

*The Voice of the Lord*

GERALD N. LUND

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*Gerald N. Lund was a Church Educational System zone administrator when this devotional address was given at BYU on 2 December 1997.*

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Today I would like to speak with you about a topic that is of the most singular importance to every person here. It is a topic that is especially important to you who are young adults and facing some of the most important decisions of your life--mission, education, career, marriage. That topic is personal revelation, or hearing the voice of the Lord.

When we are baptized and confirmed members of the Church, we are commanded to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. When you think about it, that is an incredible gift. Imagine receiving a member of the Godhead as our personal companion. We are told that our mission in life is to "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him" (Moroni 10:32). But that is not a simple thing. Life is too complex to provide a rule book that covers every situation. Instead, the Lord has given us the Holy Ghost to serve as our teacher, watchman, mentor, and guide.

I believe that one of the most important challenges of our mortal probation is learning to hear, recognize, and then follow the voice of the Lord. I would like to say that again: *One of the most important--if not the most important--challenges in learning how to come unto Christ and to be perfected in him is to learn to hear, to recognize, and then to follow the voice of the Lord.*

Part of that challenge is that there is sometimes confusion in the minds of some about personal revelation. Others have important questions about how it works or what it is like. Have you heard statements such as these: "How do I know if an impression is really from the Lord or if it is just my own emotions?" Or "I never seem to have a spiritual experience." Or "I have prayed again and again about this. Why isn't the Lord answering me?"

Let me give just one quick example of how the area of personal revelation can sometimes get confusing. When I was teaching in the institutes of religion in Southern California, there was hardly a semester that went by that I didn't have an experience like this: One of my students would come to me (usually a girl) and report that the boy she had been dating (sometimes seriously, sometimes casually) had received a "revelation" that they were to marry. I won't ask for a show of hands how many here have faced a similar declaration, but I know, from my own experience, it will be more than a few of you. Carlfred Broderick, a renowned LDS family therapist, dubbed these as "hormonal revelations" (Carlfred Broderick, *One Flesh, One Heart: Putting Celestial Love into Your Temple Marriage* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1986], p. 21).

The interesting thing to me was that often the girl felt intimidated by such a declaration, feeling that she needed to accept the "Lord's will" even though she found the prospect somewhat distasteful. [In some cases that was downright distasteful.] Some were even a little shocked when I boldly explained that unless they received an independent confirmation from the Lord, they should feel no pressure to accept the boy's request.

Today I should like to address three questions about personal revelation:

1. What is the voice of the Lord like?
2. How can I distinguish between true and counterfeit revelation?
3. What can I do to enhance my ability to hear, recognize, and follow the voice of the Lord?

**Question 1: What Is the Voice of the Lord Like?**

There are two scriptures in the Doctrine and Covenants that are particularly helpful in describing what the voice of the Lord is like and how it works with us. The first is in section 85, wherein the Lord says: "Thus saith the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things" (D&C 85:6).

Note the descriptive phrases used here. The voice is still. It is small. And it whispers. When you think about that, it becomes clear that hearing the voice of the Lord has inherent challenges. It would be much simpler if the Lord spoke in a voice of thunder or used a microphone and 80-megawatt speakers. Then there would be no doubt. But he does not. He whispers. His voice is still and small. Elder Boyd K. Packer said this about the nature of the Lord's voice:

*The Spirit does not get our attention by shouting or shaking us with a heavy hand. Rather it whispers. It caresses so gently that if we are preoccupied we may not feel it at all. . . .*

*Occasionally it will press just firmly enough for us to pay heed. But most of the time, if we do not heed the gentle feeling, the Spirit will withdraw and wait until we come seeking and listening. [Boyd K. Packer, "The Candle of the Lord," *Ensign*, January 1983, p. 53]*

The second scripture that tells us what the voice of the Lord is like is found in section 8, a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery. In that section the Lord defined what revelation is and how it comes:

*Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.*

*Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation. [D&C 8:2 3]*

"In your mind and in your heart"--think about that for a moment. If the Lord spoke something to our mind, how would it come? We would probably describe it as coming to us as "thoughts." If he tells us something in our hearts, we would probably describe that as coming as "feelings."

Thoughts and feelings--these are the most common ways the Lord gives his children personal revelation. And therein lies another challenge. Every one of us is a veritable stream of thoughts and feelings. Every day our minds are constantly occupied with thoughts, and we are filled with various emotions. In the midst of that torrent of thought and feeling, the Lord from time to time inserts a thought or a feeling that comes from him. How do we tell the difference? Revelation is rarely preceded by a drumroll or by the announcement "The following thought or feeling will be from the Lord."

