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Gifts of the Spirit for Hard Times

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Gifts of the Spirit for Hard Times

HENRY B. EYRING

I am grateful for the lovely music and for the Spirit that it has brought. I am grateful for this opportunity to be with you this evening. Many of you are here in the Marriott Center at Brigham Young University. There are thousands more listening and watching at locations across the world. I cannot see all of you, but your Heavenly Father can. He knows your name and your needs. He knows your heart. Each of you has unique challenges. I pray that I may be inspired to say the words He would have you hear.

Blessings and Challenges of the Last Days

With all of our uniqueness, we all have some things in common. We are all in the probationary test of mortality. And, wherever we live, that test will become increasingly difficult. We are in the last dispensation of time. God's prophets have seen these times for millennia. They saw that wonderful things were to happen. There was to be a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The true Church was to be brought back with prophets and apostles. The gospel was to be taken to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Most marvelous of all, the true Church and its members are to become worthy for the coming of the Savior to His Church and to His purified disciples.

But the true prophets also saw that in the last days Satan would rage. There would be wars and rumors of wars. That would inspire fear. The courage of many would fail. There would be great wickedness. And Satan would deceive many.

Yet, happily, many would not be overcome. And many would not be deceived. The fact that you are here listening tonight is evidence that you want to be among those who will not be overcome and will not be deceived. My purpose is to teach you how you can reach that happy and glorious goal.

The Holy Ghost Is the Key

The key for each of us will be to accept and hold the gift we have been promised by God. You who are members of the true Church of Jesus Christ will remember that, after you were baptized, authorized servants of God promised you that you could receive the Holy Ghost. Some of you may have felt something happen when that ordinance was performed. Most of you have felt the effects of that promise being

Henry B. Eyring was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given on 10 September 2006.

fulfilled in your lives. I will tell you tonight how to recognize that gift, how to receive it every day in your life, and how it will bless you in the days ahead.

You have felt the quiet confirmation in your heart and mind that something was true. And you knew that it was inspiration from God. For some of you it may have come as the missionaries taught you before your baptism. It may have come during a talk or lesson in church. It may have come already tonight when something that was true was said or sung, as I felt when I heard the singing, as some of you did. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Truth. You feel peace, hope, and joy when it speaks to your heart and mind that something is true. Almost always I have also felt a sensation of light. Any feeling I may have had of darkness is dispelled. And the desire to do right grows.

The Lord promised that having those experiences would be true for you. Here are His words, recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants:

And now, verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy. [D&C 11:12–13]

The Lord also promised that those who have accepted the gift of the Holy Ghost in their lives would not be deceived. He spoke reassuringly to you and to me, who live in the times when the Church is being made ready for the time when He comes again. Here is the promise from the Doctrine and Covenants:

And at that day, when I shall come in my glory, shall the parable be fulfilled which I spake concerning the ten virgins.

For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their

guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day.

And the earth shall be given unto them for an inheritance; and they shall multiply and wax strong, and their children shall grow up without sin unto salvation.

For the Lord shall be in their midst, and his glory shall be upon them, and he will be their king and their lawgiver. [D&C 45:56–59]

Manifestations of the Spirit

As you heard those words just now, you may have felt another instance of receiving a manifestation of the Spirit that you have been promised. Those words paint a picture of the day when we may be with the Savior, who spoke of the ten virgins and of His coming again—only this time in glory. And they describe a day when we might be with Him and have His glory upon us. Of all the things to which the Holy Ghost testifies, and which you may have just felt, none is more precious to us than that Jesus is the Christ, the living Son of God. And nothing is so likely to make us feel light, hope, and joy. Then it is not surprising that when we feel the influence of the Holy Ghost, we also can feel that our natures are being changed because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. We feel an increased desire to keep His commandments, to do good, and to deal justly.

