



Prayer and Personal Revelation

“It is the privilege of the children of God to come to God and get revelation.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

By June 1829, many important events in the unfolding restoration of the gospel had already occurred. The heavens had been opened at the time of the First Vision and God had again spoken to men on earth. The Prophet Joseph Smith had received the Book of Mormon plates and was translating their sacred message. The holy priesthood had been restored, and the ordinance of baptism had been made available to God’s children. Each of these events had occurred in answer to prayer as the Prophet sought guidance from the Lord.

As the work of translation drew to a close, the Prophet once again sought direction from the Lord. Because Moroni had instructed Joseph not to show the plates to anyone unless he was commanded to do so, Joseph had felt very much alone and heavily burdened with his responsibility as he translated the plates. However, he had discovered from the record itself that the Lord would provide three special witnesses who would testify to the world that the Book of Mormon was true (see 2 Nephi 11:3; Ether 5:2–4).

“Almost immediately after we had made this discovery,” Joseph Smith recalled, “it occurred to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and . . . Martin Harris (who had come to inquire after our progress in the work) that they would have me inquire of the Lord to know if they might not obtain of him the privilege to be these three special witnesses.”¹ The Prophet prayed for direction and received a revelation declaring that the three men would be permitted to see the plates, as well as the sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, and the Liahona (see D&C 17).



In June 1829, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Joseph Smith were privileged to see Moroni and the gold plates. A short time later on the same day, Martin Harris also saw the angel and the plates.

A few days later, the Prophet and the three men went into the woods near the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York, and began to pray for this great privilege to be granted to them. Martin withdrew, feeling unworthy. The Prophet recorded what then occurred: “We . . . had not been many minutes engaged in prayer, when presently we beheld a light above us in the air, of exceeding brightness; and behold, an angel [Moroni] stood before us. In his hands he held the plates which we had been praying for these to have a view of. He turned over the leaves one by one, so that we could see them, and discern the engravings thereon distinctly.”² The men also heard the voice of God testifying of the truthfulness of the translation and commanding them to bear record of what they had seen and heard. Joseph then went to find Martin, who was praying elsewhere in the woods. They prayed together and saw the same vision and heard the same voice.

Joseph Smith’s mother, who was visiting the Prophet in Fayette at this time, recalled her son’s joy and relief after this manifestation: “When Joseph came in [to the Whitmer home], he threw himself down beside me. ‘Father! Mother!’ said he, ‘you do not know how happy I am. The Lord has caused the plates to be shown to three more besides me, who have also seen an angel and will have to testify to the truth of what I have said, for they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people. And I do feel as though I was relieved of a dreadful burden which was almost too much for me to endure. But they will now have to bear a part, and it does rejoice my soul that I am not any longer to be entirely alone in the world.’ ”³

Throughout his life, Joseph Smith would turn to God in prayer to seek the help and guidance he needed. A Church member recalled hearing him pray in Kirtland, Ohio, at a time of great personal difficulty: “Never until then had I heard a man address his Maker as though He was present listening as a kind father would listen to the sorrows of a dutiful child. . . . There was no ostentation, no raising of the voice as by enthusiasm, but a plain conversational tone, as a man would address a present friend. It appeared to me as though, in case the veil were taken away, I could see the Lord standing facing His humblest of all servants I had ever seen.”⁴

Teachings of Joseph Smith

**God will hear our prayers and speak to us today,
just as He spoke to the ancient Saints.**

“Seeing that the Lord has never given the world to understand by anything heretofore revealed that he had ceased forever to speak to his creatures when sought unto in a proper manner, why should it be thought a thing incredible that he should be pleased to speak again in these last days for their salvation?

“Perhaps you may be surprised at this assertion, that I should say for the salvation of his creatures in these last days, since we have already in our possession a vast volume of his word which he has previously given. But you will admit that the word spoken to Noah was not sufficient for Abraham, or it was not required of Abraham to leave the land of his nativity and seek an inheritance in a strange country upon the word spoken to Noah, but for himself he obtained promises at the hand of the Lord and walked in that perfection that he was called the friend of God. Isaac, the promised seed, was not required to rest his hope upon the promises made to his father, Abraham, but was privileged with the assurance of his approbation in the sight of heaven by the direct voice of the Lord to him.

