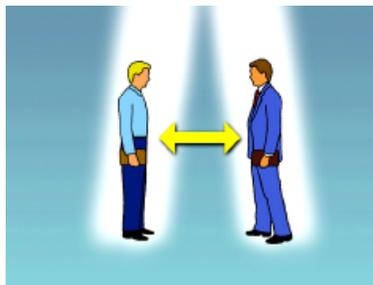


5. Such communication begins by your encouraging each one you teach to participate rather than be a passive listener. In this way you can assess their understanding of what is taught, create a feeling of ownership, and also learn from them. More important, their decision to participate is an exercise in agency that permits the Holy Ghost to communicate a personalized message suited to their individual needs. Creating an atmosphere of participation en-

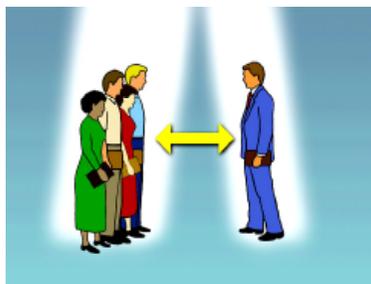
hances the probability that the Spirit will teach more important lessons than you can communicate.



6. That participation will bring into their lives the direction of the Spirit. When you encourage students to raise their hands to respond to a question, while they may not realize it, they signify to the Holy Ghost their willingness to learn. That use of moral agency will allow that Spirit to motivate and give them more powerful guidance during your time together. Participation allows individuals to *experience* being led by the Spirit. They learn to recognize and feel what spiritual guidance is. It is through the repeated process of feeling impressions, recording them, and obeying them that one learns to depend on the direction of the Spirit more than on communication through the other five senses.



7. Your capacity to teach is enhanced by the direction you receive from the Holy Spirit. Simply stated, truth presented in an environment of true love and trust qualifies an individual for the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit.



8. If you accomplish nothing else in your relationship with your students than to help them recognize and follow the promptings of the Spirit, you will bless their lives immeasurably and eternally. To do this you must constantly seek the guidance of the Spirit to know what to say and how to say it.

I am convinced that there is no simple formula or technique that I could give you or that you could give your students that would immediately facilitate mastering the ability to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Nor do I believe that the Lord will ever allow someone to conceive a pattern that would invariably and immediately open the channels of spiritual communication. We grow when we labor to recognize the guidance of the Holy Ghost as we struggle to communicate our needs to our Father in Heaven in moments of dire need or overflowing gratitude. Each time we do that we are taking another step in fulfilling the purpose of our being here on earth.

Our Father expects us to learn how to obtain that divine help by exercising faith in Him and in His Holy Son. Were we to receive inspired guidance just for the asking, we would become weak and ever more dependent on Him. He knows that essential personal growth will come as we struggle to learn how to be led by the Spirit. That struggle develops our immortal character as we perfect our capacity to identify His will through the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. What may appear initially to be a daunting task will become much easier over time as we consistently strive to recognize the feelings awakened by the Spirit. Our confidence in the direction we receive through the Holy Ghost will also become stronger.

Easy things never produce much beneficial fruit. Neither our Father in Heaven nor His Holy Son take delight in seeing you struggle to overcome obstacles, resolve questions, or find solutions to complex and challenging prob-

lems. However, they do rejoice when you willingly recognize that these steps are steps to growth which lead to action that molds your character.

### **Treasuring Up Sacred Impressions**

Have you learned the enduring value of keeping a journal of the very important spiritual experiences or sacred impressions that the Lord has communicated to you? I do not keep a detailed journal of all the events each day, but I try to keep record of some very important matters. The spiritual ones are in a sacred password-protected journal that no one else can access. When I feel authorized by the Holy Ghost, I take some of the truths learned and put them in my family journal or share them in a public message. This is consistent with a principle that the scriptures confirm is true. Some personal matters are for our guidance and edification to help us grow and improve our character, our devotion, and our testimony. These things are not intended for other individuals. Much like a patriarchal blessing is tailored for the person to whom it is given, such matters should be kept reverently protected because of their inherent sacred nature. Any sacred matter that the Lord wants others to know, He can communicate to them directly through the Spirit if they are worthy and in tune.

To confirm that what I have been talking about is not just pure theory, I will now mention some of the priceless truths I have learned through spiritual guidance over many years.

The scriptures teach and I have been led to confirm that we will never be prompted by the Holy Ghost to do something we cannot do. It may require extraordinary effort and much time, patience, prayer, and obedience, but we can do it.

Repeatedly I have been impressed to learn that to reach a goal never before attained one must do things never before done.

I have been taught that we can make many choices in life, but we cannot determine our final destiny. Our actions do that. It can appear that we control outcomes in our life, but we do not. Worthiness, righteousness, faith in Jesus Christ, and the plan of our Father assure a pleasant productive future, while lying, cheating, or violating the laws of personal purity assure a life of misery here on earth and beyond the veil, unless there is the requisite repentance.

It is important not to judge ourselves by what we think we know of our own potential. We should trust the Lord and what He can do with our dedicated heart and willing mind (see D&C 64:34).

I have been taught by the Holy Spirit and the observation of others that concepts like faith, prayer, love, and humility hold no great significance and produce no miracles until they become a living part of the individual through his or her own experience, aided by the sweet promptings of the Spirit.

We all will have adversity; it is a part of life. We will all have it because we need it for growth and the forging of our righteous character. I have learned that the Lord has a consummate capacity to judge our intent. He is concerned about what we are becoming by the choices we make. He has an individual plan for each of us. This concept is very comforting when we consider how to understand difficult matters such as the early death of someone who seems to be so needed on earth. It is most helpful when we struggle with illness or a severe handicap or try to assess another's tragic suicide.

