

God Speaks Through His Prophet, Then and Now



Elder and Sister Bangerter
Of the Seventy
Devotional
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What Shall I Do?

By Susan A. Bangerter

We are very happy to be here today. You live in paradise! I already know something about you by the very fact that you are here, taking time from your busy schedules, even missing the beautiful waves that I watched this morning. We love you for your goodness and thank you for the spirit you bring.

We were your age once, a long time ago! Elder Bangerter and I didn't know each other before his mission. Just after he returned home, he went to work for his dad. A sales girl named Jody worked there and within a few days approached him about a blind date with her friend. He adamantly said, "no." This same Jody was in my ward, we had just met and were serving as YW camp directors together. She knew I was waiting for a mission call but insisted that I go on a blind date with a new guy at her work. I said, "absolutely not."

She was persistent, with both of us, but we dug our heels in. She called me the next week and I still said no. She and her husband came jogging by my home and again I said no. Finally, she said, Susan, he has a dirt bike!" I said, "Okay, I'll go!" Jody went to work the next day and told Steve that I had a dirt bike and he said, "Okay, I'll go!" We had our blind date on a Wednesday. It was love at first sight. He proposed to me on our 2nd date... and I said, "Yes." It's been 36 years of bliss!

In the New Testament, book of Matthew, it recounts a wonderful scene that plays over and over in my mind. I recently found this story portrayed on video in the LDS.org media library. Maybe you've seen it, fishermen in their boats near the shore, working and repairing their nets as the Savior approaches and calls to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."^[i] They immediately dropped what they were doing and followed Him. If you watch closely, you won't see Simon or Andrew, James, or John look back. They immediately left their nets and followed Jesus.

This scene is mirrored in many stories in both scripture and our lives: The Lamanites who were converted to the gospel, then buried all their weapons of war. They asked Ammon to inquire of the Lord what they should do next and demonstrating their complete obedience they exclaimed, “Yea, if the Lord saith unto us go, we will go...” [ii] Thereafter we

read that they left their land and homes behind and walked to Zarahemla to begin a new life.[iii]

Alma provides another example, he set off on a mission to preach to the Zoramites, who were dissenters from the Nephites. As he taught in their synagogues, no one would listen, but on the hill called Onidah, a great multitude of the poor came out to hear him. Wanting to correct their ways and follow the prophet, they humbly asked, “What shall we do?”[iv] They too left their city behind and walked to Jershon to start a new life in devotion to our Savior Jesus Christ.[v]

You may have met people who, when they were touched by the Holy Ghost, dropped their nets and asked, “what shall I do now?”

Each weekend, Elder Bangerter and I travel to a Stake Conference where he presides. On Saturday nights, during the adult session, he opens the meeting up to questions they may have. Almost every week, someone will ask, “what can I do to better feel the Lord’s guiding Spirit in my life?”

His answer is simple but overlooked because it is so straightforward.... “pray with purpose, look forward to each sabbath day and keep it holy, go to the temple and study the scriptures like you never have before. It will change your life.” To all of this, he adds “Listen carefully to what the prophet is telling us.”

President Russell M. Nelson taught in a recent worldwide broadcast, the ...“gathering [of Israel] is the most important thing taking place on earth today. Nothing else compares in magnitude, nothing else compares in importance, nothing else compares in majesty. And if you choose to....you can be a big part of it.”[vi]

What does that mean for you young adults, here at Brigham Young University–Hawaii? This gathering has been prophesied for thousands of years. It refers to God’s children, both on the earth and beyond the veil, returning to the blessings of the covenant path. How does it relate to you? You’re in the early stages of education and planning a career. You may be in a YSA ward or young married ward, busy with church callings and homework, just trying to get thru one day at a time. President Nelson declares, “this gathering should mean everything to you. This is the mission for which you were sent to earth.”[vii]

How or when do *you* drop your nets and ask, “what shall I do to take part in this gathering?” This answer is also simple...Plan your course of study, your career, your family, with the end in mind...it is you President Nelson is speaking to when he said, “attacks against the church, its doctrine, and our way of life are going to increase...we need (you) to have a bedrock understanding of the doctrine of Christ to help raise a sin-resistant generation. We need (men and) women who can detect deception in all of its forms. We need (you) to know how to *access* the power that God makes available to covenant keepers.”[viii]

You may be studying business. Great! Plan now how you will make your mark in the business world as an example of honesty and integrity, devoted to family and God. You may be studying education. Wonderful! Plan now how you will nurture others in compassion, honesty and integrity. You may be heading into technology...I don’t even understand how my phone works, but you do, so plan how you will impact that industry for God’s purposes. So yes, plan each week, each semester, your career, your marriage, your life with God and His plan in mind.

