Spiritual Independence

- growing up I used to ask my father all kinds of questions, and he always seemed to have answers. He was a bishop, stake president, mission president, area representative, worked for CES, temple sealer. I had complete trust in his gospel knowledge...

- as I've gotten older, my questions about life have gotten more complex. I still ask my dad at times and have come to realize that he doesn't have all the answers. There are things he doesn't know. Initially that really bothered me. How come my dad didn't have answers? The gospel was his job, he's served in so many Church callings, how come he doesn't know?

- I've recently also had a whole bunch of friends, who have left the Church. They got frustrated when they encountered parts of the Church history that didn't make sense to them. Confused by the perceived inconsistencies they left and the frustration that no one could explain to them what exactly happened or what certain things meant, they left the Church

- Recently in a Relief Society lesson we had some tricky questions come up that the teacher didn't have a clear answer to. She suggested we ask a priesthood holder about it, and they could help us.

- You may wonder what these things all have in common, and what I'm going to speak about today. I would like to speak a little about what I'm going to call spiritual independence. I want to talk about our personal relationship with Heavenly Father and how we can or should turn to him for answers and guidance.

I would like to start off talking about one of our prophets - Joseph Smith. Joseph also encountered a point in his life where the people around him couldn't provide him with clear answers. He went to many different Churches, and I would imagine that he talked with his family members, and yet, he wasn't sure what he should do or who he should believe. We read in the Joseph Smith History:

**10 In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be a**[**right**](http://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&query=Joseph+Smith,+first+vision)**, which is it, and how shall I know it?**

**11 While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the** [**Epistle of**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/james/1.5?lang=eng) **a**[**James, first chapter and fifth verse**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/james/1.5?lang=eng)**, which reads: *If any of you lack b***[***wisdom***](http://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&query=Joseph+Smith,+first+vision)***, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.***

**12 Never did any passage of a**[**scripture**](http://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&query=Joseph+Smith,+first+vision) **come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed b**[**wisdom**](http://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&query=Joseph+Smith,+first+vision) **from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects c**[**understood**](http://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&query=Joseph+Smith,+first+vision) **the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.**

**13 At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in a**[**darkness**](http://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&query=Joseph+Smith,+first+vision) **and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to “ask of God,” concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would b**[**give**](http://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&query=Joseph+Smith,+first+vision) **liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture.**

I love this part of Joseph Smith's personal conversion story. I served my mission in Greece. One common problem we encountered when we tried to teach people in Greece was that we had a hard time to get them to read the scriptures, even if it was just the bible. They often felt that whatever they read, they needed a priest to explain it to them first, or that they had to ask their priests for permission to talk with us or pray with us. Joseph, I think, was still encountering some similar religious behaviors like I saw in Greece on my mission. For a long time, the Catholic Church or the Protestant Church were "the authority" in all things religion. People relied on what priests and ministers told them, and how they interpreted the scriptures. And then we have Joseph Smith. A young boy, confused, unsure, full of questions, who turns to the scriptures, reads, and then tries to find his own answer. Heavenly Father restored many things when he spoke with Joseph Smith, but I think the First Vision provides us with one exceptional experience: personal revelation. After centuries of people relying on others for their connection to God, here God is, speaking to man, answering questions! How different things would have been if Joseph wouldn't have had the courage to go and get his personal answers, to ask directly of the Lord.

We have many other examples in the scriptures of people turning to the Lord to receive guidance and inspiration.

In Enos we read**:** **4 And my soul a**[**hungered**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/enos/1?lang=eng&query=Enos)**; and I b**[**kneeled**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/enos/1?lang=eng&query=Enos) **down before my Maker, and I c**[**cried**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/enos/1?lang=eng&query=Enos) **unto him in mighty d**[**prayer**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/enos/1?lang=eng&query=Enos) **and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens.**

Nephi wanted to know and see what his father had seen. He says:  **1 For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat a**[**pondering**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/11?lang=eng) **in mine heart I was b**[**caught**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/11?lang=eng) **away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high c**[**mountain**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/11?lang=eng)**, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot.**

And then the spirit went and showed to Nephi the dream that his father had been shown as well.

