Choose Connection through Divine Interaction

This workshop will seek to help us find ways to improve our interaction with God through prayer and understand how he responds to us.

Personal Prayer & revelation workshop
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It is said that if you want to become an expert in something, you need to do it for 10,000 hours.

By that metric, if you were to spend 1 hour in prayer each day, it would take you 27 years to become an expert. Spend 3 hours in prayer a day and you can do it in 9 years. But that's looking at it wrong. We aren't developing a new skill as much as we are remembering a relationship we already have with God.

"Nothing is going to startle us more when we pass through the veil to the other side than to realize how well we know our Father and how familiar his face is to us."
Ezra Taft Benson "Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations" on December 10, 1974

It is likely that you already know quite a bit about the subjects that we'll cover in this workshop. I doubt I know more about it than you do. In fact, you probably won't hear anything new today. But, it is my hope that today as we discuss truth, the spirit will be here and that it will teach you and I things we need to **know, hear, feel and change** to have a greater connection with our Father and His Son through personal prayer and revelation.

You've been given a piece of paper for note taking. Please notice the column sizes. What I say here will be a review of principles and you can take note of some of those things - they're mostly in your Gospel library app. However, they are truth and as we expose ourselves to truth, the spirit can inspire our minds and hearts to hear and feel more than what is said. As you are in tune with the spirit, you will think of and feel things that are specifically for your personal use. Be alert for things that you hear that have nothing to do with what we're talking about. Write those down in as much detail as you are able. We will discuss the principle that this paper represents later.

When Adam and Eve were in the garden of Eden they had the ability to freely walk and talk with God. But after they were sent out of the garden they no longer enjoyed direct face to face interactions with The Father and the Son. It is interesting to observe that immediately after the fall, God introduced sacrifice, which represents the mission and life of Jesus Christ who is our intermediary with God in a fallen world. Adam was next commanded to commune with God in the name of the Son. He created the means whereby we could pray and then gave the commandment. Our Father **knew how challenging this fallen world would be** and He knew that **we would need the power that comes from regular interaction** with Him to sustain us.

"And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam… and spake saying, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore." Moses 5:7

Since that time, and in all books of scripture, we are reminded to call upon God. In fact, it is the single most frequently repeated idea in scripture. And when something is repeated in scripture, what does it mean? It's repeated for emphasis because it's important and God REALLY means it.

Personal prayer is one of the most fundamental and basic expressions of our personal worship and is often a barometer of our spiritual health and trajectory.

Before we dig too deep into prayer, let's quickly review a principle that then Elder Eyring discussed about improvement:

"Most of us have had some experience with self-improvement efforts. My experience has taught me this about how people and organizations improve: **the best place to look is for small changes we could make in things we do often**. There is power in steadiness and repetition. And if we can be led by inspiration to choose the right small things to change, consistent obedience will bring great improvement."
(The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest, 6 Feb 1998)

There are few things we do more often (spiritually speaking) than prayer. Sometimes, things we do frequently become commonplace or casual but as we consider the principle of personal prayer and revelation, I invite you to listen to the promptings of the spirit to **find a small change you can consistently repeat to improve** the power and efficacy of your personal prayers and your awareness of revelation that is present in your life.

To pray is to speak to God, the Eternal Father. We speak with him, counsel with him and seek revelation from him. It is not a one way conversation. Joseph smith taught in the Lectures on Faith that in order for us to exercise faith and trust in him, we have to have a correct idea of his character, perfections and attributes. He is a **living**, **loving** Father, **anxious to pour out** a multitude of blessings on us as far and as fast as we are able to receive them. **He yearns** to communicate with us and **assist us** in and through the challenges that life invariably will throw at us. He **finds joy in forgiving, redeeming and lifting us**. He is patient and merciful. We cannot forget who God is and what his disposition is toward us.

