

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Fruits of the Spirit,” April 2005 (excerpts)

In my growing-up years in Germany, I attended church in many different locations and circumstances...The Zwickau chapel had an old air-driven organ. Every Sunday a young man was assigned to push up and down the sturdy lever operating the bellows to make the organ work. Even before I was an Aaronic Priesthood bearer, I sometimes had the great privilege to assist in this important task.

There was an additional benefit that came from this assignment: the bellows operator sat in a seat that offered a great view of a stained-glass window that beautified the front part of the chapel. The stained glass portrayed the First Vision, with Joseph Smith kneeling in the Sacred Grove, looking up toward heaven and into a pillar of light.

During the hymns of the congregation and even during talks and testimonies given by our members, I often looked at this depiction of a most sacred moment in world history. In my mind’s eye I saw Joseph receiving knowledge, witness, and divine instructions as he became a blessed instrument in the hand of our Heavenly Father.

I felt a special spirit while looking at the beautiful scene in this window picture of a believing young boy in a sacred grove who made a courageous decision to earnestly pray to our Heavenly Father, who listened and responded lovingly to him.

Here I was, a young boy in post–World War II Germany, living in a city in ruins, thousands of miles away from Palmyra in North America and more than a hundred years after the event actually took place. By the universal power of the Holy Ghost, I felt in my heart and in my mind that it was true, that Joseph Smith saw God and Jesus Christ and heard Their voices. The Spirit of God comforted my soul at this young age with an assurance of the reality of this sacred moment that resulted in the beginning of a worldwide movement destined to “roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth” (D&C 65:2). I believed Joseph Smith’s testimony of that glorious experience in the Sacred Grove then, and I know it now. God has spoken to mankind again!

...The scriptures teach us that spiritual gifts are given to those who ask of God, who love Him, and who keep His commandments (see D&C 46:9). “All have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God.

“To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:11–12).

Today I know that my young testimony benefited greatly from the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and many friends in the Church who knew “by the Holy Ghost ... that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world” (D&C 46:13). Their good examples, caring love, and helping hands blessed me to receive another special gift of the Spirit described in the scriptures as I was yearning for more light and truth: “To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue [faithfully]” (D&C 46:14). What a wonderful and precious gift this is!

As we truly humble ourselves, we will be blessed with this gift to have faith and to hope for things which are not seen but are true (see Alma 32:21). As we experiment upon the words given to us by the scriptures and the living prophets—even if we only have a desire to believe—and do not resist the Spirit of the Lord, our souls will be enlarged and our understanding will be enlightened (see Alma 32:26–28).

The Savior Himself explained this merciful principle clearly to all the world in His great intercessory prayer, given not only for His Apostles but for all the Saints, even for us today, wherever we might be living. He said:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20–21; emphasis added).

This is how Joseph Smith’s First Vision blesses our own personal lives, the lives of families, and eventually the whole human family—we come to believe in Jesus Christ through the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Prophets and apostles throughout the history of mankind have had divine manifestations similar to Joseph’s. Moses saw God face-to-face and learned that he was a son of God “in the similitude of [His] Only Begotten” (see Moses 1:1–6). The Apostle Paul testified that the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus and made Paul one of His great missionaries (see Acts 26:9–23). Hearing Paul’s witness of his heavenly vision during the trial at Caesarea, the powerful King Agrippa admitted, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

...God has spoken to Joseph Smith for the purpose of blessing all of God’s children with His mercy and love, even in times of uncertainties and insecurities, of wars and rumors of wars, of natural and personal disasters. The Savior said, “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive” (3 Ne. 9:14). And all who accept this invitation will be “encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love” (Alma 26:15).

Through our faith in the personal witness of the Prophet Joseph and the reality of the First Vision, through study and prayer, deep and sincere, we will be blessed with a firm faith in the Savior of the world, who spoke to Joseph “on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty” (JS—H 1:14).

Faith in Jesus Christ and a testimony of Him and His universal Atonement is not just a doctrine with great theological value. Such faith is a universal gift, glorious for all cultural regions of this earth, irrespective of language, race, color, nationality, or socioeconomic circumstance. The powers of reason may be used to try to understand this gift, but those who feel its effects most deeply are those who are willing to accept its blessings, which come from a pure and clean life of following the path of true repentance and living the commandments of God.

As we remember and honor the Prophet Joseph Smith, my heart reaches out to him in gratitude. He was a good, honest, humble, intelligent, and courageous young man with a heart of

gold and an unshaken faith in God. He had integrity. In response to his humble prayer, the heavens opened again. Joseph Smith had actually seen a vision. He knew it, and he knew that God knew it, and he could not deny it. (See JS—H 1:25.)

Through his work and sacrifice, I now have a true understanding of our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ, and I can feel the power of the Holy Ghost and know of Heavenly Father's plan for us, His children. For me, these are truly the fruits of the First Vision.

I am grateful that early in my life I was blessed with a simple faith that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that he saw God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, in a vision. He translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. That testimony has been confirmed to me over and over again.

As one of the least among you, but in my calling as one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, I testify that He truly lives, that He is the Messiah. I do have a personal witness of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. I received this knowledge by the unspeakable peace and power of the Spirit of God. The desire of my heart and of my mind is to be pure and faithful in serving Him now and forever.

I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Russell M. Nelson, "Hear Him," April 2020 (excerpts)

...In the past two years, Sister Nelson and I have met with thousands of you around the world. We have convened with you in outdoor arenas and in hotel ballrooms. In each location, I have felt that I was in the presence of the Lord's elect and that I was seeing the gathering of Israel occur before my eyes.