Many of you have felt that effect from your frequent experiences with the Holy Ghost. For instance, in the mission field some of you had to rely on the Spirit to have the words to teach what the people needed. More than once, and perhaps every day, you had the blessing that Nephi and Lehi had among the people in their mission, described in Helaman:

And it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi did preach unto the Lamanites with such great power and authority, for they had power and authority

given unto them that they might speak, and they also had what they should speak given unto them—

Therefore they did speak unto the great astonishment of the Lamanites, to the convincing them, insomuch that there were eight thousand of the Lamanites who were in the land of Zarahemla and round about baptized unto repentance, and were convinced of the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers. [Helaman 5:18–19]

Although you may not have been blessed with so miraculous a harvest, you have been given words by the Holy Ghost when you surrendered your heart to the Lord's service. At certain periods of your mission, such an experience came often. If you will think back on those times and ponder, you will also remember that the increase in your desire to obey the commandments came over you gradually. You felt less and less the tug of temptation. You felt more and more the desire to be obedient and to serve others. You felt a greater love for the people.

One of the effects of receiving a manifestation of the Holy Ghost repeatedly was that your nature changed. And so, from that faithful service to the Master, you had not only the witness of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ but you saw evidence in your own life that the Atonement is real. Such service, which brings the influence of the Holy Ghost, is an example of planting the seed, which Alma described:

And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because you know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.

O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good; and now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect?

Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.

And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit. [Alma 32:33–37]

Receiving Revelations Daily

Now, if you and I were visiting alone (I wish we could be), where you felt free to ask whatever you wanted to ask, I can imagine your saying something like this: "Oh, Brother Eyring, I've felt some of the things you have described. The Holy Ghost has touched my heart and mind from time to time. But I will need it consistently if I am not to be overcome or deceived. Is that possible? Is it possible, and, if it is, what will it take to receive that blessing?"

Well, let's start with the first part of your question. Yes, it is possible. Whenever I need that reassurance—and I need it from time to time too—I remember two brothers. Nephi and Lehi, and the other servants of the Lord laboring with them, faced fierce opposition. They were serving in an increasingly wicked world. They had to deal with terrible deceptions. So I take courage—and so can you—from the words in this one verse of Helaman. The reassurance is tucked into the account of all that happened in an entire year, almost as if to the writer it was not surprising. Listen:

And in the seventy and ninth year there began to be much strife. But it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi, and many of their brethren who knew

concerning the true points of doctrine, having many revelations daily, therefore they did preach unto the people, insomuch that they did put an end to their strife in that same year. [Helaman 11:23]

They had “many revelations daily.” So, for you and for me, that answers your first question. Yes, it is possible to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost sufficiently to have many revelations daily. It will not be easy. But it is possible. What it will require will be different for each person because we start from where we are in our unique set of experiences in life. For all of us there will be at least three requirements. None of them can be gained and retained from a single experience. All of them must be constantly renewed.

Faith in God

First, receiving the Holy Ghost takes faith in our Heavenly Father and in His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. A memory of a great spiritual experience some time ago, where you had confirmed to you that truth, won’t be sufficient. You will need to be sure of your faith in the moment of crisis, which may come at any time day or night, when you plead for the influence of the Spirit. You must then be unshaken in your confidence that God lives, that He hears your cry for help, and that the resurrected Savior will do for you what He promised to do for His servants in His mortal ministry. You remember:

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. [John 15:26]

The brothers Nephi and Lehi received many revelations daily. The record shows that they knew concerning the true points of doctrine. Of all the true doctrine, nothing is more important to you and me than the true nature of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. For

that I return again and again to the scriptures. For that I return again and again to prayer. For that I return again and again to partaking of the sacrament. And, above all, I come to know God and Jesus Christ best by keeping the commandments and serving in the Church. By diligent service in the Church we come not only to know the character of God but to love Him. If we follow His commands, our faith in Him will grow and we may then qualify to have His Spirit to be with us.

Vibrant faith in God comes best from serving Him regularly. Not all of us have received callings to offices in the Church. Some of you may not yet be called to something in a formal way, yet every member has a multitude of opportunities to serve God. For instance, for years we have heard the phrase “every member a missionary.” That is not a choice. It is a fact of our membership. Our choice is to speak to others about the gospel or not. Similarly, each member is to care for the poor among us and around us. Some of that we do privately and alone. Some we do together with other members. That is why we have fast offerings and service projects. Our choice is to decide whether to join with the Lord and His other disciples in our day as He and His disciples did during His mortal ministry.