We can speak with him verbally, out loud, in a whisper or by thoughts in our mind and heart. They can be casual, open ended prayers or formal, kneeling prayers with arms folded and eyes closed. You can use formal language as a way of showing respect or just talk to him as a loving Father who is deeply interested in you. Jesus himself used both types of interactions in his mortal life, referring to God (more formal) and "Abba" (informal). In my career, there are formal and scripted ways to communicate which can expedite a two way positive communication. But sometimes in moments of stress or in emergencies, plain English is the most clear way to express what needs to be said. Our prayers can be brief communication with him or take as long as needed. Think of that! An all knowing, all powerful and all loving Father commands us to approach him and develop a relationship with him at any time of *our* choosing and to spend as long as we want with him. President Nelson in his talk "Think Celestial" tells us that *"Our prayers can be —and should be —living discussions with our Heavenly Father."* There is value in each type of prayer and as with a proper diet, the key is finding balance.

"Prayer is the act by which the will of the Father and the will of the child are brought into correspondence with each other. The object of prayer is not to change the will of God but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant but that are made conditional on our asking for them." (Bible Dictionary, "Prayer")

In other words, it is **an alignment process** that requires us to exercise faith and trust in God and His character. It is you and I **moving our hearts, minds, wills and attitudes to be more congruent with that of God**. This is what praying in the name of Christ means- asking for things that it is His will and pleasure to give us. We do not pray so that we can tell God what we need and want. He already knows all that. **We pray to find out what God wants for us.** A shift here will immediately enhance our prayers. "Many prayers remain unanswered because they are not in Christ's name at all; they in no way represent His mind but spring out of the selfishness of man's heart." (Bible Dictionary, "Prayer")

Hank Smith, Ensign college 2025

“As a parent, instead of asking Him to help me with my children, I now ask Him how I can help Him with His children. Instead of wondering what He’ll permit, I ask now to know what He prefers. Instead of asking Him to change His mind, I now ask Him to change my heart.”

It is through prayer that you and I grow and develop in our understanding of our divine identity. This leads us to understand the character of God. And it is by understanding our divine identity and the character of God that impels us to commune with Him. That’s just the 2D model though. This is a repetitive and iterative process as Elder Renlund describes ("Lifelong Conversion" BYU Devotional, September 2021), where each repetition builds on itself, strengthening us and lifting us to a higher spiritual plain. Think of it like a spiral staircase where each step takes you in a similar path but lifts you higher and higher in your relationship with God.

“As soon as we learn the true relationship in which we stand toward God (namely, that God is our Father, and we are His children), then at once prayer becomes natural and instinctive on our part (Matt. 7:7–11). Many of the so-called difficulties about prayer arise from forgetting this relationship.” (Bible Dictionary, “Prayer”)

Prayer, while seemingly simple, plays a critical role in our return back to our Heavenly Father. It is through prayer that you and I:

- exercise our **faith in Jesus Christ**,
- come unto him,
- **repent** and seek forgiveness through the power of the atonement of Jesus Christ,
- **recommit to covenants** we have entered into,
- engage in revelatory experiences with the **Holy Ghost** and
- find strength to **endure to the end**.

Each element in the fundamental gospel principles finds expression in this sincere act of daily, personal worship.

Prayer is an interconnected experience that we engage in, a “living discussion” with God as we just heard from President Nelson. Elder Bednar, in his talk “Pray Always,” describes the process of prayer being a way in which we follow the pattern God set forth in the creation and spiritually create our day before we go and act to “temporally” create our day. We begin our day with prayer discussing **behaviors**, **attitudes**, **things in our character or thought processes with which we need help to change**. We seek **guidance**, **direction** and **awareness** as well as **strength** and **capability** to successfully manage those challenges. Then, throughout the day we continue that prayer in our heart, recognizing small answers to that specific prayer and request. At the end of the day we then kneel in prayer and return and report on the stewardship of time we were given, how well we turned to the Savior for help, where we succeeded or failed and identify ways we can do and become better tomorrow.

“Thus our evening prayer builds upon and is a continuation of our morning prayer. And our evening prayer also is a preparation for meaningful morning prayer.

“Morning and evening prayers—and all of the prayers in between—are not unrelated, discrete events; rather, they are linked together each day and across days, weeks, months, and even years. This is in part how we fulfill the scriptural admonition to “pray always” (Luke 21:36; 3 Nephi 18:15, 18; D&C 31:12). Such meaningful prayers are instrumental in obtaining the highest blessings God holds in store for His faithful children.”
(Bednar, “Pray Always, October 2008)

Prayer is a principle of action- of self awareness, setting goals, receiving and **living in revelation** and then returning and reporting on a small piece of stewardship - our time.