There is yet one other thing we need to note when we talk about what the voice of the Lord is like. It has to do with revelation that does not come from the Lord. Note what Elder Packer said about counterfeit revelation:

*Be ever on guard lest you be deceived by inspiration from an unworthy source. You can be given false spiritual messages. There are counterfeit spirits just as there are counterfeit angels. . . .*

*The spiritual part of us and the emotional part of us are so closely linked that it is possible to mistake an emotional impulse for something spiritual. We occasionally find people who receive what they assume to be spiritual promptings from God, when those promptings are either centered in the emotions or are from the adversary. [Packer, "Candle," pp. 55 56]*

If something is counterfeit, it means that it resembles the original so closely that it is difficult to distinguish which is the true and which is the false. So it is with counterfeit revelation. On the surface it may feel real. It may appear to be from the Lord. We may even have very strong feelings about what we have received. But this alone is not proof it is from God. Note that President Packer warns that we must *ever be on guard* against being deceived by our emotions or by revelation from an unworthy source. That suggests that counterfeit revelation is not a rare thing.

This shouldn't be too surprising to you, should it? If you were Satan and knew that personal revelation was absolutely essential for a person striving to come unto Christ, wouldn't you try to sow confusion and deception about it? Which brings us to our second question.

## **Question 2: How Can I Distinguish Between True and Counterfeit Revelation?**

Personal revelation comes in many different ways and forms. It may vary from one person to another, and therefore it is difficult to set down rigid rules that cover every situation. But the Lord has not left us without guidance in this matter. Through the scriptures and the statements of his modern prophets, we find principles that can help us determine how to decide if revelation comes from the Lord or from another source. I would like to briefly outline five of those guidelines or principles to you today. There are others, but these have proven to be particularly helpful to me.

Principle 1: *It is God who determines all aspects of revelation.*

By definition, revelation is the communication of the mind and will of the Lord to his children. If you think about that for a moment, then you will understand that revelation is always unidirectional. It comes only from God to us. We may communicate back and forth with God in a two-way process, but revelation always comes in one direction. We never reveal anything to God.

Since all revelation comes from the Lord, then it is reasonable that he should set all of the parameters of that revelation. Those parameters include (a) *to whom* a revelation is given; (b) *what* content is given in the revelation; (c) *when* the revelation comes; and (d) in *what form* the revelation may be given. Sometimes, with the best of intentions, we inadvertently seek to tell the Lord how he should conduct his business. We may feel a particular urgency about a question and press the Lord for an answer by a certain deadline. Or we may strongly desire a particular kind of manifestation, such as one of the more dramatic forms of revelation, and be satisfied with nothing less. We may try to tell the Lord how to solve our problems or what answer we would like. But these are not our choices. All aspects of the revelation are determined by the Lord.

Elder Packer counseled against trying to force spiritual things:

*It is not wise to wrestle with the revelations with such insistence as to demand immediate answers or blessings to your liking. You cannot force spiritual things. Such words as compel, coerce, constrain, pressure, demand, do not describe our privileges with the Spirit. . . . You can create a climate to foster growth . . . ; but you cannot force or compel. . . .*

[And then comes this warning:] . . . *Do not force it or you will open the way to be misled.* [Packer, "Candle," p. 53]

Note that he says we can create a climate that fosters spiritual growth. Through appropriate action we can influence the process of revelation. We can study and pray, on occasion we can add fasting to our prayers, we can importune the Lord with deep yearnings, we can keep sacred covenants--all of these will help create a climate that fosters spiritual growth. But we must remember that when all is done, it is still up to the Lord to determine when the revelation comes, how it is given, what is revealed, and to whom.

In connection with the principle that God determines all aspects of revelation, I should like to make two other points. The prophet Jacob taught a simple principle with these words: "Seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand" (Jacob 4:10). Think about that for a moment. God's wisdom is infinitely greater than ours. His knowledge is infinitely more complete. How foolish we are when we presume to tell him how he should do his work.

There is also great wisdom in what some have called the Gethsemane principle. With the utmost earnestness and the deepest of pleadings, the Savior called on his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane to remove the dreaded cup of his coming sacrifice. But that request was followed immediately by these profound words: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). That should be part of every prayer we utter, every request we take to the Lord. In that simple phrase lies the key to our willingness to let the Lord decide what is best.