Be invested in moving Gods plan of happiness forward. Be consecrated. Visualize the future scenes of your life and write down a plan, be specific in the details and Our Heavenly Father will guide you.

Now, Peter and the apostles witnessed miracles and broke bread with the Savior daily, and it still took them a few years to understand their purpose and mission. It took the people of Ammon years to raise up **the** righteous, sin-resistant stripling warriors. What we learn from their example is to be willing to drop our nets, inquire of the Lord, “what would thou have me do?” and go forward in confidence, not looking back.

May God bless you in your journey. I say these things, leaving my witness that our Savior personally knows each of us, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[\[i\]](#) Matthew 4:19

[\[ii\]](#) Alma 27:8

[\[iii\]](#) Alma 27:26

[\[iv\]](#) Alma 32:5

[\[v\]](#) Alma 35:6

[\[vi\]](#) Russell M. Nelson, Worldwide Youth Devotional, June 3, 2018

[\[vii\]](#) Russell M. Nelson, Worldwide Youth Devotional, June 3, 2018

[\[viii\]](#) President Russell M. Nelson, Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel, Oct 2018 General Conference

God Speaks Through His Prophet, Then and Now

By Elder Steven R. Bangerter

For twenty-five years prior to my call to serve as a General Authority, I worked as an attorney primarily representing churches and other faith-based organizations. Over the course of that time I represented hundreds of different denominations. I came to love people of other faiths and, though many of our beliefs were different, I came to love and respect many of their traditions, practices and teachings. Over those years I also developed a sincere sense of gratitude for the blessings we enjoy as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I was often asked questions by leaders of other faiths that helped me realize just how blessed we are to be led by apostles and prophets. For example, I was asked by a leader of one very large Christian church: “can you help us develop a church welfare system like you have in your church?” “Well, it’s not my church, it is the Church of Jesus Christ, let me help you understand.” Or, “will you help us develop a polity and ecclesiastical line of succession like you have in your church?” They were referencing the way we go from one bishop of a ward to the next, or from one young women’s president or relief society president to the next. My response – “well, it’s not my church, it’s the Lord’s church and his organization is beautiful, let me help you understand.” Now the most relevant example for you – leaders of other churches would ask “can you please help us to develop an educational system like you have in your church?” “Well, (now say it with me), it’s not my church, it is the Lord’s church, let me help you understand.”

We enjoy these and many more great blessings – like being students here at Brigham Young University – Hawaii, because this is a Church blessed by the reality of continuing revelation through a living prophet of God.

We find ourselves in tumultuous times. Throughout the media we see and hear images of a confused, frightened world. Many are bitter, angry and fearful of what lies ahead. Never during this dispensation has the importance of being guided by a living prophet been so apparent. Throughout recorded history the need for God’s pattern of speaking through His chosen representative has remained consistent. However, despite that history, God’s children have remained consistently reluctant to accept God’s clear pattern of communication and hearken to His chosen prophets. Why are so many so reluctant to accept the notion that God could and would speak through a prophet in their own time and place? Many insist that because we have the scriptures to teach the words of God, we do not need a living prophet. Others teach that what God wants us to know He will reveal directly to our hearts and to our minds. While the scriptures and personal revelation have always been instruments through which God has communicated with His children, they are not the exclusive means by which He has revealed His will.

From the time of Adam, God established a clear pattern of communication so that we would be able to recognize and rely upon His guidance. After Adam was excluded from the Garden of Eden the heavens did not remain closed. God continued to reveal His will through Adam.^[i] However, soon we see Cain rebel against that direction, and with that rebellion we begin to see the effect of those who will not hearken to the words of living prophets.^[ii] As He had with Adam, the Lord raised up Enoch as a voice of prophetic warning and guidance.^[iii] Then, a call issued from heaven as Noah received and conveyed direction from God to a wicked generation of people who would not listen.^[iv] I was struck by the profound words on a bookmark a kind person left in my box many years ago when I was serving as a bishop. Depicted at the top of the bookmark was a sketch of Noah’s ark. Printed above were the words, “It wasn’t raining when Noah built the ark!” Following Noah, the Lord called other prophets among whom was Abraham. A man so righteous that an everlasting covenant was established through him that Christ would come through his lineage; and he and his posterity would inherit a choice land and eternal reward.^[v] We likewise see other prophets emerge including Moses,^[vi] Joshua^[vii] and Samuel,^[viii] but with the call of each new prophet the people questioned, doubted and fussed over their having to follow a new leader. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all struggled to convince the people to give heed to their message. The people’s refusal to submit to prophetic guidance always resulted in dire consequences. Their rebellion in the days of Jeremiah, for example, resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the ensuing enslavement of tens of thousands.^[ix] The familiar words of the Old Testament prophet Amos continue true through New Testament times and in our day. “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”^[x] According to Amos, if God did not reveal His will among us, neither would He act among us.