Most of us have or may have callings as home and visiting teachers. There is in those callings great opportunity to grow in faith that the Lord sends the Holy Ghost to His humble servants. That builds faith and renews our faith in Him. I’ve seen it and so have many of you. I received a phone call from a distraught mother in a state far away from where I was. She told me that her unmarried daughter had moved to another city far from her home. She sensed from the little contact she had with her daughter that something was terribly wrong. The mother feared for the moral safety of her daughter. She pleaded with me to help her daughter.

I found out who the daughter’s home teacher was. I called him. He was young. And

yet he and his companion both had been awakened in the night with not only concern for the girl but with inspiration that she was about to make choices that would bring sadness and misery. With only the inspiration of the Spirit, they went to see her. She did not at first want to tell them anything about her situation. They pleaded with her to repent and to choose to follow the path that the Lord had set out for her and that her mother and father had taught her to follow. She realized as she listened that the only way they could have known what they knew about her life was from God. A mother's prayer had gone to Heavenly Father, and the Holy Ghost had been sent to home teachers with an errand.

More than once I have heard priesthood leaders say that they had been inspired to go to someone in need, only to find the visiting teacher or the home teacher had already been there. My wife, who is here with me tonight, is an example. We had a bishop once who said to me, "You know, it bothers me—when I get an inspiration to go to someone, your wife has already been there." Your faith will grow as you serve the Lord in caring for Heavenly Father's children as the Lord's teacher to their home. You will have your prayers answered. You will come to know for yourself that He lives, that He loves us, and that He sends inspiration to those with even the beginnings of faith in Him and with the desire to serve Him in His Church. Stay close to the Church if you want your faith in God to grow. And as it grows, so will your ability to claim the promise you were given that you can receive the gifts of the Spirit.

Requirement to Be Clean

The first requirement was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in our Heavenly Father. A second requirement for frequent companionship and direction from the Holy Ghost is to be clean. The Spirit must withdraw from those who are not clean. You remember the sad illus-

tration of that in the history of the people in the Book of Mormon:

And because of their iniquity the church had begun to dwindle; and they began to disbelieve in the spirit of prophecy and in the spirit of revelation; and the judgments of God did stare them in the face.

And they saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples. [Helaman 4:23–24]

The path to receiving the Holy Ghost is to exercise faith in Christ unto repentance. We can become clean through qualifying for the effects of the Savior's Atonement. The covenants offered in baptism by authorized servants of God bring that cleansing. We renew our pledge to keep those covenants each time we partake of the sacrament. And the peace we all seek is the assurance that we have received forgiveness for our sins of omission or commission.

The Savior is the one who has been given the right to grant that forgiveness and to give that assurance. I have learned that the Lord gives that assurance at the time He chooses, and He does it in His own way. And I have learned to ask for it in prayer. One way He grants that assurance is through the Holy Ghost. If you have difficulty in feeling the Holy Ghost, you might wisely ponder whether there is anything for which you need to repent and receive forgiveness.

If you have felt the influence of the Holy Ghost during this day, or even this evening, you may take it as evidence that the Atonement is working in your life. For that reason and many others, you would do well to put yourself in places and in tasks that invite the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Feeling the influence of the Holy Ghost works both ways: the Holy Ghost only dwells in a clean temple, and the reception of the Holy Ghost cleanses

us through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. You can pray with faith to know what to do to be cleansed and thus qualified for the companionship of the Holy Ghost and the service of the Lord. And with that companionship you will be strengthened against temptation and empowered to detect deception.

Pure Motive

A third requirement for the companionship of the Holy Ghost is pure motive. If you want to receive the gifts of the Spirit, you have to want them for the right reasons. Your purposes must be the Lord's purposes. To the degree your motives are selfish, you will find it difficult to receive those gifts of the Spirit that have been promised to you.

That fact serves both as a warning and as helpful instruction. First, the warning: God is offended when we seek the gifts of the Spirit for our own purposes rather than for His. Our selfish motives may not be obvious to us. But few of us would be so blind as the man who sought to purchase the right to the gifts of the Spirit. You remember the sad story of a man named Simon and of Peter's rebuke:

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. [Acts 8:18–24]

Apparently Simon recognized his own corrupt motives. It may not be so easy for each of us. We almost always have more than one motive at a time. And some may be mixtures of what God wants as well as what we want. It is not easy to pull them apart.