Principle 2: *The content given in a revelation is more important than the form in which it comes.*

Another mistake some make is to covet the more dramatic forms of revelation. God reveals his mind and will to man across a broad spectrum of experiences. These may range from the very direct and dramatic: the appearance of divine beings, open visions, fire from heaven. Or they may be very subtle: quiet premonitions, gentle thoughts, a feeling of

peace. The latter are by far the most common. We must be careful that we don't feel that only the more direct forms of revelation are valid. President Spencer W. Kimball warned of this tendency:

*Even in our day, many people . . . expect if there be revelation it will come with awe-inspiring, earth-shaking display. . .*

*The burning bushes, the smoking mountains ..., the Cumorahs, and the Kirtlands were realities; but they were the exceptions. The great volume of revelation came to Moses and to Joseph and comes to today's prophet in the less spectacular way--that of deep impressions, without spectacle or glamour or dramatic events.*

*Always expecting the spectacular, many will miss entirely the constant flow of revealed communication.* [Spencer W. Kimball, CR, Munich Germany Area Conference, 1973, pp. 76 77; emphasis added]

We must learn to be content, not only with what the Lord decides to reveal to us but with what form he chooses to send that revelation. As Elder Packer warned, if we try to force a spiritual manifestation to our liking, we open the way for us to be deceived.

*Principle 3: True revelation does not contradict gospel principles or go contrary to established Church policy and procedure.*

This principle seems self-evident and hardly worthy of mention, but again and again we hear of cases where the principle is violated. Sensational stories or wild rumors go through the Church like wildfire. Some are almost ridiculous in nature, and yet there are still those who believe them. For example, one story that has been around for years tells of a hitchhiker supposedly picked up by Church members. As they drive along, the hitchhiker tells the people that if they don't have their food storage now, it is too late. Then he mysteriously disappears out of the car. You would think that everyone would be skeptical of such a story, but there are always a few who believe it. In another case a person predicted that the great earthquake foretold in the scriptures was about to hit Utah. For months he was a popular fireside speaker, and tapes of his talk were widely distributed. Do you remember a major earthquake in Utah in recent years? Neither do I. Another man worked out the exact day and date that Christ will come, and that, too, went around the Church like a sensation. The scriptures say that "no man, no, not [even] the angels of heaven" know the day nor the hour of his coming (Matthew 24:36). So where does that leave him? And why aren't we wise enough to see the contradiction? Here is what President Harold B. Lee had to say of such things:

*It never ceases to amaze me how gullible some of our Church members are in broadcasting sensational stories, or dreams, or visions, or purported patriarchal blessings, or quotations, or supposed [entries] from some person's private diary. . . .*

*. . . We find that these [things] are finding their way into our Relief Society meetings, into priesthood quorums, firesides, institutes, and seminaries.*

*Brethren of the priesthood, you defenders of the faith, . . . cease promoting the works of the devil . . . for they are the works of Satan.* [Harold B. Lee, CR, April 1970, pp. 55 56; emphasis added]

Now is that strong enough language for you? Here is something equally clear given in an official declaration by the First Presidency:

*When visions, dreams, tongues, prophecy, impressions or any extraordinary gift or inspiration conveys something out of harmony with the accepted revelations of the Church or contrary to the decisions of its constituted authorities, Latter-day Saints may know that it is not of God, no matter how plausible it may appear. . . . Anything at discord with that which comes from God through the head of the Church is not to be received as authoritative or reliable. ["A Warning Voice," August 1913, in Messages of the First Presidency, comp. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:285, as cited by Harold B. Lee, CR, April 1970, p. 55; emphasis added]*

Is that plain enough? If the Lord wants to warn the Church about the importance of food storage, he won't do it through a hitchhiker. If you need to be told of a coming earthquake, you won't get that news from an audiotape your neighbor hands you. Let us be wise, brothers and sisters. When there is new doctrine or new procedures to come forth, you will get it in one of three ways:

- a. A formal press conference will be called by the leaders of the Church and an official announcement will be made.
- b. It will be announced through the *Church News*, the *Ensign*, or other official Church organs.
- c. It will be announced in general conference by those in authority.

Otherwise we should be very wary about accepting it ourselves, and also we should not share it with others.

