



SPENDING TIME ALONE WITH GOD

“I retired to the woods . . . on the morning of a beautiful, clear day. . . Having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I knelt down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God.”

JOSEPH SMITH—HISTORY 1:14–15

As simple as heartfelt prayer looks on the surface, there’s usually a lot more going on. Even after seeking out a quiet place of solitude, Joseph had to work through some intense opposition designed to thwart this personal communion.

That young prophet is not the only one whose chance to communicate and connect with God has been threatened by surprising resistance. There will be turbulence we each undoubtedly have to navigate to arrive at our own rich interaction with God. Instead of delaying prayer until such obstacles are overcome, consider bringing those hurdles directly to the Father in prayer.

PONDER. How often do you have a chance to spend time alone with God? When you try, what internal or surrounding resistance do you sometimes face? How can you respond well to that kind of turbulence when it comes up?

PRACTICE. Next time you have an opportunity to be alone with God, try bringing your attention to your thoughts and feelings first—pausing to give yourself time to notice what’s happening in your mind and heart. When you feel ready, direct your attention toward God, searching for the words to offer. Take time to listen to whatever impressions, feelings, and thoughts arise during this sacred time of communion.

STUDYING THE GOSPEL WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY

“Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege.”

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 88:122

In contrast to some other educational settings, the Lord encourages us to create an open atmosphere where the Spirit can teach us all. Sometimes we are the teacher, and sometimes we are the learner, with everyone getting a turn at some point—be that in Sunday School, Relief Society, elders quorum, youth and children’s classes, or in our individual homes.

Compared with solo study, studying together as a group, couple, family, or class can be more challenging—as multiple perspectives and personalities merge in a pursuit of further light and knowledge. Approaching these shared study sessions as opportunities to practice nonjudgmental awareness may help us benefit and learn from those who have different perspectives than we do.

PONDER. What do you notice going on in your heart and mind when you study the gospel with others? Are there any unique challenges to shared study for you—ways this kind of class, group, or family study stretches you?

PRACTICE. The next chance you have to study the gospel with others at home or church, pay attention to where your mind goes. When your attention wanders, experiment with bringing it back to the discussion gently and firmly. If there are moments you notice tension within, see if you can consciously shift your heart back to a place of softness, as you practice holding the whole experience—questions, comments, instructions, feelings, thoughts—from a place of compassion and curiosity.



UNDERSTANDING MORE BY COUNSELING TOGETHER

“Many of the brethren have used the expression that ‘revelation is scattered among us.’ And it’s really true. The Church is governed by councils, and that’s how we grow, that’s how we make progress.”

JEAN BINGHAM¹⁵

Rather than having one leader dictate and discern alone, we’ve been taught to aspire for a better way as fellow disciples. “In our meetings, we do not just sit around and wait for [the prophet] to tell us what to do,” President M. Russell Ballard taught. “We counsel openly with each other, and we listen to each other with profound respect for the abilities and experiences [everyone] brings.” The apostle went on to emphasize the power of bringing together two different kinds of truth seeking: “listening to each other and listening to the Spirit!”¹⁶

“No one is trying to figure out, ‘Well, what’s the agenda here? What’s the hidden message?’” Elder David Bednar also shared.¹⁷ “The only objective is to try to discern and apply the Lord’s will and His timing.” In that process, Jesus reassures all seeking to follow Him that He won’t be far away: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

PONDER. Have you felt inspiration arise in your own opportunities to counsel, be that in leadership positions or in family relationships? If not, what adjustments can you make so that these deliberations become more revelatory, edifying, and unifying?

PRACTICE. Next time you join a discussion, notice how well you’re able to give your full attention to the person speaking, compared with when your mind is caught up in your own thoughts. In a distracting moment, consciously guide your attention back to the speaker. Look for other ways to contribute to an environment where everyone feels heard and respected, including being mindful of your language and tone of voice.