

Quit Worrying About It! Is It the Holy Ghost or Me?

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I want to see if I can't provide a little direction in relation to a question that is in the soul of every single member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Sister Bednar indicated that as we travel the world, we invite people to ask questions. There is one question that is asked most often. It's a very simple question. "Elder Bednar, How do I know if it is the Holy Ghost or just me?" Have you ever wondered that? Is it me thinking this or is it the Holy Ghost telling me this and how do I know the difference? Now let me describe what I want to do tonight and then we will get to work. I want to number one, answer that question. I think my answer will surprise you. Then, I want to illustrate how I have learned that principle that answers that question over the course of the last 36 years. I am going to share an experience I had as a 40-year-old stake president that relates to an experience I had as a 20-year-old missionary, and then I am going to tell you about an experience I had as a 56-year-old member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. You will find a remarkable consistency and continuity in all three of those experiences and I hope it won't take you 36 years to learn the same lesson.

Now the answer to the question "How do you tell if it's the Holy Ghost or just me?" Answer: quit worrying about it! Quit fussing, quit stewing, quit analyzing, quit worrying about it! Press forward with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Be a good boy. Be a good girl. Honor your covenants, keep your commandments, and I promise you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that your steps will be guided. As you open your mouth, it will be filled. You will be in the right place at the right time and in most instances, you'll have no idea why or how you got there. So quit worrying about it. You got the answer? Good.

Experience number one. I was a 40-year-old stake president living in Fayetteville, Arkansas. In those days we used to have Regional Conferences. Regional Conferences involved a number of different stakes, there would always be a member of the First Presidency or Quorum of the Twelve Apostles presiding, and you would come together for a four-hour Priesthood Leadership meeting on Saturday and a General Session held in a very large venue on Sunday. We were having such a Regional Conference in Joplin, Missouri, presiding at that conference was Elder Boyd K. Packer. Before the Priesthood Leadership meeting on Saturday, there was a luncheon to which all the stake presidents were invited so that we could visit with President Packer, become acquainted, and tell him about the challenges and issues we were experiencing in our stakes.

At the beginning of the lunch, Elder Packer invited each of us to introduce ourselves. So, we went around the room and he got to me and I said "My name is David Bednar. I live in Fayetteville, Arkansas..." And then I said, "Elder Packer I'm sure you won't remember this. But, in 1972, I was a missionary in Southern Germany. You were travelling from Berchtesgaden to Munich so that you could catch a plane to fly to Berlin to fulfill an assignment. Your plane was

fogged in at the Munich airport..." and then Elder Packer, really very abruptly, just cut me off! And he said, "And President Bednar do you remember that you and your companion came to the airport and picked my wife and I up, you took us to the mission home, because President Peterson was away at a mission president's seminar. Sister Packer found some cans of soup in the kitchen cabinets. She made the soup; we had some toast. We sat in the kitchen. We visited for a while, and then because you could not get us on an airplane you took us to the train station, you got us on the midnight train. Did the best accommodations you could find and then you sent us on our way." He said, "President Bednar do you remember that?" I said, "Elder Packer, I remember picking you up at the airport." Let me tell you what I remember about that! I was working in the office. The phone rang. The call was directed to me. I said "Hello, this is Elder Bednar." He said, "Hello, this is Elder Packer." We had 250 missionaries in our mission. Elder Packer, where is he? And he said, "this is the Elder Packer from Salt Lake City!" I said, "Oh! That Elder Packer!" He was the junior member of the Quorum of the Twelve and had been serving for two years so my companion and I zipped out to the airport and went and picked him up. I said, "I remember picking you up. I remember we couldn't get you on a plane. I remember we took you to the train station, and Elder Packer that's all I remember."