I have been led through personal experience to understand an important truth. I know Satan has absolutely no power to force a determined righteous individual because the Lord protects that person from him. Satan can tempt; he can threaten; he can attempt to appear to have such power; but he does not possess it.

I have learned that our mind can strengthen an impression of the Holy Ghost or sadly, can totally destroy it by casting it out as something unimportant or the product of our own imagination. When spiritual guidance comes, it is well to remember this comment of the Prophet Joseph Smith, "God judges men according to the use they make of the light which He gives them."<sup>2</sup>

When facing adversity we can be led to ask many questions. Some of them serve a useful purpose; others do not. It really does no good to ask questions that reflect opposition to the will of God. Willing sacrifice of deeply held personal desires in favor of God's will is generally very hard to do. Yet when done, we are in the strongest position to receive the maximum help from our loving Heavenly Father. Accepting His will, even when it is not fully understood, brings great peace and, over time, understanding.

It is sometimes very hard to discern an answer to prayer for a matter for which we have very deep personal feelings or something which causes strong emotions to arise within us. That is why it is important to receive valid, inspired counsel when one finds himself or herself in such a circumstance.

In a quiet moment of pondering I learned that there is a relationship between faith and character. The greater our faith in Jesus Christ, the stronger our character and increased character enhances our ability to exercise even greater faith.

The Spirit has taught that Satan doesn't have to tempt us to do bad things. He can accomplish much of his objective by distracting us with many acceptable things, thus keeping us from accomplishing the essential ones. We need to frustrate that distraction by identifying what is critically important in our lives. We must give the cream of our effort to accomplish those things. Where there is limited time or resources, this pattern may require that some good activities be set aside.

On occasion the Lord will give us vital spiritual guidance by inspiring others to share what they have learned. Such mentors can greatly enrich our life through thoughtful communication of their knowledge and experience. We also can identify living or deceased mentors by careful study and emulation of their productive lives. I am confident that the recent passing of President James E. Faust has brought to the mind of thousands of individuals he has touched personally gratitude for his encouragement and motivation. He had the exceptional capacity to lift and build other individuals. He chose valid reasons to congratulate others as he spoke of them with sincerity and integrity. The result was to edify, lift, and help them to explore a course of life that would bring each greater success and happiness. His encouragement was often brief and concise, yet most effective and enduring.

One of the most memorable and powerful patterns of communication by the Spirit is through dreams. I have learned that when the transition from being fully asleep to being fully awake is almost imperceptible, it is a signal that the Lord has taught something very important through a dream. When this occurs, I recognize the need to ponder what I remember of the dream to seek to understand it and its application in my life. Sometimes the dream is symbolic and prayer is required so that through the Holy Ghost the Lord can interpret or clarify the lessons to be understood and applied.

Throughout the majority of my teenage and adult life, I have greatly appreciated *mercy*. It was through a vivid dream that I learned also to cherish *justice*. Justice provides order and control in our Father's plan of happiness. It assures that whatever we have earned through worthy effort will ever be ours, such as knowledge, the love of dear ones, and the eternal benefits of ordinances, including those of the temple. Justice assures that no power can take these precious things from us. We could lose them through disobedience, but who would want to do that?

The Savior's injunction to "ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (3 Nephi 27:29) is a gate to spiritual guidance. I have

been taught that gentle promptings will encourage us to make the right decisions. When carefully observed, these gentle impressions to our heart can be followed by specific counsel given to our mind. That counsel leads us to know what to do with greater precision. Such detailed direction comes when we readily respond to the initial promptings of the Spirit. At times such spiritual guidance can indicate or imply events that will occur later in life. Our acceptance of such prompting and willingness to obey it does not mean that the will of the Lord will be changed. It does mean that the impact on our life will be different. There will be far more significant consequence because of our willingness to obey the counsel given by such sacred guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There is one last priceless gem of spiritual guidance I would share. It has taken a very long time to recognize. Forced obedience yields no enduring fruit. That is why both our Father in Heaven and the Savior are willing to entreat, to prompt, to encourage, and to patiently wait for us to recognize precious spiritual guidance from Them. Once it took me over ten years to discover the answer to an extremely important matter for which I had prayed consistently and earnestly. The complete answer came as I was able to assemble portions of the solution communicated to me in differing ways and at differing times. I was not given the answer directly, but I was patiently and lovingly led to find it.

I close with my testimony. I will try to follow the excellent counsel given by President Spencer W. Kimball. He taught: “A testimony is not an exhortation; a testimony is not a sermon; . . . it is not a travelogue. . . . Just tell how you feel inside. That is the testimony. The moment you begin preaching to others, your testimony ended. Just tell us how you feel, what your mind and heart and every fiber of your body tells you.”<sup>3</sup>

I know that the things I have shared are true for I have learned them. They have been confirmed by the gentle promptings of the Holy Ghost. May some of them be of benefit to you. I positively know that Jesus Christ lives and as one of His Apostles bear solemn witness that He is a glorified, resurrected, personage of perfect love. He guides His Church on earth. He loves you. During your presence here He will prompt you. As you seek that prompting to identify it, He will guide your life. He is our Master, our Redeemer, our Savior. I love Him. With every capacity that I possess I bear witness that He lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**Notes**

1. Bruce R. McConkie, regional representatives seminar, April 2, 1982.
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 303.
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 76–77.