If you're not already praying like this, don't worry. God will meet us where we are and as we are. He loves effort and will shower blessings on you as you strive to improve! "Blessings require some work or effort on our part before we can obtain them. Prayer is a form of work and is an appointed means for obtaining the highest of all blessings." (Bible Dictionary)

What are some of the obstacles that we face that impede the power that God wants to share with us? What can we change that can bring that power into our lives more fully?

We've already discussed 3:

1 - Forgetting who we are, our true relationship with God, and what his character and disposition is toward us.

2 - Trying to use prayer as a way to get what we want instead of submitting ourselves to the will of God. He is not a "cosmic vending machine" as described by D Todd Christofferson. (April 2022, Our Relationship with God)

3 - Not praying in the name of Christ- where we do not pray with the mind of Christ.

Another 3 obstacles that we want to be aware of:

4 - Physical, mental and emotional Fatigue - If we pray in the morning and evening, are we alert and attentive enough to draw the powers of Heaven into our lives? **Find a time** when you are clear minded enough to converse with God. We live in a loud and fast paced world. **Preparing** mentally, physically and spiritually for prayer is becoming more and more important. Consider following the Lords counsel to pray in your closet (**Find a physical place** removed from the world). **Praying out loud** (or even in my mission language) has also been helpful for me as I have sought divine guidance in my life because it often helps me **slow down** and **stay focused and be more childlike.** While I am at work I have a room apart from others. This has been a place where I have been able to pour out my heart and soul. I have felt heard. And I have received answers and guidance in that space. Turning off my radio in my car and expressing my gratitude and my needs has been a wise use of time for me. Find a combination of places and times that work for you.

5 - Worthiness - is there something that is getting in the way that needs to be addressed through repentance, forgiveness or a discussion with the bishop? Remember what Nephi taught: *"if ye would hearken unto the Spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray; for the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray."* (2 Nephi 32:8) The spirit will always encourage us to pray, even if we are currently struggling with obedience to God's commandments. If there is something in your life that you know you need to repent of, do it now! Don't wait! I can testify that the Lord has a forgiving disposition and you have not traveled beyond his ability to help and heal you.

6 - Lack of focus or purpose. Prayer is designed to be a revelatory process and revelation streams from proper questions, but we tend to focus on receiving revelation as a response to OUR question. Our Father, who knows us better than we know ourselves, instead wants us to seek guidance from the spirit to *know what questions to ask*. He wants us to engage in revelation earlier in the process than we normally think of doing. Really, he wants us to **live in revelation.** Studying the scriptures, pondering and asking what questions to ask can help us have more inspired and meaningful questions. This in turn will lead to greater and clearer revelation as a response. **Inspired questions lead to inspired answers. The spirit itself will help us know what questions to ask.**

That is a great lead in to our discussion on revelation. If prayer is our attempt to speak with God, then revelation is His attempt to speak to us. I say attempt because, just like trying to communicate with another human, we sometimes **misunderstand**, **don't hear or don't recognize when God is speaking with us**. This two way communication is relational! I intentionally spend time with those who I love and

I grow in my ability to love and communicate with them as I invest time in those relationships. It's no different in our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Revelation is how God conveys information, direction and love to us. It is usually, but not always, a direct response to a question or concern posed to God. This answer can come through:

- dreams,
- visions,
- spiritual manifestations,
- heavenly messengers sent from above and
- inspiration.

God customarily sends us small packets of information, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Seldom will you receive a complete response all at once. But this is the process of living in revelation. If you and I are members of the church and attended a sacrament meeting this past week, we took the bread and water and recommitted to Heavenly Father to follow and remember Jesus. And we we're promised that we would "always have His spirit to be with [us]." Having the spirit with us to guide and direct us is then the rule and not the exception. It is your default state of being. It should be with us more than it is not with us. If you are good- not perfect but good- are honoring your covenants and moving forward in your life with faith in Jesus Christ, you are living in revelation and you can count on the spirit to be available to you. And you don't have to recognize and be completely aware that you're receiving revelation to receive it! That's a trap that we can fall into. As we live in revelation and we act in faith, God will steer us to where he needs us to be, when we need to be there.