Principle 4: *The Lord wants us to use our agency and develop spiritual self-reliance.*

In some ways this guideline may at first seem like a paradox. There is no question but what the Lord wants us to rely on him, to turn to him, and to trust in his guidance, counsel, and direction. On the other hand, the scriptures and the prophets warn us about having to be directed in every matter of life. From time to time we meet people who feel that being "spiritual" means that the Lord inspires or confirms every action they take. Everything they do is attributed to the Spirit. In some cases they submit even the most trivial of matters to the Lord for confirmation. When I was a young college student many years ago, I remember a teacher saying something like this: "If you are living by the Spirit, you will even know which brand of toothpaste to buy." I was deeply impressed then and hoped that someday I might reach that level of "spirituality." Today I have a different understanding.

Do these words sound familiar?

*For behold, it is not meet [i.e., it is not proper, it is not good] that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. [D&C 58:26]*

They should sound familiar. They come from the Lord. It seems to me that if I require spiritual direction in whether to buy Crest or Colgate, I run the risk of being slothful and not wise.

We know from scripture that there are some things that don't matter to the Lord, that he leaves the choice up to us. There are several places in the Doctrine and Covenants where you will find this phrase: "it mattereth not unto me" (see, for example, D&C 60:5, 61:22, 62:5, 63:40). It is clear then that the Lord does not expect us to seek help on every trivial matter. As president of BYU, Elder Dallin H. Oaks spoke of this:

*The Spirit of the Lord is not likely to give us revelations on matters that are trivial. I once heard a young woman in a testimony meeting praise the spirituality of her husband, indicating that he submitted every question to the Lord. She told how he accompanied her shopping and would not even choose between different brands of canned vegetables without making his selection a matter of prayer. That strikes me as improper. [Dallin H. Oaks, "Revelation," *BYU 1981 82 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1982), p. 26]*

Striking the balance between trust in the Lord and spiritual self-reliance is a delicate matter, but it is clear that the Lord does not want us to be spiritual automatons who are afraid to move without first being told what to do.

Principle 5: *A person is not given revelation to direct another person unless they have priesthood or family responsibility for that person.*

Some time ago I was speaking at a Know Your Religion lecture in another part of the country. My topic was the same as it is today. Afterward a woman came up and told me that this was the first Church meeting she had been to in more than six years and that she had come only at the urging of a friend. Then she told me why. She and her husband had been unable to have children for several years after marriage. Finally she got pregnant, and they looked forward with great joy to having a child. Shortly before the baby was due, she went into terrible contractions and started to

hemorrhage. Her husband rushed her to the hospital barely in time to save her life, but not in time to save the baby. You can imagine their devastation.

About a week after the funeral a sister from the ward came to visit this woman. This neighbor told the woman that she had had a dream the previous night in which it had been revealed to her that if the father had taken the time to give his wife a priesthood blessing before he had rushed her to the hospital, the baby would have lived.

"That was when I stopped going to Church," the woman told me. "My husband is a faithful priesthood holder, but all he could think about that night was saving my life. I decided that if God would let my child die under such circumstances, I wanted nothing more to do with him." Then she said this: "But what that woman told me wasn't from the Lord, was it?"

I shook my head and said no.

What had led her to that conclusion? It came from two quotes I read that night. Let me read them to you now. The first is from an official declaration by the First Presidency: "In secular as well as spiritual affairs, Saints may receive Divine guidance and revelation affecting themselves, *but this does not convey authority to direct others*" ("A Warning Voice," pp. 285 86; emphasis added).

The second statement comes from Elder Oaks:

*We should understand what can be called the principle of "stewardship in revelation." . . . Only the president of the Church receives revelation to guide the entire Church. Only the stake president receives revelation for the special guidance of the stake. The person who receives revelation for the ward is the bishop. . . . Individuals can receive revelation to guide their own lives. But when one person purports to receive revelation for another person outside his or her own stewardship . . . you can be sure that such revelations are not from the Lord. [Oaks, "Revelation," p. 25; emphasis added]*

This young mother began to weep then and said: "I am so glad I came tonight. It is time I came back to the Lord." I am sure the neighbor woman was well-meaning. I am sure that she felt that her dream was from the Lord. But had she understood this principle, she would have known that it wasn't from God because she had no right to direct the lives of that couple.

