

Friday Morning Keynote Address
“The Power of the Holy Ghost in Discerning Truth”
Peggy Worthen

This address was given on May 2, 2025
at the BYU Women’s Conference
©2025 by Brigham Young University Women’s Conference
All rights reserved.

For further information, email:
womens_conference@byu.edu
or write to:
253 Harman Continuing Education Building
Provo, Utah 84602
801-422-7692
Website: womensconference.byu.edu

This talk may be used for Church or personal use only, commercial use is prohibited.
This talk is available to view at:
<https://www.youtube.com/@BYUWomensConference>

While preparing this talk, I kept thinking that I wanted something sort of graphic that would represent what it feels like to live “in this unsettling and weary world...where information is coming at us with overwhelming speed...with different sources of information, conflicting ideas, and persuasive points of view.”¹ What kept coming to my mind was the painting entitled “The Scream,” by Edvard Munch, which has been described as a symbol of the anxieties of living in this modern world. But I decided that I could do even better than that. It wasn’t necessary to look too far to find artistic expressions from those who are living today in such a confusing and puzzling world. I asked my grandchildren to draw a picture, showing how they feel when they are confused and don’t know what to do. As you can see, these represent different ages (from 4 to 12) with different artistic abilities. But as a group, they represent fairly well the kinds of individual reactions that confusion causes. When our grandson was finished with his picture, he handed it to me and said, “here’s my picture of how I feel when I’m confuzzled.”

Do you ever feel confuzzled? I certainly do. In today’s world, it is easy to feel confuzzled. The question is, how can we thrive in such challenging times?

Our Prophet, President Nelson has identified the key solution in his Sunday morning address at the April 2018 general conference. “In coming days,” he said, “it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”²

With this prophetic directive in mind, I would like to focus on three questions: 1) What are some practical ways to follow President Nelson’s counsel to invite the influence of the Holy Ghost into our lives? 2) In what ways can we better recognize the influence of the Holy Ghost? And 3) In

what ways can reflecting on past personal experiences with the Holy Ghost give us comfort and peace?

First, what are some practical ways to follow President Nelson’s prophetic counsel? President Nelson himself has provided us with several specific steps each of us can take to more fully receive the influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

For example, in the same April 2018 talk, President Nelson counseled us to pray and gave us wonderful advice on how to make our prayers more effective. “Find a quiet place where you can regularly go. Humble yourself before God. Pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father. Turn to Him for answers and for comfort. Pray in the name of Jesus Christ about your concerns, your fears, your weaknesses—yes, the very longings of your heart. And then listen! Write the thoughts that come to your mind. Record your feelings and follow through with actions that you are prompted to take. As you repeat this process day after day, month after month, year after year, you will ‘grow into the principle of revelation.’”³

In another general conference address, President Nelson identified another way we can increase the influence of the Spirit in our lives when he counseled us to study the Book of Mormon. He promised that “as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon every day, you will make better decisions—every day. I promise that as you ponder what you study, the windows of heaven will open and you will receive answers to your own questions and direction for your own life.”⁴

President Nelson has also counseled us to attend the temple regularly, thereby giving us another practical way to invite the influence of the Holy Ghost into our lives: “The temple lies at the center of strengthening our faith and spiritual fortitude because the Savior and His doctrine are the very heart of the temple. Everything taught in the temple, through instruction and through the Spirit, increases our understanding of Jesus Christ. His essential ordinances bind us to Him through sacred priesthood covenants. Then, as we keep our covenants, He endows us with His healing, strengthening power. And oh, how we will need His power in the days ahead.”⁵

President Nelson provided more advice on how to increase the Holy Ghost’s influence when he admonished us to perform family history work: “While temple and family history work has the power to bless those beyond the veil, it has an equal power to bless the living. It has a refining influence on those who are engaged in it.”⁶

It’s comforting to me to know that we don’t have to sit idly by and feel hopeless in this chaotic world. We can be proactive. By following the counsel of President Nelson to regularly pray, study the Book of Mormon daily, attend the temple, and engage in family history work, we can have the constant influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

Second, in what ways can we more effectively recognize the influence of the Holy Ghost? We can begin by believing that Heavenly Father wants to communicate with us. Joseph Smith taught that “It is the privilege of the children of God to come to God and get revelation. ... God is not a respecter of persons; we all have the same privilege.”⁷ President Nelson emphasized this when he exclaimed, “Does God really want to speak to you? Yes! ‘As well might man stretch forth his

puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course . . . as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints.”⁸

Given God’s deep desire to speak with us, it is no surprise that there are many ways in which He communicates with us through the Holy Ghost. Elder Quentin L. Cook taught that “The Spirit communicates in marvelous ways... The scriptures include many examples of how the Spirit influences our minds, including speaking peace to our minds, occupying our minds, enlightening our minds and even sending a voice to our minds.”⁹

But what happens when we are not sure if the feelings we have are from the Holy Ghost or just our own thoughts? The ancient prophet Mormon gave us one key to making that determination when he taught “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.”¹⁰ When our thoughts prompt us to do good, and to serve and love God, we can be certain that it is from the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost will always prompt us to do good – always.

But sometimes, despite all our efforts, we are still unsure of what God wants us to do. For those situations, Elder Richard G. Scott gave wise counsel: “What do you do when you have prepared carefully, have prayed fervently, waited a reasonable time for a response, and still do not feel an answer? ...When...you need to act, proceed with trust. As you are sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, one of two things will certainly occur at the appropriate time; either the stupor of thought will come, indicating an improper choice, or the peace or the burning in the bosom will be felt, confirming that your choice was correct. When you are living righteously and are acting with trust, God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision.”¹¹ As we continually strive to recognize the influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives, our ability to do so will increase.