“If one man can live upon the revelations given to another, might not I with propriety ask, why the necessity, then, of the Lord speaking to Isaac as he did, as is recorded in the 26th chapter of Genesis? For the Lord there repeats, or rather promises again, to perform the oath which he had previously sworn unto Abraham. And why this repetition to Isaac? Why was not the first promise as sure for Isaac as it was for Abraham? Was not Isaac Abraham’s son? And could he not place implicit confidence in the word of his father as being a man of God? Perhaps you may say that he was a very peculiar man and different from men in these last days; consequently, the Lord favored him with blessings peculiar and different, as he was different from men in this age. I admit that he was a peculiar man and was not only peculiarly blessed, but greatly blessed. But all the peculiarity that I can discover in the man, or all the difference between him and

men in this age, is that he was more holy and more perfect before God and came to him with a purer heart and more faith than men in this day.

“The same might be said on the subject of Jacob’s history. Why was it that the Lord spake to him concerning the same promise after he had made it once to Abraham and renewed it to Isaac? Why could not Jacob rest contented upon the word spoken to his fathers?

“When the time of the promise drew nigh for the deliverance of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, why was it necessary that the Lord should begin to speak to them? The promise or word to Abraham was that his seed should serve in bondage and be afflicted four hundred years, and after that they should come out with great substance. Why did they not rely upon this promise and, when they had remained in Egypt in bondage four hundred years, come out without waiting for further revelation, but act entirely upon the promise given to Abraham that they should come out? . . .

“. . . I may believe that Enoch walked with God. I may believe that Abraham communed with God and conversed with angels. I may believe that Isaac obtained a renewal of the covenant made to Abraham by the direct voice of the Lord. I may believe that Jacob conversed with holy angels and heard the word of his Maker, that he wrestled with the angel until he prevailed and obtained a blessing. I may believe that Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire with fiery horses. I may believe that the saints saw the Lord and conversed with him face to face after his resurrection. I may believe that the Hebrew church came to Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. I may believe that they looked into eternity and saw the Judge of all, and Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant.

“But will all this purchase an assurance for me, or waft me to the regions of eternal day with my garments spotless, pure, and white? Or, must I not rather obtain for myself, by my own faith and diligence in keeping the commandments of the Lord, an assurance of salvation for myself? And have I not an equal

privilege with the ancient saints? And will not the Lord hear my prayers and listen to my cries as soon as he ever did to theirs if I come to him in the manner they did?”⁵

We can make everything we undertake a subject of prayer.

Sarab Granger Kimball reported: “In the School of the Prophets . . . , when Joseph Smith was giving instruction to the brethren, he told them to make everything they undertook a subject of prayer.”⁶

“Seek to know God in your closets, call upon him in the fields. Follow the directions of the Book of Mormon, and pray over, and for your families, your cattle, your flocks, your herds, your corn, and all things that you possess [see Alma 34:18–27]; ask the blessing of God upon all your labors, and everything that you engage in.”⁷

“Slack not your duties in your families, but call upon God for his blessings upon you, and your families, upon your flocks and



“Slack not your duties in your families, but call upon God for his blessings upon you, and your families.”

herds, and all that pertains to you—that you may have peace and prosperity—and while you are doing this, ‘pray for the peace of Zion, for they shall prosper that love her.’ [See Psalm 122:6.]”⁸

A prayer the Prophet recorded in August 1842 shows his desire for wisdom from God: “O Thou, who seest and knowest the hearts of all men . . . , look down upon Thy servant Joseph at this time; and let faith on the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ, to a greater degree than Thy servant ever yet has enjoyed, be conferred upon him, even the faith of Elijah; and let the lamp of eternal life be lit up in his heart, never to be taken away; and let the words of eternal life be poured upon the soul of Thy servant, that he may know Thy will, Thy statutes, and Thy commandments, and Thy judgments, to do them. As the dew upon Mount Hermon, may the distillations of Thy divine grace, glory, and honor, in the plenitude of Thy mercy, and power, and goodness, be poured down upon the head of Thy servant.”⁹

When we pray in faith and simplicity, we receive the blessings God sees fit to bestow upon us.

“Supplicate at the throne of grace, that the Spirit of the Lord may always rest upon you. Remember that without asking we can receive nothing; therefore, ask in faith, and ye shall receive such blessings as God sees fit to bestow upon you. Pray not with covetous hearts that ye may consume it upon your lusts, but pray earnestly for the best gifts [see D&C 46:8–9].”¹⁰

“Virtue is one of the most prominent principles that enables us to have confidence in approaching our Father who is in heaven in order to ask wisdom at his hand. Therefore, if thou wilt cherish this principle in thine heart, thou mayest ask with all confidence before him and it shall be poured out upon thine head [see D&C 121:45–46].”¹¹

“Let the prayers of the Saints to heaven appear, that they may enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, for the effectual prayers of the righteous avail much [see James 5:16].”¹²

Henry W. Bigler recalled: “Speaking about praying to our Father in heaven, I once heard Joseph Smith remark, ‘Be plain and simple and ask for what you want, just like you would go to

a neighbor and say, I want to borrow your horse to go to [the] mill.’ ”¹³

We can receive personal revelation through the Holy Ghost.

