

*“Stand in awe . . . and be still” or in other words—Spiritual Receptiveness*

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Stand in awe . . . and be still—Spiritual Receptiveness. I have known since early January that this was to be my topic for BYU Women’s Conference. I also knew that to speak about spiritual receptiveness and to be able to hear the whisperings of the Spirit, I would need to practice being still and have experiences of listening and practicing what I planned to speak about. I asked Heavenly Father to help me learn how to listen and how to rely on His Holy Spirit to guide my life.

Well, that was the beginning of several very difficult months. They have been months that were filled with happiness and joy, but mostly the past few months have been filled with many challenges and experiences that have forced me to humbly approach my Heavenly Father in earnest prayer in hopes of receiving guidance and inspiration to get by from day to day.

There have been many challenges—personal challenges, challenges in my family and among my relatives and friends—people I love. These challenges are things such as serious health problems, death, trouble with jobs, loss of employment, and financial challenges. Others have suffered with addictions, marital problems, difficulties with children and relationship problems—again, this is happening among those I love.

The Lord has blessed me with many opportunities to speak to various groups the past few months. Although joyous for the most part, it is just plain hard work to prepare for a talk, especially when called upon to speak in General Conference. These opportunities are challenging and stressful. I know I need the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, when we are the most stressed and feel the most pressure, that is when it is also difficult to quiet our spirits, to be still and just listen. There are so many distractions and so many voices in our daily lives that it becomes increasingly difficult to hear the “still, small voice” unless we tune our hearts and listen for the voice.

This requires careful listening. Revelation or inspiration from the Holy Spirit is probably the most powerful thing we can experience. It is the thing we can remember day after day, month

after month, and year after year. We need to be able to recognize promptings and inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

Some of the ways the Spirit will speak to us are through the whisperings of the still, small voice<sup>i</sup> a thought or feeling in our minds and in our hearts<sup>ii</sup>, an enlightenment of the mind<sup>iii</sup>, a burning in the bosom<sup>iv</sup>, peace to our minds<sup>v</sup>, a vision<sup>vi</sup>, a dream<sup>vii</sup>, or pure intelligence coming into our minds<sup>viii</sup>.

He can also speak to us through living prophets, the scriptures, an inspired priesthood leader, a parent, or a dear friend. Revelations from the Holy Spirit come in many ways.

Are we sometimes guilty of not listening after we have asked the Lord for help? Do you sometimes accuse your husband, children, or work associates of not listening to you? How does that make you feel?

I have found that sometimes I get an answer to my pleadings only to then question if that was really an answer or did I just imagine it. Sometimes I think Heavenly Father may say, “Barbara, why are you asking Me this again? I answered that. You need to listen. I won’t be giving you two or three answers to a question I have already answered for you.”

Sometimes, after feeling good about a decision, in my mind I say, “Well, yes, I felt good about that decision, but it would have been better if I had heard a voice or if I had seen a vision. Then I would have been really sure.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said: “Most of the revelation that comes to leaders and members of the Church comes by the still, small voice or by a feeling rather than by a vision or a voice that speaks specific words we can hear. I testify to the reality of that kind of revelation, which I have come to know as a familiar, even daily, experience to guide me in the work of the Lord.”<sup>ix</sup>

Because revelation or the power of the Holy Spirit is so strong, Satan works very hard to tell us we didn’t receive an answer. He works hard to deceive us, to tempt us and to tell us it just isn’t worth it to try to keep the commandments and live the gospel.

One time I was in another city attending some business meetings. I had a long lunch break and only needed a few minutes to grab a bite of food. I had some time before the meetings were to start up again. I noticed a card shop close by and went in to read some cards. I enjoyed many of the humorous cards.

To all you cat lovers, let me just apologize right now. I don’t really appreciate cats. I am allergic to cats. I try to stay as far away from cats as possible. Due to this allergy, I haven’t been as sympathetic towards cats as I probably should be (Please don’t write me hateful letters. I am happy for those of you who love cats.).

Anyway, I picked up a card with the picture of a washing machine and dryer on it. The dryer door was open and there was a sign taped on it which said, “Cat food inside.” There was an arrow pointing towards the inside of the dryer.

Hiding on the side of the dryer out of sight was a dog. As the dog saw the cat approaching and then stopping to read the sign, he was quietly saying, “Oh please, oh please.”

I think this is exactly what Satan does to us. He tries to entice us with many things that seem exciting, fun and look so good. He tells us that almost anything is OK if it feels good or looks good. He knows that if he can get us to let down our guard, desire that “cat food” and step close to the dryer door and then go inside, he has us. His heart delights that he has us.