Finally, how can reflecting on past experiences with the Holy Ghost give us comfort and peace?

When we face challenges and uncertainty, reflecting on our past personal experiences with the Holy Ghost is more than a nice suggestion, it is crucial. In that regard we can learn from the example of Lucy Mack Smith, the prophet Joseph Smith’s mother.

Years before the gospel was restored Lucy, like us, experienced confusing times that were filled with different sources of information, conflicting ideas, and persuasive points of view. She described an experience she had when she was very ill. Lucy recounted “[I] said to myself, I am not prepared to die for I do not know the ways of Christ, and it seemed to me as though there was a dark and lonely chasm between myself and Christ.... I looked to the Lord and begged and pled with the Lord that he would spare my life.... I covenanted with God [that] if he would let me live I would endeavor to get that religion that would enable me to serve him right, whether it was in the Bible or wherever it might be found, At last a voice spoke to me and said, ‘Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. Let your heart be comforted. Ye believe in God; believe also in me.’ ...From this time forward I gained strength continually.”¹²

After that experience, Lucy went years without a definitive direction from God about religion. However, during that time she continually pondered on her experience, while waiting patiently for that direction. As she explained, although “I said but little upon the subject of religion ... it occupied my mind entirely, and I thought that I would make all diligence as soon as I was able to seek some pious person who knew the ways of God to instruct me in things of Heaven.”¹³

I have found similar strength and perspective by reflecting on past experiences in my life when I knew that I was influenced by the Holy Ghost. Such reflection gives me increased faith that God will provide hope and direction to me as He has in the past.

At a very young age, and without having been taught about the doctrine of eternal families, I felt the assurance that I would be with my earthly family forever. Later, when I was 18 years old, and the missionaries invited me to be baptized, I said yes, even though I did not know that much about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I just felt it was the right thing to do. When I was uncertain about moving to Provo with our young family many years ago, and feeling lonely and overwhelmed, many tender mercies assured me that Heavenly Father was aware of me. When I face challenges now, I reflect on these experiences, and I receive renewed assurance that Heavenly Father loves me and He will continue to help me as He has in the past.

You might begin this process of reflection by recalling specific times when you knew you were being influenced by the Holy Ghost. For example, you might consider times in your life when you knew that Heavenly Father was aware of you, or when you were listening to the Prophet and you knew what he was saying was true. You may consider times when you were reading the scriptures and had an overwhelming feeling come over you that gave you clarity on an issue. Or it may have been when you felt a prompting that led you to avoid physical or spiritual danger, or you felt peace and comfort during difficult times.¹⁴

You can enhance the impact of remembering such experiences by reflecting on what and how you felt in that moment, how you knew that it was the Holy Ghost’s influence, and what steps you took to prepare yourself for that moment. Such personal reflection can enhance your ability to recognize the Holy Ghost in your life,¹⁵ allowing you to follow President Nelson’s inspired invitation to increase the influence of that Spirit in all you do.

I testify that President Nelson is a prophet of God and that through him, God has given us direction about how to flourish in a confuzzled world. As we follow that counsel, we will be blessed with greater peace, joy, and direction in our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ (From BYU Women’s Conference session abstract)

² President Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” Ensign, May 2018

³ President Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives,” Ensign, May 2018

⁴ President Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like Without It?” October 2017 General Conference

⁵ President Russell M. Nelson, “The Temple and Your Spiritual Foundation,” October 2021 General Conference

⁶ President Russell M. Nelson, "Generations Linked in Love," April 2010 General Conference

⁷ Joseph Smith, in a discourse given about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards, in Willard Richards Pocket Companion, "Before 8 August 1839 (3)," in *The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, comp. and ed. Andrew F Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 13, 15; quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 132.

⁸ President Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," emphasis in original, April 2018 General Conference

⁹ Elder Quentin L. Cook, "The Blessing of Continuing Revelation to Prophets and Personal Revelation to Guide Our Lives," April 2020 General Conference

¹⁰ (Moroni 7:13)

¹¹ (Elder Richard G. Scott, "Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer," Ensign, May 2007). Elder David A. Bednar shared a similar insight "In many of the uncertainties and challenges we encounter in our lives, God requires us to do our best, to act and not be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:26), and to trust in Him. We may not see angels, hear heavenly voices, or receive overwhelming spiritual impressions. We frequently may press forward hoping and praying—but without absolute assurance—that we are acting in accordance with God's will. But as we honor our covenants and keep the commandments, as we strive ever more consistently to do good and to become better, we can walk with the confidence that God will guide our steps." ("The Spirit of Revelation", April 2011 General Conference)

¹² (Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844-1845, book 2, pages 2-4, josephsmithpapers.org)

¹³ (Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844-1845, book 2, pages 2-4, josephsmithpapers.org)

¹⁴ From Gospel Study Guide

¹⁵ As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, "there are clusters of memories embedded in each of [our] lives. And these can help us to 'remember how merciful the Lord hath been (Moroni 10:3)'" (Neal A. Maxwell, "Remember How Merciful the Lord Hath Been." April 2004)

Photo of "The Scream" by Edvard Munch. Public Domain. Copyright expired January 1, 2015

Drawings by Ainsley Worthen, Brinley Worthen, Becca Worthen. Permission for use given by parents, Aaron & Laurel Worthen.

Drawings by Marvin Killian, Merika Killian, Wayne Killian, Bonnie Killian. Permission for use given by parents, Kaylee & Miles Killian.