“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.”¹⁴

“We believe that we have a right to revelations, visions, and dreams from God, our heavenly Father; and light and intelligence, through the gift of the Holy Ghost, in the name of Jesus Christ, on all subjects pertaining to our spiritual welfare; if it so be that we keep his commandments, so as to render ourselves worthy in his sight.”¹⁵

“A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus.”¹⁶

“I have an old edition of the New Testament in the Latin, Hebrew, German and Greek languages. . . . I thank God that I have got this old book; but I thank him more for the gift of the Holy Ghost. I have got the oldest book in the world; but I have got the oldest book in my heart, even the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . . The Holy Ghost . . . is within me, and comprehends more than all the world; and I will associate myself with him.”¹⁷

“No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator.”¹⁸

John Taylor, while serving as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, reported: “I well remember a remark that Joseph Smith made to me upwards of forty years ago. Said he, ‘Elder Taylor, you have been baptized, you have had hands laid upon your head for the reception of the Holy Ghost, and you have been ordained to the holy priesthood. Now, if you will continue to fol-

low the leadings of that spirit, it will always lead you right. Sometimes it might be contrary to your judgment; never mind that, follow its dictates; and if you be true to its whisperings it will in time become in you a principle of revelation so that you will know all things.’ ”¹⁹

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Note the importance of prayer in the experience of Joseph Smith and the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon (pages 125–27). How has prayer influenced your own experiences with the Book of Mormon? What other aspects of your life are influenced by prayer?
- What are your thoughts as you read the paragraph at the bottom of page 127? As you ponder this statement, consider what you might do to improve the way you “address [your] Maker.”
- Why can’t we rely solely on revelations from the past? (For some examples, see pages 128–30.) Why do we need continuing, personal revelation?
- Review the section that begins on page 130. Identify the Prophet’s teachings concerning *when* we should pray and *what* we should pray about. How might these teachings help you in your personal prayers? How might they help families with family prayer?
- Study the Prophet’s teachings on pages 131–32 about *how* we should pray. What is the value of using “plain and simple” language when we pray? How does living righteously give us confidence in approaching our Heavenly Father in prayer? What has helped you gain a testimony that God hears and answers prayers?
- Read the third full paragraph on page 132. When have you profited from noticing “the first intimation” of the Spirit prompting you? How can we learn to immediately recognize the whisperings of the Spirit when they come?

Related Scriptures: 1 Kings 19:11–12; James 1:5–6; Helaman 5:30; 3 Nephi 18:18–21; D&C 6:22–23; 8:2–3; 88:63–65

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 1:52–53; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 23, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. *History of the Church*, 1:54; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, pp. 24–25, Church Archives.
3. Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1844–45 manuscript, book 8, p. 11, Church Archives.
4. Daniel Tyler, in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, Feb. 15, 1892, p. 127.
5. Letter from Joseph Smith to his uncle Silas Smith, Sept. 26, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio; in Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1845 manuscript, pp. 229–32, Church Archives.
6. Sarah Granger Kimball, in “R. S. Report,” *Woman’s Exponent*, Aug. 15, 1892, p. 30.
7. *History of the Church*, 5:31; from “Gift of the Holy Ghost,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, June 15, 1842, p. 825; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
8. “To the Saints of God,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 15, 1842, p. 952; punctuation modernized; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
9. *History of the Church*, 5:127–28; paragraph divisions altered; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Aug. 23, 1842, near Nauvoo, Illinois; this entry is incorrectly dated Aug. 22, 1842, in *History of the Church*.
10. Letter from Joseph Smith and John Whitmer to the Saints in Colesville, New York, Aug. 20, 1830, Harmony, Pennsylvania; in Newel Knight, *Autobiography and Journal*, ca. 1846–47, p. 129, Church Archives.
11. Statement written by Joseph Smith in Feb. 1840 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; original in private possession.
12. *History of the Church*, 6:303; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.
13. Henry W. Bigler, in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, Mar. 1, 1892, pp. 151–52.
14. Discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards, in Willard Richards, *Pocket Companion*, pp. 75, 78–79, Church Archives.
15. Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, Mar. 22, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, p. 54.
16. *History of the Church*, 3:381; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 27, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
17. *History of the Church*, 6:307–8; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.
18. *History of the Church*, 6:58; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 15, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
19. John Taylor, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Jan. 15, 1878, p. 1.