Remember those cases of "hormonal revelation" that I came across while teaching institute? I told my students that they didn't have to accept another's so-called revelation about marriage unless they received independent confirmation of it for themselves. Why did I feel bold enough to make such a statement? Because it comes under this same principle of not getting revelation to direct another over whom we have no responsibility. Again from Elder Oaks:

*I have heard of cases where a young man told a young woman she should marry him because he had received a revelation that she was to be his eternal companion. If this is a true revelation, it will be confirmed directly to the woman if she seeks to know. In the meantime, she is under no obligation to heed it. . . . The man can receive revelation to guide his own actions, but he cannot properly receive revelation to direct hers. She is outside his stewardship. [Oaks, "Revelation," p. 25; emphasis added]*

That concludes the five principles that can serve as guidelines concerning personal revelation. I hope from these examples that you can see how they provide a standard by which we can judge and measure the processes of personal revelation. They help us better understand how the Lord works with us and also help us weigh which things are truly from the Lord and which may be counterfeit.

This now brings us to the third and, almost certainly, the most important of our three questions.

### **Question 3: What Can I Do to Enhance My Ability to Hear, Recognize, and Follow the Voice of the Lord?**

There are obviously many answers that could be given to that question: be worthy, earnestly seek the Lord, pray always, follow the Brethren. But I should like to answer in a little different way. To do that, I would like to conduct a

brief experiment with you. Even though we are a large audience in a massive hall, I would like to have absolute silence for a few moments. Then I would like you to listen to the silence and see what you can hear.

[Pause]

What did you hear? Could you hear the hum of the air conditioning? There is something up there. I don't know if it is the lights or something else. Had you heard those sounds before? Why not? Do you see the principle now? If, as we noted before, the Lord's voice is still and small and it whispers, then if our lives are filled with noise, we will find it difficult to hear. Elder Henry B. Eyring noted in his recently released book:

*Your problem and mine is not to get God to speak to us; few of us have reached the point where he has been compelled to turn away from us. Our problem is to hear.* [Henry B. Eyring, *To Draw Closer to God* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997], p. 29; emphasis added]

In our little experiment, only in the silence did we begin to hear the more subtle and quieter sounds. And yet they were there all along. Other sounds cover, mask, or distract us from those quieter sounds. If the voice of the Lord is still and small and whispers to us, then we must find ways to reduce the inner noise in our lives and create times of inner stillness and quiet.

There are many sources of inner noise. Some are obvious. Sin is clearly a major source of spiritual noise. The effect is similar to what loud prolonged noise does to the auditory nerves. Prolonged permanent hearing loss can result. I believe this is what Paul meant when he spoke to Timothy about having our "conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). It means we are beyond feeling. Sin rapidly impairs our spiritual senses. It can create tremendous inner noise.

Anger and contention are a major source of inner noise. Remember the story of the Prophet Joseph during the days of translating the Book of Mormon? It was reported that one day he came up to the room to translate but could get nowhere. He then admitted that he and Emma had spoken some disagreeable words earlier. He excused himself and went to make his peace with his wife. After a time he returned and indicated he was now ready to proceed.

Other sources of inner noise are not necessarily bad in and of themselves. Physical tiredness, stress, busyness, apathy, and worry can all create inner noises of their own.

Even outer noise can detract from inner quiet. Noise is endemic in our society. We live in envelopes of outer noise. We play music in our homes and cars, we watch television while we study, we even buy portable tape and CD players so we can carry this envelope of noise with us when we walk or jog. This is not a bad thing, but it may interfere at times with the quiet whisperings the Lord wants to give us. One observer noted that before a revelation could be given to some people, there would have to be something like this: "We interrupt this broadcast to bring you the following message."

Irreverence is a source of inner noise. Elder Boyd K. Packer made this observation in a conference talk:

*Irreverence suits the purposes of the adversary by obstructing the delicate channels of revelation in both mind and spirit. . . .*

*Leaders sometimes wonder why so many active members get themselves into such predicaments in life. Could it be that they do not feel what they need to feel because our meetings are less than they might be spiritually?*

*. . . Leaders should teach that reverence invites revelation.* [Boyd K. Packer, "Reverence Invites Revelation," *Ensign*, November 1991, p. 22]

Let me mention one other common source of great inner noise, often found even among faithful, obedient people. It is what Elder Eyring on another occasion described as "having your wants too high." When we desperately desire something, it creates a great rush of emotion within us. And high emotion can mask or cover spiritual promptings. Even if the thing we desire is a good thing--such as wanting help for a critically ill family member--our "wants" may be so high that we become unwilling or unable to hear the Lord's will in the matter.