Many years ago when I was a young teenager our family attended a movie. It was called *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. This movie was about two men (handsome men; Paul Newman and Robert Redford) who were bank robbers. This is how they made their living. The audience really got into the movie. We were cheering, laughing, and enjoying it. At the end of the movie when the two main characters were shot as they were robbing that last bank—everyone was sad. My little brother was confused and asked me, “Are they the good guys or the bad guys?” That question caused me to stop and think. Well, we were cheering for men who were robbing banks. That obviously was not a good thing to do. I had a hard time explaining this to my young brother.

This is exactly what Satan does to us. He tries to make the bad look so good and he makes good seem unattractive or dull. He tells us a little lie or a little sin is not a big deal. He slowly and carefully distracts us to the point where it becomes very difficult for us to feel the Holy Spirit and get the guidance we need to stay on the right path.

The Book of Mormon gives countless examples of good and evil people—both fighting to win over the hearts of the people. The scriptures tell us of the joy of those who follow God and the misery of those who choose Satan’s ways.

Remember the scriptures in Alma where the forces of evil were fighting against the people of God. The people had experienced a time of happiness and peace. They were living the gospel. Then came Korihor, the Anti-Christ, among the people. He preached to them many false and deceptive things. He told them their belief in God was foolishness. He told them exactly what Satan tells people today—that “whatsoever a man did was no crime.”<sup>x</sup>

In Alma, chapter 30, verse 18 we read, “And thus he [meaning Korihor] did preach unto them, leading away the hearts of many, causing them to lift up their heads in their wickedness, yea, leading away many **women, and also men**, to commit whoredoms—telling them that when a man was dead, that was the end thereof.”

This is one of the few scriptures which singles out “women” especially in connection with leading them away. The scriptures frequently say the people were led away, or that men were lead away, meaning both men and women. But this phrase is specific about leading away many women. Women were falling into Satan’s traps and believing a man who used flattering words, telling them the things they wanted to hear.

I am fearful that this is beginning to be the norm today. Too many women are being deceived. We are being sold a pack of lies by Satan, the master deceiver.

Getting back to Korihor . . . he began to believe that his own lying words were true. Satan deceived him, even though he later admitted that he always knew there was a God.<sup>xi</sup>

Korihor's teachings had led away so many people that Alma's heart began to sicken<sup>xii</sup> because of the iniquity of the people. These were his people, members of the Lord's Church. He desperately wanted them to repent and return to God. He pled with God in mighty prayer that they might find the way to have success in "bringing them unto thee in Christ"<sup>xiii</sup>. Alma prayed that the people might be humble and that he would help to bring them "without stubbornness of heart"<sup>xiv</sup> back to the Church and the safety it provides.

Alma's plea and hope for all the people was expressed earlier in Alma 13:27-29, "And now, my brethren, I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, and not procrastinate the day of your repentance; But that ye would humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit, becoming humble, meek, submissive, patient, full of love and all long-suffering; Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest."

Many people don't recognize the Spirit. They don't know what it is that they are feeling or experiencing—even some members of the Church. We need to learn to recognize the Spirit.

I can remember my mission president telling us to remember that at every door and with every person to whom we spoke, we needed to teach them something that we could testify to. He said to tell them something about Christ, about His Church, about Joseph Smith, or the eternal nature of families and then testify to the truthfulness of it. Then the Holy Spirit can bear witness that you are teaching the truth. This works. I saw it happen many times.

I remember one day it seemed the doors were slamming so fast that there wasn't any time to teach a sentence, let alone testify of anything. Finally we got to one of the last doors in the apartment building. A lady came to the door. I told her we were representatives of Jesus Christ, that God loves her, and that He has a special message for her and her family. Then I testified to the truthfulness of this message. She hesitated for a moment. I could tell she felt something but she politely told us she didn't have time and shut the door.

We were finished at that apartment building and went outside to pack up our bags, get on our bikes and leave. Moments later this woman came running after us and said, "I want to know why I felt so different when you were talking to me. I don't understand what was happening to me." This gave us the opportunity to explain what she was feeling and to tell her more.

Another day I felt impressed that we should ride our bikes, out to a little village that was quite a few miles away and visit a family who had told us to come back sometime after they got home from vacation.

My companion said, "Don't you think we should try to call them to see if they are home?" I said, "Let's just go." So we rode all the way out to this little town. We parked our bikes out by the fence then walked up the sidewalk to the front door. We knocked and waited. No answer. We knocked again. There was no one home. Everything was quiet.

I began to doubt the impression I had felt. Maybe I had just wanted to go for a long ride to avoid knocking on doors. I felt bad. My companion was nice enough not to say anything about making a phone call first. We went back to our bikes talking about what house we could go to next.

A man was walking on the sidewalk in front of the house. He was a Lebanese man who spoke English. He was visiting his daughter who was married to a German man and they were living there in Germany on the next block. He was just out for a walk.