What does that look like from the outside? The story of Oliver Cowdery coming to be involved in the translation of the Book of Mormon can help us here - he had to be told he was being inspired and guided in his thoughts and footsteps, that he was living in revelation and that he was receiving revelation - he didn't recognize it was happening, but it was. How often is that you and me? He asked for a revelation and received a revelation, telling him he had been receiving revelation this whole time.

14 blessed art thou for what thou hast done; for thou hast inquired of me, and behold, as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit. If it had not been so, thou wouldst not have come to the place where thou art at this time.

15 Behold, thou knowest that thou hast inquired of me and I did enlighten thy mind; and now I tell thee these things that thou mayest know that thou hast been enlightened by the Spirit of truth
DC 6:14-15

"We shouldn't be trying to recognize [the Holy Ghost] when it comes, we should be recognizing what happens that causes it to leave. It ought to be with us all the time- not every nanosecond- but if a person is doing his or her best… we're not committing serious transgressions, we can count on the Holy Ghost guiding us."
Bednar, Living in Revelation with Elder David A Bednar, Ensign College, Jul 21, 2024

Elder Bednar has referred to the speed of it occurring in one of two ways:

Like a light switch, where everything is immediately illuminated and there is distinct recognition

Or, like a sunrise, where gradually we have increased definition, color, depth of field, and acuity in the perception of things around us. (Bednar, The spirit of revelation, April 2011)

Which is more common?

I'll give you a hint: Joseph didn't walk out of the Sacred Grove with the Church Handbook of Instructions and the Doctrine & Covenants in hand. It takes time!

Joseph smith and Alvin and his eternal fate
Living in revelation
Alvin smith dies in 1823 - Joseph doesn't know what happened to him, preacher says he's going to hell
9 years later, section 76 "you have to be baptized to go to the celestial kingdom." Alvin wasn't baptized
1836 sees a vision of the celestial kingdom and there's Alvin
1842 - oh yeah, there's baptisms for the dead
19 years of a slow reveal to an important question

Revelation is often distilled upon us in ways that it's almost imperceptible in the moment but hindsight gives us a clear view of gods hand in our lives

Woman with an issue of blood waited YEARS for an answer to her prayers.

This process of receiving revelation in small packets of information, "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" allows us to do spiritual work, to exercise our spiritual muscles and grow in faith, in confidence in God and in our confidence of our ability to use our agency in powerful, soul expanding ways.

God has given us this magnificent body! Whatever imperfections or deficiencies it may have, it is the instrument through which we channel revelatory experiences. Our body amplifies experiences and creates greater capacity to become like our Father in Heaven than we have *ever* had before.

Revelation comes to us through one or both of two body parts - our mind and our heart. Heavenly guidance will make sense to our minds and it will feel right in our hearts. Responses to the mind have been described as very specific, almost dictated words while responses to the heart are generalized feelings.

Brigham Young taught that Satan, knowing how important our physical body is, will entice us to misuse our agency by tempting us through our physical bodies and their appetites, which dulls our sensitivity (Journal of Discourses, vol. 10, p. 325). God on the other hand wants to help us refine, hone and increase our sensitivity to spiritual matters. This is one reason why we are counseled to avoid inappropriate media, pornography, harmful or addictive substances or behaviors that impair our physical bodies and therefore our ability to feel and respond to the spirit.

Along with worthiness which we discussed earlier, this might be a good place to remember the fact that we cannot force spiritual things as Elder Boyd Packer has taught us. The spirit speaks to us in soft, subdued and delicate tones. Even if we are generally worthy, if we are not careful and deliberate in our consumption of movies, TV shows, and social media, we can offend the spirit and in a subtle, collusionary manner, inadvertently drive away the very influence we are seeking.