For instance, consider yourself on the eve of a school examination or an interview for a new job. You know that the direction of the Holy Ghost could be of great help. I know from my own experience, for example, that the Holy Ghost knows some of the mathematical equations used to solve problems in thermodynamics, a branch of the sciences. I was a struggling physics student studying in a book that I still own. I keep it for historical and spiritual reasons. Halfway down a page (I could even show you where it is on the page), in the middle of some mathematics, I had a clear confirmation that what I was reading was true. It was exactly the feeling I had had come to me before as I pondered the Lord's scriptures and that I have had many times since. So I knew that the Holy Ghost understood whatever was true in what I might be asked on an examination in thermodynamics.

You can imagine that I was tempted to ask God to send me the Holy Ghost during the examination so I wouldn't need to study further. I knew that He could do it, but I did not ask Him. I felt that He would rather have me learn to pay a price in effort. He may well have sent help in the examination, but I was afraid that my motive might not be His. You have had that same choice to make often. It may have been when you were to be interviewed for a job. It may even have been when you were preparing for a talk or to teach a missionary discussion. Always there is the possibility that you may have a selfish purpose for yourself that is less important to the Lord.

For instance, I may want a good grade in a course, when He prefers that I learn how to work hard in the service of others. I may want a job because of the salary or the prestige,

when He wants me to work somewhere else to bless the life of someone I don't even know yet. He surely will have purposes for your hearing me speak tonight. He knows you. I might have a desire to entertain or impress you. But I have tried to suppress my desire and surrender to His.

I saw a man do that once. It changed my life. A member of the General Authorities came to speak to a conference where I was sitting on the stand. I was in the local priesthood presidency. I knew personally the struggles of the local families and the members. He, the General Authority, had just flown in from a long assignment in Europe. He was obviously tired. He stood to speak in the meeting. It seemed to me that he rambled from one subject to another. At first I felt sorry for him. I thought he was failing to give a polished sermon of the kind I knew he had delivered many times.

After a while I was thrilled to recognize that as he moved from one apparently unrelated topic to another, he was touching the need of every poor struggling member and family we were trying to help. He did not know them and their needs. But God did.

How grateful I am that his motive was not to give a great sermon or to be seen as a powerful prophet. He must have done what I hope you and I will always do. He must have prayed something like this: "Father, I need Thy help. I am tired. Please guide me with the Holy Ghost. Bless these people. I love them. I ask only that I can do Thy will to help them."

The Holy Ghost came that night. And the Lord's will was done. The General Authority had spent a lifetime feeding himself and others on the good word of God. He had served the Master faithfully. He was a special witness of Jesus Christ because he had paid the price to be one. All of that came from keeping his motives as closely tied as he could to what the Lord wanted. That made it possible for the Lord to send the whisperings of the Holy Ghost to His servant and so bless the people.

Pure Love of Christ

I surely don't understand all the meaning of the scriptural words "the pure love of Christ." But one meaning I do know is this: It is a gift we are promised when the Atonement of Jesus Christ has worked in us. The gift is to want what He wants. When our love is the love He feels, it is pure because He is pure. And when we feel our desire for people is moving toward being in line with His, that is one of the ways that we can know that we are being purified. When we pray for the gifts of the Spirit—and we should—one for which I pray is that I might have pure motives, to want what He wants for our Father's children and for me and to feel, as well as to say, that what I want is His will to be done.

That is what these words from Moroni mean to me:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. [Moroni 7:46–48]

I bear you my witness that God the Father lives, a glorified and exalted Man. He is the Father of our spirits. He and His Beloved Son, both resurrected and glorified, appeared to the boy Joseph Smith in a grove of trees in New York. They were there. The Father spoke to Joseph, first calling him by name and then introducing His Son. Heavenly messengers

came to restore all the priesthood keys of authority. Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. It had been written on plates by ancient prophets, one of whom gave them to Joseph and took them back when the translation was done. The keys of the priesthood are on the earth today. As a witness of Jesus Christ, I testify to you that I know He lives and that He leads His Church.

I pray with all the energy of my heart that you will have your prayers answered to meet the requirements to receive the Holy Ghost. And I pray that you will endure faithful to the end and that, for you, it will be glorious.

I leave you my blessing that your pleadings for the gifts of the Spirit to serve the Lord will be granted. And I leave you my love. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.