During the Savior's ministry, he called twelve Apostles to bear witness of him.^[xi] Through these Apostles revelation continued to guide the Church after Christ's ascension into heaven. After the original twelve, others were called to receive revelation, including Paul, who received his own witness of Christ.^[xii] Here is a man who, though he had been a persecutor of the Christians, had a remarkable vision wherein he heard the voice of Christ ask "why persecutest thou me?"^[xiii] His response is deeply meaningful and reveals the nature for which we ought to strive. Saul responded "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"^[xiv] How familiar and comforting are the promises given through Paul, that Christ's Church would be built on a "foundation of apostles and prophets with Christ as its chief cornerstone..."^[xv]

Thirty years ago, I was attending Arizona State University majoring in Religious Studies. In a course on the Old Testament, we received a semester-long assignment to draft a lengthy research paper known as an exegesis. An exegetical paper of the type we were assigned takes a few words of scripture, sometimes a full verse or more and studies the literary, linguistic, political, cultural, historical and religious background of the verse in an effort to understand, best we can in our day, the author's intent at the time the verse was written.^[xvi]

I selected for my paper a verse of scripture from the first chapter of Genesis that states: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."^[xvii] Near the end of the semester we turned in our lengthy papers. On the day our papers were handed back, we arrived the auditorium and took our seats. Our papers were in a tall stack on a small table at the front of the class. One by one our professor called us forward to return our paper. Finally, reaching the last paper on the table, he paused, holding it in his hands he declared "Now, we have a paper written from a most interesting perspective. We will now invite Mr. Bangerter forward to present and defend his paper during the remaining 40 minutes or so of our class." This was a class of masters and bachelor's degree candidates and as far as I know, I was the only member of the Church in the entire College of Religious Studies.

So, perhaps you can understand why I felt my heart pound within me as I stood, then walked down those steps to the front of the auditorium. It wasn't the presentation of the paper that gave rise to the concern – but the poignant questions I knew would follow. Those questions soon came as I completed my presentation which, as you can imagine spoke from a theological perspective distinct to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the moments that followed, I felt the comforting, strengthening and inspiring influence of God's Holy Spirit wash over me. Peace filled my mind, calmed my pounding heart and informed my witness that day. You see, within just a few minutes all questions, consuming the remainder of that class session, focused on the divine origin of the call of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I testified then and I bear you my solemn witness now that God continues His pattern of revelation and guidance through living prophets. He revealed Himself to Joseph Smith and called Joseph as the prophet through whom the restoration of His doctrine, His authority, and His direct, continuing guidance was once again reestablished on the earth. Think of it for a moment, had Joseph's description of his glorious call occurred by any other means, or been testified to by him in any other manner, it would have been inconsistent with God's pattern that was firmly rooted in 6,000 years of history. But it was consistent. Like Moses^[xviii], Joshua^[xix], Jeremiah^[xx], and Paul, Joseph Smith too felt inadequate for the call and the responsibility to bear the mantle of a Prophet. But, as with other prophets called throughout our recorded history, Joseph could not shrink from his divinely issued call.^[xxi]

In our day we hear the voices of the world challenge the words and teachings of living prophets. The world ridicules prophetic guidance, places derogatory labels on prophetic teaching and ascribes to prophets of our day demeaning titles such as “intolerant” or “uninformed”. The claim by their own, uninspired wisdom is that “one day the prophet will understand, one day he will have the truth revealed to him the way it has been revealed to me,” but brothers and sisters, such rhetoric has never been consistent with God’s order. As the world rails against prophetic teaching in our day, “so [the world] persecuted [the] prophets” throughout history.[\[xxii\]](#)

Today, as I stand before you, were I to have the wish of my heart for you, it would be that you would clearly see God’s Plan, that you would have eyes to see the consistency with which He has always worked through His prophets to teach us His word and His glorious Plan of Happiness.