He then proceeded to tell me this story. He said, "do you remember that just as our train was about to leave the train station, that you gave me 20 Marks?" I said "I have absolutely no recollection of doing that. Are you sure I gave you 20 Marks? That was a lot of money!" He said, "you were concerned that travelling through the night on the train, we might get hungry. We would not have any German money, so you gave me 20 Marks." I said, "I have no recollection of doing that." He said, "Well our train travel to Berlin went very fine as long as we were in Western Germany." At that time, Germany was partitioned into two segments. The Western and the Eastern. Eastern was dominated by a Communist Government. When they reached the border and were going to go into Eastern Germany, and in a city called Houff, East German guards got onto the train. They began checking the passports of everyone on the train. Elder Packer's passport was fine. Sister Packer's passport was a three-year passport that had been extended to be a five-year passport, and the East German Government was not accepting three year passports that had been extended. Elder Packer could not speak German. The guard could not speak English. If you listen to Elder Packer now describe that man, he would say he was one of the surliest, grumpiest, darkest, and most evil men he's met. He said, "it frankly was escalating in this confrontation to the point that I thought it was going to have a very unhappy ending." He said, "they refused to acknowledge my wife's passport and I didn't know what to do." He said, "I then reached into my pocket. I found the 20 Marks that you had given me. I took it out. I put it into my passport. Took my passport, Sister Packer's passport, and gave it to the guard. He left. He came back. The 20 Marks was gone, and we were permitted to go on and travel throughout Eastern Germany." That's not a bribe, it's called righteous exchange!

When Elder Packer got to Berlin, he was greeted by a Priesthood leader who was serving in the United States Government. I don't know if it was in the FBI or some other branch, but he knew of some things that were taking place in Eastern Germany. After having been picked up at the train station and riding in the car, Elder Packer rather nonchalantly explained what had happened at the border crossing in Eastern Germany. This Priesthood leader, who worked for

the US Government, really became rather pail and said, "Elder Packer, I cannot explain how you were able to get through Eastern Germany with your wife's passport." And Elder Packer said, "well what do you mean?" He said, "The East German government, for the past several months, has been making quite an issue out of people with those three year, extended to five year, passports. And they have been taking people off the train in Eastern Germany." Only then did Elder Packer realize how serious that situation had been. He said, "I could see this man trying to escort my wife off of the train. I would not have allowed that to happen." And then he began to realize the severity of the situation in which he had been placed.

Now, I had no idea any of that had taken place until 20 years later, 1992, when I was a 40 year-old stake president participating in a Regional Conference at which Elder Packer was presiding. President Packer, of the Quorum of the Twelve, came to BYU Idaho when I was the president there and he gave a talk. He called it "The 20 Mark Note" and he detailed this episode from his experience and his point of view. And as he taught this principle, I will never forget both what he said and how he said it. He said, "everything you need to know about living the Gospel and responding to the impressions of the Holy Ghost, is evidenced in a 20-year-old missionary, handing me that 20 Mark Note, and having no idea why he was doing it." He said, "If you'll learn that lesson, you'll live the Gospel, you'll rear your family, they'll respond to your teachings, and you'll find happiness in mortality." You've got to let that sink in. I had no idea why I was giving him the 20 Marks. I gave him the 20 Marks because I thought they would be hungry. In retrospect, with the advantage of hindsight in 20 years. Was that a spiritual impression to give him 20 Marks? Yes. Was it a prompting from the Holy Ghost? Absolutely. Did God see the beginning from the end and know that his member of the Quorum of the Twelve needed that assistance? Yes. And I was there in the right place at the right time. I was really trying to be a good boy. I was trying to honor my covenants, and keep my commandments, and do my very best. I did not receive an email or a text message from Moroni saying "give him 20 Marks because he's going to need it at the border in Hauff." I didn't hear a bugle. I could not have told you in the moment that it was a spiritual impression.

Somehow, someway in the culture of the church, not in the doctrine, but in the culture of the church we have come to believe that I must know in the moment that it's a spiritual impression. That I must receive the spiritual impression so that it will guide me and tell me what to do. And that unless I receive such an impression, I cannot go forward because I won't know what to do. Now, Elders and Sisters, every once in a while, rarely, you will receive an impression that will guide you and you will know it before the fact. The overwhelming majority of the impressions and revelations you will ever receive will come in the course of you being a good boy or a good girl, honoring your covenants, keeping your commandments and you will become and instrument in the hands of God and He will take you where you need to be so you can do what He wants you to do and much of the time you'll never know it's happening that way.

I hope this doesn't sound like heresy. But I watch so many members of the church, and I watch so many Elders and Sisters who are paralyzed because they don't want to go unless they know they are under the influence of the Spirit. Well guess what? When you are sitting there, you are not under the influence of the spirit. The scriptures say you are to press forward, not sit still.

Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ. And when you are moving you will be guided. And you have to have the confidence and the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to know that He will help you! Now you can't kick back and be acted upon and say "okay, I'm just going to go where He tells me to go." You get going. You get busy. You do everything that you're supposed to do and He will guide you.

Now, can I tell you one charming footnote to that 20 Mark Note story? When I was called to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, and when I attended my very first meeting in the temple with the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, I was now the junior member of the Quorum of the Twelve, which is what President Packer had been 34 years earlier. He's now the President of the Quorum of the Twelve and he told that story to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. Do you want to know what President Hinckley said? He looked at me and said, "well David has he ever paid you back?" And I said, "Well President, no he hasn't!" And he said, "well how much is that 20 Marks worth today?" And I said, "Well I figure he owes me about \$240,000!" And then President Hinckley with great delight turns to President Packer and says, "Well Boyd you'd better start paying him back!" Now, that was an experience when I was 20 years old. When I was your age. I had been in the mission field for a year. And I didn't know then what a profound lesson that was about receiving and recognizing promptings from the Holy Ghost.

Episode number two. Now I'm in my 40's, serving as a stake president. I'm presiding over a stake in Arkansas, in Eastern Oklahoma, and Southern Missouri, that is very large. Hundreds of miles North and South. Hundreds of miles East and West. 17 units; 9 branches and 8 wards. Don't complain to me about how far you have to go to do your home teaching or anything else. I don't want to hear about it. It took two hours to get from our home in Fayetteville to the stake center in Ft. Smith. You had to travel through the Boston Mountains, on a two-lane road, and it took approximately two hours to get there. So, anytime you went to the stake center, it was two hours there and two hours coming back. As a result of the distance and the travel in our stake, we did everything as a stake on a Saturday, once a month. We would have a high council meeting, and the auxiliaries would come at the same time, everything was done on that one Saturday so that we could clear the calendar for families and not have people driving back and forth to the stake center all the time.

I was to preside at a Stake Priesthood Leadership meeting that began at 4:00 in the afternoon and then there were to be youth activities and a dance that night. I was seated on the stand, and it was close to the time for the meeting to begin. Our oldest son was in the ninth grade. It was basketball season, and his ninth-grade basketball team was playing in a tournament championship game back in Fayetteville and the game was to begin at 7:00. For this dad and stake president, this was the ultimate conflict. I wanted to be at that ballgame with my wife and our boys. But, as a stake president, I needed to be at this Priesthood Leadership meeting. Now, do you remember the setting? I'm up here. The meeting is about to begin. It's like five minutes before the meeting begins and I'm looking out into the congregation, and I look down and see one of the Elder's Quorum presidents. I know that his son is playing on the team against whom my son is playing. I turned to my councilor, and said "If I leave, can you cover this?" And he said, "Yeah. What's the matter?" And I said, "I'll tell you later. I just think I need to go." I then asked

the Executive Secretary of the stake to come over and I said “go get this Elder’s Quorum president. Have him make arrangements for someone else to drive his car back to the northern end of the stake where he lived, and have him meet me in the Stake President’s office in about two minutes.” So, the Executive Secretary comes down off the stand and gets this Elder’s Quorum President and takes him back to the Stake President’s office. I just get up and walk out. And my councilor takes over. I go back and this Elder’s Quorum President is just scared to death. “What did I do? What am I going to get chewed out for just before this meeting starts?” I said to him, “Uh, I don’t know why we are doing this but, you and I are now going to have a two-hour personal Priesthood interview in my car as we drive back to Springdale so you and I can go watch our boys play basketball.” And he had the biggest smile. He went from being petrified to elated.

We jumped in my car, and we talked about a lot of things. We got there about 20 minutes before the game began and you should have seen the faces of those two boys. And we watched that ballgame and we had a great time. And I struggled, I’m 40 years old at the time, maybe 42, I don’t remember. I thought ‘you know you really have rationalized why you wanted to leave a Priesthood meeting just to go to a ballgame.’ My wife said to me, which didn’t help, “David. Nice try, but you’d do anything to go to a ballgame!” And I frankly thought, “you know did I shirk my duty?” I mean I needed to be there with my son. But there are sometimes when you’ve just got to say “I’m sorry. I can’t make it.” And I just went back and forth wondering if I had done the right thing.