We live in the day that "our forefathers have awaited with anxious expectation."¹ We have front-row seats to witness live what the prophet Nephi saw only in vision, that "the power of the Lamb of God" would descend "upon the covenant people of the Lord, who were scattered upon all the face of the earth; and they were armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory."

You, my brothers and sisters, are among those men, women, and children whom Nephi saw. Think of that!

Regardless of where you live or what your circumstances are, the Lord Jesus Christ is your Savior, and God's prophet Joseph Smith is your prophet. He was foreordained before the foundation of the earth to be the prophet of this last dispensation, when "nothing shall be withheld" from the Saints. Revelation continues to flow from the Lord during this ongoing process of restoration.

What does it mean for you that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth?

It means that you and your family can be sealed together forever! It means that because you have been baptized by one who has authority from Jesus Christ and have been confirmed a member of His Church, you can enjoy the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. He will guide and protect you. It means you will never be left comfortless or without access to the power of God to help you. It means that priesthood power can bless you as you receive essential ordinances and make covenants with God and keep them. What an anchor to our souls are these truths, especially during these times when the tempest is raging.

The Book of Mormon chronicles the classic rise and fall of two major civilizations. Their history demonstrates how easy it is for a majority of the people to forget God, reject warnings of the Lord's prophets, and seek power, popularity, and pleasures of the flesh. Repeatedly, past prophets have declared "great and marvelous things unto the people, which they did not believe."

It is no different in our day. Through the years, great and marvelous things have been heard from dedicated pulpits across the earth. Yet most people do not embrace these truths—either because they do not know where to look for them or because they are listening to those who do not have the whole truth or because they have rejected truth in favor of worldly pursuits.

The adversary is clever. For millennia he has been making good look evil and evil look good. His messages tend to be loud, bold, and boastful.

However, messages from our Heavenly Father are strikingly different. He communicates simply, quietly, and with such stunning plainness that we cannot misunderstand Him.

For example, whenever He has introduced His Only Begotten Son to mortals upon the earth, He has done so with remarkably few words. On the Mount of Transfiguration to Peter, James, and John, God said, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." His words to the Nephites in ancient Bountiful were "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him." And to Joseph Smith, in that profound declaration that opened this dispensation, God simply said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!"

Now, my dear brothers and sisters, consider the fact that in these three instances just mentioned, just before the Father introduced the Son, the people involved were in a state of fear and, to some degree, desperation.

The Apostles were afraid when they saw Jesus Christ encircled by a cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Nephites were afraid because they had been through destruction and darkness for several days.

Joseph Smith was in the grips of a force of darkness just before the heavens opened.

Our Father knows that when we are surrounded by uncertainty and fear, what will help us the very most is to hear His Son.

Because when we seek to hear—truly hear—His Son, we will be guided to know what to do in any circumstance.

The very first word in the Doctrine and Covenants is hearken. It means “to listen with the intent to obey.” To hearken means to “hear Him”—to hear what the Savior says and then to heed His counsel. In those two words—“Hear Him”—God gives us the pattern for success, happiness, and joy in this life. We are to hear the words of the Lord, hearken to them, and heed what He has told us!

As we seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our efforts to hear Him need to be ever more intentional. It takes conscious and consistent effort to fill our daily lives with His words, His teachings, His truths.

We simply cannot rely upon information we bump into on social media. With billions of words online and in a marketing-saturated world constantly infiltrated by noisy, nefarious efforts of the adversary, where can we go to hear Him?

We can go to the scriptures. They teach us about Jesus Christ and His gospel, the magnitude of His Atonement, and our Father’s great plan of happiness and redemption. Daily immersion in the word of God is crucial for spiritual survival, especially in these days of increasing upheaval. As we feast on the words of Christ daily, the words of Christ will tell us how to respond to difficulties we never thought we would face.

We can also hear Him in the temple. The house of the Lord is a house of learning. There the Lord teaches in His own way. There each ordinance teaches about the Savior. There we learn how to part the veil and communicate more clearly with heaven. There we learn how to rebuke the adversary and draw upon the Lord’s priesthood power to strengthen us and those we love. How eager each of us should be to seek refuge there.

When these temporary COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, please schedule regular time to worship and serve in the temple. Every minute of that time will bless you and your family in ways nothing else can. Take time to ponder what you hear and feel when you are there. Ask the Lord to teach you how to open the heavens to bless your life and the lives of those you love and serve.

...We also hear Him more clearly as we refine our ability to recognize the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. It has never been more imperative to know how the Spirit speaks to you than right now. In the Godhead, the Holy Ghost is the messenger. He will bring thoughts to your mind which the Father and Son want you to receive. He is the Comforter. He will bring a feeling of peace to your heart. He testifies of truth and will confirm what is true as you hear and read the word of the Lord.

I renew my plea for you to do whatever it takes to increase your spiritual capacity to receive personal revelation.

Doing so will help you know how to move ahead with your life, what to do during times of crisis, and how to discern and avoid the temptations and the deceptions of the adversary.

And, finally, we hear Him as we heed the words of prophets, seers, and revelators. Ordained Apostles of Jesus Christ always testify of Him. They point the way as we make our way through the heart-wrenching maze of our mortal experiences.

What will happen as you more intentionally hear, hearken, and heed what the Savior has said and what He is saying now through His prophets? I promise that you will be blessed with additional power to deal with temptation, struggles, and weakness. I promise miracles in your marriage, family relationships, and daily work. And I promise that your capacity to feel joy will increase even if turbulence increases in your life.