We would do well to carefully and objectively examine our choices of media and seek revelation about what needs to be changed so that the spirit can be more unrestrained in our daily lives. Consider counseling with a trusted friend who may be able to see your blind spots and help you identify what you can eliminate in your life to have more spiritual sensitivity.

Now, the paper you have in front of you. This simple paper is intended to help you receive and record revelation. This is an important principle that can lead to a cascade of personal revelation.

"You can learn vitally important things by what you *hear* and *see* and, especially, by what you *feel,* as prompted by the Holy Ghost. Most individuals limit their learning primarily to what they hear or what they read. Be wise. Develop the skill of learning by what you see and particularly by what the Holy Ghost

prompts you to feel. Consciously seek to learn by what you see and feel, and your capacity to do so will expand through consistent practice. Ask in faith for such help. Live to be worthy of it. Seek to recognize it. **Write down in a secure place the important things you learn from the Spirit. You will find that as you write down precious impressions, often more will come.** Also the knowledge you gain will be available throughout your life. *Always*, *day or night, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, seek to recognize and respond to the direction of the Spirit.* Express gratitude for the help received and obey it. This practice will reinforce your capacity to learn by the Spirit. It will permit the Lord to guide your life and to enrich the use of every other capacity latent in your being."
Richard G Scott, To Acquire Knowledge and the Strength to Use It Wisely

A pattern emerged from Elder Scott that he elaborated on in another talk 7 years later.
Once, while on an assignment and in a position to receive divine direction, he started to notice strong inspiration.

- He moved to a more private location.
- He wrote down what came into his mind and heart.
- After writing it down, he asked, "Is that correct?"
- He made some adjustments to the recorded inspiration.
- He asked again, "is that correct?"
- When he received the confirmation that it was, he expressed gratitude.
- Then he asked, "Is there more?"
- There was more!

This process continued 2 more times!

Then his comment, "Had I not responded to the first impressions and recorded them, I would not have received the last, most precious guidance." (Scott, "To Acquire Spiritual Guidance)

In this experience, notice how Elder Scott was not stagnant sitting in his room waiting for revelation to occur before he got to work. He was active, moving forward. God cannot steer a parked car.

If you want revelation, show the Lord you can be trusted with revelation. Record it somewhere safe and secure, ask if you have recorded it correctly, and act on it. You will find this principle repeated time after time by prophets and apostles. President Nelson talked about the same pattern:

"Find a quiet place where you can regularly go. Humble yourself before God. Pour out your heart to your Heavenly Father. Turn to Him for answers and for comfort.
Pray in the name of Jesus Christ about your concerns, your fears, your weaknesses—yes, the very longings of your heart. And then listen! Write the thoughts that come to your mind. Record your feelings and follow through with actions that you are prompted to take. As you repeat this process day after day, month after month, year after year, you will "grow into the principle of revelation.""
Russell Nelson , revelation for the Church, revelation for your lives

Have you written down a thought, an impression, a sudden stroke of light as you have been listening today? What are you hearing that is not being said? It's possible to receive revelation regarding things that are completely off topic from what is being discussed. That is direct, personal revelation meant for you.

How do you know if it's you or if it's the spirit? Mormon gives us the answer: "that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God." Moroni 7:13

Don't over think this. If you or I hear in our minds a thought that invites and entices to do good, it comes from God. In the economy of Heaven, he's not going to send an angel when a memory of a parent or teacher reminding me to pray and read my scriptures will do.

What if, instead of choosing between good and bad, we are choosing between two good options? Sometimes we may not feel like there's a clear direction to take between two choices. When we're making decisions, we can't just sit around and wait for an answer. We have a responsibility to study things out in our minds, learn about the options before us, understand and compare them and then make an informed choice. That option is what we then take to the Lord and present as our decision. If it's right, at the appropriate time, we will come to know it's right. As we walk forward in faith, we will either get the confirmation that it was right or we will be redirected. Sometimes that means we move forward, "not knowing beforehand the things [we] should do." But the answer will always come, little by little, puzzle piece by puzzle piece until we can make out enough to keep moving forward to get more pieces given to us.