In summary then, if the voice of the Lord is still and small and it whispers, should it surprise us that his counsel is "*Be still and know that I am God*" (D&C 101:16; emphasis added). Only as we are still can we learn to hear the still small voice.

Thankfully, the scriptures and the prophets teach us how to reduce inner noise and create times of quiet and reverence. These will neither be new nor surprising ideas to you, but they are of great importance. I list only a few.

Reading and studying the word of God is a great source of inner quiet. There are many here who already understand that principle. Life has left you torn and troubled. Inside you feel like a churning, boiling cauldron of anxiety and unrest. Then you turn to the scriptures. Almost immediately you can feel things begin to change. The churning calms, the agitation melts away, and peace comes in its place. I have experienced that time and again in my own life.

Prayer is another source of inner quiet and serenity. I am not talking about the perfunctory "I-have-to-do-my-duty" sort of prayers. I speak of prayers that are filled with yearning. I speak of prayers when your heart swells with gratitude for the almost countless gifts God has given you. I speak of prayers that are consistent, focused, and submissive to God's will.

If irreverence is a great source of static and noise, then we can deliberately set about to increase our own personal reverence. In sacrament meetings we can sit quietly and prepare for the covenant-making process offered there. We can sing the hymns, paying attention to the words so they become a prayer unto the Lord. We can focus on what the speaker is saying and try to understand how the principles being taught apply to us.

Here is a simple thing, and yet one of the most effective ways to attune our inner hearing to spiritual things. In the sacramental covenant we witness to God that we are willing to do three things. One of those, to "always remember him," is repeated in both of the sacramental prayers. If we keep that covenant, what is God's promise back to us? *That we shall always have his Spirit to be with us* (see D&C 20:77, 79). What a promise! Let me give you a quick example of how that simple promise could bring tremendous inner peace and quiet.

One of the great sources of inner noise in our society is driving the freeways, a challenge that earlier generations did not have to face. In Utah, at the moment, that has become particularly so. After half an hour or more on the freeways, we feel anger and frustration, irritation and impatience. Some even experience rage. By the time we reach our destination we are fuming with anger or trembling with fear. The next time you get in your car to drive the freeway, try this experiment. Pause for a moment and offer this short prayer: "Help me to remember the Savior as I drive today. Help me to try and act as he would act. When that person in front of me is talking on his cellular phone and not paying attention to his driving, help me to remember the Savior and act accordingly. When some knucklehead cuts directly in front of me, help me to not say anything that the Savior would not say." I suggest that it will not only dramatically reduce the inner noise within you, but it will directly bring the promise of the Lord to you: "That they may always have his Spirit to be with them."

Finally, one of the most important things you can do when you are searching to reduce inner noise in your life is to take time to ponder and reflect. Get away from the bustle of life. Find a quiet place and take time to simply sit and think, to listen to your thoughts and feelings, to open yourself to the promptings of the Spirit. Note what the following prophets said they were doing prior to receiving important revelations. Nephi: "I sat pondering in my heart" (1 Nephi 11:1). Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon: "While we meditated upon these things" (D&C 76:19). Joseph F. Smith: "I sat in my room pondering over the scriptures; and reflecting" (D&C 138:1 2). Joseph Smith: "My mind was called up to serious reflection. . . . I reflected . . . again and again [upon the words of James]" (JS--H 1:8, 12).

Sometimes we must deliberately put aside the cares of the world, put aside the rush of our daily lives, and find a quiet place and a quiet time where we can sit and ponder and reflect and mediate--and listen for that still small voice that whispers. Part of that time of pondering will be to deliberately push your wants down. You will remind yourself that it is not your place to counsel the Lord or to try and tell him what is best for you. You will consciously remember the Gethsemane principle mentioned earlier and submit your will to his.

## **Conclusion**

I say again now, as I said at the beginning: *One of the most important--if not the most important--challenges in learning how to come unto Christ and to be perfected in him is to learn to hear, to recognize, and then to follow the voice of the Lord.* Fortunately the Lord has given us this almost incomprehensible gift of the Holy Ghost--a member of the Godhead--to be our constant companion and spiritual guide. If we learn how to distinguish the voice of the Lord from the many other voices and sounds that fill our lives, the promises are incredibly rich. I cite only one such promise:

*For thus saith the Lord--I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.*

*Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory. [D&C 76:5 6]*

To the realities of that promise I add my own testimony, having experienced to some small degree the blessings therein promised, and I testify to that in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.