When I look at these examples from the scriptures, it seems to me that there is a pattern for learning or getting answers from our Heavenly Father. Pattern of finding answers is to think for ourselves, study, pray, ponder... **DnC 9:8  But, behold, I say unto you, that you must a**[**study**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9?lang=eng) **it out in your b**[**mind**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9?lang=eng)**; then you must c**[**ask**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9?lang=eng) **me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your d**[**bosom**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9?lang=eng) **shall e**[**burn**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9?lang=eng) **within you; therefore, you shall f**[**feel**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/9?lang=eng) **that it is right.**

**DnC 109:7 And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best a**[**books**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/109?lang=eng&query=study) **words of wisdom, seek learning even by study and also by faith;**

**DnC 98:**  **12 For he will a**[**give**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/98?lang=eng&query=precept) **unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will b**[**try**](http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/98?lang=eng&query=precept) **you and prove you herewith.**

examples: Jared's brother, Joseph Smith's revelations result of asking (ie. DnC 89 - Word of Wisdom), or Declaration No. 2 says it came after much pondering: **President Kimball has asked that I advise the conference that after he had received this revelation, which came to him after extended meditation and prayer in the sacred rooms of the holy temple, he presented it to his counselors, who accepted it and approved it.**

- Heavenly Father wants us to learn to think for ourselves, to ponder, to study, and then come to him. I feel that the process of receiving answers shouldn't just be a simply "mana raining from heaven process" but that it involves our effort. However, the beautiful thing is that we've been shown that God DOES answers us, as we diligently seek wisdom, and knowledge. In fact, he has given us the Holy Ghost which will teach us all things**: John 14 26 But the a**[**Comforter**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/john/14.26?lang=eng)**, which is the b**[**Holy Ghost**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/john/14.26?lang=eng)**, whom the Father will send in my c**[**name**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/john/14.26?lang=eng)**, he shall d**[**teach**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/john/14.26?lang=eng) **you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.27 a**[**Peace I**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/john/14.26?lang=eng) **leave with you, my b**[**peace**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/john/14.26?lang=eng) **I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be c**[**troubled**](http://lds.org/scriptures/nt/john/14.26?lang=eng)**, neither let it be afraid.**

- we have been given this gift of the Holy Ghost, who can guide us closer to our Heavenly Father and help us find answers to any questions we have, anything we don't understand, any advice we need...

**Elder Poelman, 1984 Conference Talk: Every church member has ~~not only~~ the opportunity, right, and privilege to receive a personal witness regarding gospel principles and Church practices, ~~but has the need and obligation to obtain such assurance by exercising his free agency, thereby fulfilling one purpose of his mortal probation.~~Without such assurance, one may feel confused and perhaps even burdened by what may appear to be simply institutional requirements of the Church. I ~~ndeed, it is not enough that~~ we obey the commandments and counsel of Church leaders. ~~In response to~~ study, prayer and by the influence of the Holy Spirit we may seek and obtain an individual, personal witness that the principle or counsel is correct and divinely inspired. Gospel living is a process of continuous individual renewal and improvement until the person is prepared and qualified to enter comfortably and with confidence into the presence of God.**

**Elder Bednar 2010 Conference Talk: Praying, studying, gathering, worshipping, serving, and obeying are not isolated and independent items on a lengthy gospel checklist of things to do. Rather, each of these righteous practices is an important element in an overarching spiritual quest to fulfill the mandate to receive the Holy Ghost. The commandments from God we obey and the inspired counsel from Church leaders we follow principally focus upon obtaining the companionship of the Spirit. Fundamentally, all gospel teachings and activities are centered on coming unto Christ by receiving the Holy Ghost in our lives.**

**Brigham YOung taught:** [Brigham Young](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigham_Young) taught "the greatest fear I have is that the people of this Church will accept what we say as the will of the Lord without first praying about it and getting the witness within their own hearts that what we say is the word of the Lord."

- it is so important that we learn to live our lives guided by the promptings of the Holy Ghost, that we trust in this gift, and know that we can receive answers. Of course, it's ok to ask a priesthood holder, for example, about something that we don't understand. It's ok to ask anyone really. Part of the studying process certainly includes talking with other people, and looking in all corners of the world for wisdom and inspiration. But it's important that we have trust that in the end WE, as individuals, can receive the guidance and answers we seek for our lives. When we ask in faith, our Heavenly Father will speak to us.

**12 And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the a**[**rock**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/hel/5?lang=eng) **of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your b**[**foundation**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/hel/5?lang=eng)**; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty c**[**storm**](http://lds.org/scriptures/bofm/hel/5?lang=eng) **shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.**

**2 Timothy 1:7** For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.