Here's how Richard G Scott briefly outlined the ways that we will receive answers:
"He will reply in one of three ways. **First**, you can feel the peace, comfort, and assurance that confirm that your decision is right. Or **second**, you can sense that unsettled feeling, the stupor of thought, indicating that your choice is wrong. Or **third**—and this is the difficult one—you can feel no response.

"What do you do when you have prepared carefully, have prayed fervently, waited a reasonable time for a response, and still do not feel an answer? You may want to express thanks when that occurs, for it is an evidence of His trust. When you are living worthily and your choice is consistent with the Savior's teachings and you need to act, proceed with trust. As you are sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit, one of two things will certainly occur at the appropriate time: either the stupor of thought will come, indicating an improper choice, or the peace or the burning in the bosom will be felt, confirming that your choice was correct. When you are living righteously and are acting with trust, God will not let you proceed too far without a warning impression if you have made the wrong decision."
(Scott, "Using the supernal gift of prayer" April 2007)

God honors agency and so he will not force his will on us. In order for this mortal experience to be impartial, he has to use the veil to remain aloof just enough for it to be a fair demonstration of our agency to continually choose Him. But just as a parent who just let go of the back of the bike seat when his child is learning to balance, he's not more than an arm length away and calling out encouragement and guidance.

Our agency is so important to him that he willingly allowed 1/3 of his children to exercise it in a way that was harmful to their progression. If it was that important then, we can expect him to continue to honor our agency today and, as the song says, he'll persuade, entice, invite, etc… but never force the human mind. (Know this that every man is free). Agency is an important facet in our ability to receive and respond to revelation, and God will never violate it. He will give us direction and allow us to choose to follow it or he will wait and allow us the time and space to exercise our agency so we can confidently act in faith. That exercise usually entails WORK, straining, stretching.

Sometimes it may seem like we are not getting answers despite doing all the right things. What do we do then? Let's remember these 5 principles:

1. **Exercise faith that God is hearing and answering your prayers.** Don't forget the kind of Father he is. Having faith that an answer of some kind is certain will help you to patiently continue searching for it when the answer may not be immediately obvious.

2. **Don't limit the way you allow God to answer your prayers.** There are multiple ways God may choose to respond. Be open minded about how you will recognize answers. In other words, learn how to "Hear Him." Ask Him how he speaks to you. Make the effort and take the time to learn the language of revelation.

3. **When no answer comes, consider that God may have already provided the answer or provided you with life experiences necessary to figure out the answer.** If God has already provided you with the

answers you need in, scripture, words of the living prophets, your patriarchal blessing, or divinely designed life experiences, He may be trusting you to use those to draw your own conclusions. The stretching and refining part of this struggle is designed to help you progress and is designed to help you become more like Him.

4. **Don't confuse not getting what you ask for with not getting an answer at all.** Be willing to accept answers that are different from those you are requesting. Expect change, or in other words, expect to be invited to repent.

Elder Bednar:
"Many times what [God] wants for us, **because it involves change in what we are and what we do, it's not something that we readily want to hear or accept. That's one of the ways you know it's coming from heaven.** If all of your answers are exactly what you want, you're giving yourself some of those answers. So he's not interested in making our life hard. But to become what we are destined to become as his sons and daughters doesn't come by staying the same, and it doesn't come by not having to deal with some demanding, difficult things."
Face to Face with Elder and Sister Bednar (Sept 12, 2021)

5. **Trust your ability to use your agency**. Don't be too eager to give up your agency., allow God to guide you to use it well — and trust yourself to use it well.

From my personal experience with prayer and revelation, I know:
- He knows us.
- **He loves you and I** more than we can possibly comprehend
- He hears ALL our cries
- **He understands our deepest pain and most intense struggles**
- **He understands our needs** better than we do and is responsive to them
- **He keeps his promises**. When he invites us to, "ask, seek and knock" and he promises that we "will receive"; we "will find"; and things "will be opened to us", he means it.
- **He will ALWAYS answer**- not at the time and in the way that we want, but he will always answer **in a way that is best for our eternal benefit**- and often I look back at answers that I received and find that they were WAY better than what I was hoping for.

It is my hope that we all can find greater strength and direction through **more regular, more intentional and more focused** prayer,

And then be better at **listening to his voice** and **acting in faith.**