He said to us, "I have been watching you. There is something different about you. Your eyes are shining. Who are you? What are you doing here? Please tell me." We told him that we were missionaries and there in Germany serving the Lord. He was very interested in our message. Of course, the Church was not allowed in Lebanon in those days. We spoke to him on the street for a while and explained about the restoration and the Book of Mormon.

He told us that the next day he was flying to the United States on business. He would be in San Francisco for several weeks. We gave him an English pamphlet about Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel. On the back of the pamphlet there just happened to be an address in San Francisco where he could locate the Church. He said he was anxious to do so.

Do spiritual experiences only happen to missionaries? Why do they seem to happen to missionaries more than to some of us? Does the Lord love missionaries more? Well no, of course not.

He loves all of us. He wants to bless us. Think what missionaries are doing. They are studying the scriptures daily. They are praying, teaching, and bearing testimony often. And hopefully they are living their lives in accordance with the gospel. Each of us who have been baptized and confirmed members of this Church has been told how we can always have His spirit to be with us also.

The sacramental prayers remind us of how we can have the Spirit of the Lord in our lives. As we partake of the sacrament we renew our covenants with God and indicate that we are willing to take upon us the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments.<sup>xv</sup> Then, as we do these things we will put ourselves in a position to have His Spirit to be with us.

During the past year as I have done Relief Society auxiliary training I have asked many sisters what they do to prepare themselves to receive revelation or what they do to get inspiration in their lives. They have shared many beautiful experiences. They have explained that they pray, fast, study the scriptures, go to the temple, read the General Conference talks, listen to sacred music, repent, and they are still, and quiet so they can hear when the Spirit whispers to them.

Let me take just a few minutes to expand on these things that sisters have talked about.

In Alma 8:10, we are told that “Alma labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit . . .” We have also been told to “counsel with the Lord in all [our] doings so we can be directed for good.”<sup>xvi</sup> Prayer will be the source of much strength and will help us be receptive to the Holy Spirit.

We have been told in Isaiah chapter 58 that when we fast and give offerings to help others that when we call, the Lord will answer and the Lord will guide us continually.<sup>xvii</sup> Fasting will help us to be humble and more receptive so we can hear the voice of the Spirit.

We have heard many times of the value of reading and studying the scriptures. “Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks has given us some valuable insights into the importance of regular scripture study. He said, “Just as continuing revelation enlarges and illuminates the scriptures, so also a study of the scriptures enables men and women to receive revelations. The idea that scripture reading can lead to inspiration and revelation opens the door to the truth that a scripture is not limited to what it meant when it was written but may also include what that scripture means to a reader today. Even more, scripture reading may also lead to current revelation on whatever else the Lord wishes to communicate to the reader at that time. We do not overstate the point when we say that the scriptures can be a Urim and Thummim to assist each of us to receive personal revelation.”<sup>xix</sup>

We have been counseled to not only attend the temple as often as possible but to worship in the Holy Temple.<sup>xx</sup> Every latter-day prophet has stressed the importance of temple worship and the blessings associated with making and keeping sacred covenants.

Joseph Smith received by revelation the words to the prayer he offered at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants section 109. One of the blessings mentioned in that section is that we can feel God’s power.<sup>xxi</sup> In verse 22 it states: “And we ask thee, Holy Father, that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them. . .”

What a great source of revelation we will find as we attend and worship in the Holy Temple.

Time does not permit us to explore further about spiritual receptiveness today. However, I pray that we will each recommit to seek the Holy Spirit, live so the Spirit can be with us, listen for the answers, and then act upon the inspiration we have been given.

I testify to you that our Heavenly Father lives and loves us. I testify that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Redeemer and that the Holy Ghost will be with us as we do the things we have promised to do. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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- <sup>i</sup> Helaman 5:30  
<sup>ii</sup> D&C 8:2-3  
<sup>iii</sup> D&C6:15  
<sup>iv</sup> D&C 9:8  
<sup>v</sup> D&C 6:22  
<sup>vi</sup> 1Nephi 1:8  
<sup>vii</sup> 1 Nephi 1:16  
<sup>viii</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, p. 151  
<sup>ix</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, *Ensign*, March 1997, p. 14  
<sup>x</sup> Alma 30:17  
<sup>xi</sup> Alma 30:52-53  
<sup>xii</sup> Alma 31:1  
<sup>xiii</sup> Alma 31:34  
<sup>xiv</sup> Alma 32:16  
<sup>xv</sup> Moroni 4:3  
<sup>xvi</sup> Alma 37:37  
<sup>xvii</sup> Isaiah 58:6-11  
<sup>xviii</sup> 2 Nephi 32:3  
<sup>xix</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, "Scripture Reading and Revelation," *Ensign*, Jan 1995, 7  
<sup>xx</sup> David A. Bednar, "Honorably Hold a Name and Standing," April 2009 Conference Report  
<sup>xxi</sup> D&C 109:13