Now, we return to Sister Bangerter’s invitation. Her invitation means everything to you. Are you willing to seek God’s will in your life, and then the pivotal question, are you willing to immediately make course corrections now that will bring you happiness and joy in this life and through the eternities? In seeking God’s will for you, in discerning His voice among all the commotion of life, you are assured that God’s counsel for you will always include the guidance and direction we receive through his living prophets. So, do you know what President Nelson is teaching in our day? What is his focus? What words of counsel is he providing? If I mention the words “Gathering Israel” and “Covenant Path” does that strike a familiar chord within you? If so, then you are listening. Think of the meaning of those words in your life. “Covenant Path” refers to those covenants we make as we participate in the saving ordinances of the gospel. Saving ordinances include, baptism, confirmation, for men ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood, for both men and women “covenant path” includes being endowed with temple blessings and receiving the crowning blessings of sealing across the holy altar of the temple. These are known as “saving ordinances” and they are all necessary for exaltation.[\[xxiii\]](#)

Why the heightened, laser focus by President Nelson on the covenant path? Recall for a moment the singular purpose for which Joseph Smith went to the grove that beautiful spring morning. The desire of his heart was simply to know which of all the churches he should join.[\[xxiv\]](#) In response to his prayer of faith the heavens were opened and God the Father and His son, our Savior Jesus Christ appeared. The answer to Joseph’s question? – He should join none of them. This was a response he had never before imagined. The Lord explained, “they [have] a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.”[\[xxv\]](#) Joseph wouldn’t fully come to understand what the Lord meant that day by His references to other churches having a “form of godliness, but...[denying] the power thereof” until many years later. In September, 1832 the Lord visited the prophet to provide detailed doctrine and practices regarding the priesthood, its offices and duties. In the midst of that revelation the Lord made clear to Joseph what He meant all those years ago in that grove of trees in upstate New York, when he directed that Joseph join none of the churches. Now, twelve years later the Savior taught:

“...this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh.”[\[xxvi\]](#)

In the sacred grove, the Lord was teaching Joseph the need for His church to have the authority of the priesthood of God, together with the saving ordinances of the gospel in order that the power of godliness could open for us the mysteries of heaven. That is what occurs in the midst of the ordinances. It is there, at the waters of baptism, during the confirmation as the Gift of the Holy Ghost is received, or as the priests kneel before the sacred emblems of the sacrament and render pleadings to heaven, “Oh God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless...”,[\[xxvii\]](#) it is in those moments that we come to think the way God thinks and feel the way He feels. It is within the walls of the holy temple as we participate in sacred ordinances that we receive gems of knowledge, even a knowledge of things necessary to “enable us to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels,...and gain [our] exaltation.”[\[xxviii\]](#)

As the prophet Alma explained: “...these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God...”[\[xxix\]](#)

Note Alma’s words, the ordinances are given to enable us to one day look “on” our Savior. The ordinances enable us to feel the way God feels and think the way God thinks. In this process the veil thins for us, little by little as we consistently engage to gather scattered Israel and with them enjoy the blessings of the saving ordinances of the gospel, the veil for us thins and we come closer to God. These are the reasons the prophet of our day, President Russell M. Nelson calls us to a remembrance of the sacred significance of the covenant path. By inviting all to that path we are like Lehi, pleading with his family to follow the straight path to the tree of life and partake of the blessings of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice. That path is the covenant path.

My dear brothers and sisters, I leave with you my ordained witness that Jesus is the Christ, our Lord and Redeemer. That he lives, and that He guides this, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through His chosen prophet and apostles, consistent with the pattern He established. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

[\[i\]](#) Moses 5:4-9

[\[ii\]](#) Moses 5:25-26

[\[iii\]](#) Moses 6:27

[\[iv\]](#) Genesis 6:8-9; 2 Peter 2:5

[\[v\]](#) Genesis 17:1-19

[\[vi\]](#) Exodus 3:1-15

[\[vii\]](#) Numbers 27:18-19; Deuteronomy 3:28

[\[viii\]](#) 1 Samuel 7:2-17

[\[ix\]](#) 2 Nephi 1:4

[\[x\]](#) Amos 3:7

[\[xi\]](#) Matthew 10:1-5

[\[xii\]](#) Acts 1:26; 6:5; 9:1-6

[\[xiii\]](#) Acts 9:4

[\[xiv\]](#) Acts 9:6

[\[xv\]](#) Ephesians 2:20; 4:11-14

[\[xvi\]](#) Trinity College, University of Toronto, “Guidelines for Writing an Exegetical Paper”, by The Reverend Dr. Glen Taylor, Wycliffe College, Revised November, 2012.

[\[xvii\]](#) Genesis 1:27

[\[xviii\]](#) Exodus 3:11

[\[xix\]](#) Joshua 1:6-7

[\[xx\]](#) Jeremiah 1:6

[\[xxi\]](#) JSH 1:24 -25

[\[xxii\]](#) Matthew 5:12

[\[xxiii\]](#) www.lds.org/topics/ordinances?lang=eng

[\[xxiv\]](#) JSH 1:10, 18

[\[xxv\]](#) JSH 1:19

[\[xxvi\]](#) Doctrine and Covenants 84:19-21

[\[xxvii\]](#) Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79

[\[xxviii\]](#) Journal of Discourses 2:31

[\[xxix\]](#) Alma 13:16