Now, fast forward six months. It’s now 4:30 in the morning on a Sunday. I receive a phone call from this Elder’s Quorum president. And he says, “we’ve had a terrible accident. My son is in the hospital, can you please come?” I said, “I’ll be right there.” I walked into the Emergency Room where they were with their son. And this Elder’s Quorum President just grabbed me and hugged me and said, “he just died.” I said, “what happened?” They had been out in the woods cutting wood. They were using a metal maul to split the wood. This young man, very athletic, and very strong, had hit this metal maul. A very small piece of metal had come off of the maul, had penetrated through his clothing, into his chest cavity, and had nicked his heart and he was bleeding internally. But it wasn’t a grievous wound. You couldn’t even tell. The young man didn’t even know that it had happened. After they got through cutting the wood, he sat in the back of the pickup truck where they had the wood stacked and he said, “Boy I just feel terrible” and he passed out. They took him to the hospital. They worked on him, and he died from internal bleeding.

Now, Elders and Sisters, that Elder’s Quorum President, after he had greeted me, hugged me and told me what had happened to his son, looked at me and said, “President Bednar I am so glad we were able to go to that ball game because that’s the only chance I ever would have had so see my son play in a game like that.” Now, Elders and Sisters, was a stake president moved upon by the Holy Ghost to get up and walk out of a Stake Priesthood Leadership meeting because the Lord knew in the future what would happen to the son of the Elder’s Quorum President and He wanted that dad to have that experience with that son before that son was transferred to the Spirit World? I absolutely know that’s what took place. But can I confess to

you? Can I confide in you? Can I share the fact that as a 40 plus year old man who had been a bishop and I was serving for the second time as a stake president, I kind of thought I was just rationalizing my own desire to go and watch a basketball game my son was playing in. Which was a good thing. But I wasn't sure it was the right thing in that very moment.

Can you hear the lesson I'm trying to teach? Don't just sit and wait for some dramatic message to come from heaven. You be a good boy. You be a good girl. You honor your covenants. Keep the commandments. Press forward with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and He will guide your steps and as you open your mouth it will be filled. Don't be paralyzed wondering "Oh is this me or is it the Holy Ghost?" Get over it! Quit worrying about it! Press forward. Get going and you'll be alright!

Now, I'm not suggesting that there are not impressive even dramatic spiritual experiences in our lives. Certainly, there are. But if you and I are to put off the natural man and the natural woman and become a saint through the Atonement of Christ, if we are to have in us the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, then shouldn't we be making gradual, steady, incremental line upon line, precept upon precept progress in thinking what Christ would think and in doing what He would do? And the more we draw unto Him, come unto Him, He shouldn't have to constantly be smacking us with the Holy Ghost to get our attention. He increasingly trusts us to think what He would think, and to do what He would do. So yes, there are profound and dramatic spiritual impressions. But don't think that every one has to come that way. The vast majority are sweet, they're soft, they're subtle. They come when we are pressing forward and moving, not when we are sitting and waiting and analyzing. Are you with me so far?

We won't go through and review the verses now, but I'm going to give you an assignment. I want you to read the story of Nephi returning to Jerusalem to obtain the plates of brass. Do you know why that episode is in the very beginning of the Book of Mormon? Because you read it a bazillion times! You start the Book of Mormon, and you get to the Isaiah chapters and the enthusiasm dwindles, the book goes on the shelf, a week later "ok, I'm going to do it this time" and you read the first twenty one chapters again! Right? And then you read the same chapters again until Isaiah and it's back on the shelf again! Everyone thinks that Elder Oaks because his demeanor in General Conference is so stoic and straightforward, they think Elder Oaks is like "wow he would never smile or tell a joke or anything." Elders and Sisters, it's not the place to pop off in General Conference! It's not the place to tell jokes and try to be funny. We are declaring the mind and the will of the Lord. And so don't be surprised when Elder Oaks comes, and you go "wow! He's a lot funnier than I thought!" I love it when Elder Oaks tells this story. He tells a story of a man. He's walking along and he has one of those little pocket versions of the Book of Mormon in his pocket and he bore witness that it saved his life. One day a guy came out, pulled a gun was robbing him, the gun went off. Shot him. Hit the Book of Mormon and it stopped at the Isaiah chapters! Now, what's funny about that is Elder Oaks can't tell that story without laughing so hard before he gets to the punch line! He laughs so hard, anticipating the laugh, whenever he tells the joke!

Story number three. Now you remember the 20 Mark note? I'm a 20-year-old missionary. This Elder's Quorum president, we are going to the ball game, I'm in my early 40's as a stake president. Episode number three is just a few weeks ago as a 56-year-old member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Sister Bednar and I had an assignment to be in Europe in the latter part of February and early March. General Conference was in the latter part of March and the early part of April. Members of the Quorum of the Twelve speak in every single General Conference. So, knowing I would get back towards the middle of March, knowing that you have to turn your talk in a few days early so it can be translated into 84 different languages, you don't leave that 'til the last minute. So, I got busy, and I prepared my message and I turned it in before we left to go to Europe. And I felt pretty good about that, while I was in Europe. When we got home, a few days before the deadline for turning in your message so it can be translated, I woke up one morning and I just said to Susan, "I think I'm supposed to give a different message in General Conference." Now, this frankly didn't make a lot of sense. But, I could argue it was just a feeling. I didn't have a dramatic, strong, spiritual impression, I just felt a bit unsettled. So, I went to work, and I prepared the talk that I delivered in the last General Conference entitled "Honorably Hold a Name and Standing." It's a message that focuses on the protecting power of the covenants and ordinances in the Holy Temple. Now, Brothers and Sisters, there are no assigned topics for the messages that are delivered in General Conference. All we receive is a letter from the First Presidency. It says this:

"Dear Elder Bednar. We would be pleased if you would accept the invitation to speak in the Sunday Afternoon Session of General Conference for such and such a period of time. You will follow Elder Dallin H. Oaks. Sincerely, Your Brethren of the First Presidency"

That's it. I didn't know what Elder Oaks was going to talk about because there is no coordination of topics. No assigned topics. Nor did I know what Elder Gary Stevenson was going to talk about immediately following me. I didn't know based upon the letter I received from the First Presidency that Elder Stevenson would speak after me. Elder Oaks focused his message on selfless service, and he talked about covenants of sacrifice and consecration and how they relate to selfless service. He even spoke of those significant temple covenants. I spoke about the protecting power of temple ordinances and covenants. And then Elder Gary Stevenson talked about the temple and its impact in our home. Interestingly, President Monson concluded the Sunday Afternoon Session with a significant emphasis on the temple as he admonished the Saints to leave the conference, take what you have learned, and visit the House of the Lord. Now, those messages were orchestrated but not by the people speaking, certainly not by the First Presidency. They were orchestrated by heaven. Elders and Sisters, please listen. I didn't know why I had been moved upon by the Holy Ghost to change my message until I listened to Elder Gary Stevenson speak in that Sunday Afternoon Session of General Conference.

People look at the Twelve and at the General Authorities and think that somehow, it's dramatically different for you that it is for everybody else. In some ways, yes, it is. But, in the way I am describing with you tonight, no it's not. "Elder Bednar, how do you tell if it's the Holy Ghost or just you?" Quit worrying about it! Get to work! Press forward with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You be a good boy. You be a good girl. You honor your covenants. You keep the

commandments. And as you're pressing forward, God will guide your steps. As you open your mouth, he will inspire your utterances. You will become a tool in His hands to be at the right place, at the right time. Do you really think the Lord is going to depend on you and me in our limited capacity to really figure this out?

I love to visit with new converts every where I go. I did this last Sunday in Pensacola, Florida. I do this all over the world and do you know what I ask them? "What was it like being taught by the missionaries?" This is the most common response I ever get. It doesn't make any difference the language, the country, the culture. Here's the answer. "I had no idea what they were talking about. They were telling me about Joseph Smith, and golden plates, and angels. It was the most discombobulated, disjointed, unconnected set of stories I have ever heard in my whole life! This made no sense to me!" I then ask them; why did you keep listening? "It isn't because of what they said, it's because of what I could feel about what they said and what I could feel with them. So, I continued to listen until it started to make some more sense and then I could pray and come to know for myself if it were true. Now, Elders and Sisters, quit worrying about it. If you are good, then every good thought that you have is inspired by the Holy Ghost. Everything that is good comes from God. So just quit worrying about it.