

The path to follow God is always fraught with peril.

King Benjamin said Mosiah 4:29-30: "I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them. But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not."

So it is practically impossible for us to avoid errors by putting together a list of what to avoid.

Then there is the weakness of mind and spirit of mankind. As Moroni discussed the ministering of angels:

neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of **strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness**. And the office of their ministry is to **call men unto repentance**, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. (Moroni 7:29-31.)

These things:

- Firm mind
- Every form of godliness
- Call to repentance
- Fulfill and do the work of the covenants
- Bear testimony of Him

Are the essential things that are needed. Not a fanciful or flowery imagination. Nor to bear testimony of ourselves. Nor to do something other than to fulfill and do the work of the covenants.

Therefore use these as a guide when you consider all the competing claims now being made.

We are vulnerable to being misled even as we claim to be “inspired”. This is from a recent study:

“Religion appears to serve as a moral compass for the vast majority of people around the world. It informs whether same-sex marriage is love or sin, whether war is an act of security or of terror, and whether abortion rights represent personal liberty or permission to murder. Many religions are centered on a god (or gods) that has beliefs and intentions, with adherents encouraged to follow “God's will” on everything from martyrdom to career planning to voting. Within these religious systems, how do people know what their god wills?

“When people try to infer other people's attitudes and beliefs, they often do so egocentrically by using their own beliefs as an inductive guide. This research examines the extent to which people might also reason egocentrically about God's beliefs. We predicted that people would be consistently more egocentric when reasoning about God's beliefs than when reasoning about other people's beliefs. Intuiting God's beliefs on important issues may not produce an independent guide, but may instead serve as an echo chamber that reverberates one's own beliefs.

“The Jewish and Christian traditions state explicitly that God created man in his own image, but believers and nonbelievers alike have long argued that people seem to create God in their own image as well.”
(Believers' estimates of God's beliefs are more egocentric than estimates of other people's beliefs, by Nicholas Epley, Benjamin A. Conversea, Alexa Delboscb, George A. Monteleonec and John T. Cacioppoc, proceedings of the National Academy of Science, July 27, 2009, Vol 106, No. 51—reporting on 7 different studies in this area.)

The greatest help given to solve this contradiction is the scriptures. They provide us a lifeline for measuring any inspiration we think we obtain from God. But that is not enough if it is not coupled together with prayerful, ponderous thought, and time and experience. Compare these statements from Joseph:

“A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into

you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus." *DHC* 3:381, June 1839.

Which seems to suggest this happens quickly. But Joseph also said:

"A fanciful and flowery and heated imagination beware of; because the things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God." *TPJS*, p. 137, March 1839.

In a letter from Liberty Jail Joseph spoke about how frenzied his mind (and man's mind) can be when contemplating the many difficult issues we are called upon to confront. There are perpetual conundrums and contradictions that we face. Some are of our own making, but others are just inherent in living this existence. When we thoughtfully consider the challenges it seizes the mind and, like Joseph in Liberty Jail, makes us reflect upon so many things with the avidity of lightning "until finally all enmity, malice and hatred, and past differences, misunderstandings and mismanagements are slain victorious at the feet of hope; and when the heart is sufficiently contrite, then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers[.]"

God's most important inspiration for the most challenging subjects is often not hasty, quick and without effort at our end. Consider the advice to Oliver Cowdery that he must "study it out in his own mind first" before asking God to tell him the answer. Many people want a quick, perfunctory response from God with no forethought. What they receive in turn is a quick, perfunctory answer.

God is almost always, for the most difficult challenges, not a "short order cook" although there are certainly false spirits who are willing to be just that.

I asked God in October what the term “mutual agreement” as used in the Answer meant. But before asking God I had hesitated and pondered the issue for two months. I discussed it with my wife and with several others, and then discussed again with my wife the views I heard from others. I read emails from people involved in an active discussion about the meaning of the term.

It requires humility to approach God and ask for His answer and yet more humility to know it is from Him and not my own ego, presumptions, hopes, desires, wants and conceit. It is for me, as it was for Joseph, only “when the heart is sufficiently contrite, then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers” the truth. That comes from a pure source, higher than myself and more filled with light than any man. Certainly, greater light than I have.

When the definition was given, it was accompanied by the realization the Lord could have disputed every day of His life with someone. He deliberately chose to not contend. He was not an argumentative personality.

The more we contend with others the more we are taken captive by the spirit of contention. We become subject to the spirit we submit to follow. Those who are prone to contention become more contentious as they listen to that spirit. Eventually they are overcome by that spirit and it is a great work involving great effort to subdue and dismiss that spirit from the heart and mind of its victim.

Prayer for Covenant: It took months of pondering testing, questioning beforehand to even ask. The idea presented to my mind was that Joseph’s prayer at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple was a pattern to be followed when some great event involving God was to take place. The House of the Lord was one such event. But having a new volume of scripture was at least equally important. Therefore a prayer to God asking for His acceptance was an idea that continued to press upon my mind.

But it concerned me that the idea of my offering that prayer may be based on my own will, and not heaven’s. Before proceeding I questioned my motive, my desire, and why I would even ask. But I was haunted by the continuing impression that it needed to be done and was required of me. Finally, when the idea could not be shaken from my mind I determined it was not my own thought but God’s beckoning voice telling me this was an obligation I needed to act on and not suppress. Think of Joseph’s description: “Never did any passage of scripture 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[.]”

When I began to compose the prayer, the content was provided by inspiration from Heaven, and not my own words.

There are those who have claimed inspiration on very important matters who make decisions quickly. Almost as soon as they finish a prayer asking for something they assume the first thing that pops into their mind is God’s infallible answer. I do not doubt that may happen, for it has happened to me. But for the most important things, I have found that careful, ponderous and solemn thought and meditation over time produces God’s will and word with clarity that does not happen in haste.

Plural marriage history is very convoluted and difficult. Easy to reach a decision without the labor of careful, solemn, ponderous and searching thought to determine the truth. When announced in 1852 focus was on Constitution of US. Why that focus? If it begins with Adam bringing “one of his wives” why isn’t that much more important to relate? The practice, if of Divine origin, should have a great body of scripture and truth to back it, why focus on something as comparatively trivial as the then 100 year old Constitution? Took me several decades of searching before I felt qualified to reach a conclusion on the topic.

27 years of preparation and pursuit to find God.

If a group spend months focused on a challenge, and then many hours together and individually discussing, searching, praying and looking to heaven for guidance, then reach a conclusion they can all individually and collectively testify came from heaven, how can we adequately test their outcome without giving it careful, solemn, ponderous thought and take the time to test and retest the answer we get.

People who can make truly inspired snap decisions are far better at obtaining God’s voice than am I. For gravely important matters it takes me a great deal of wrestling with heaven before I can trust that I am humble enough before God to accept what He has to offer and exclude all of what I want, hope and intend. Those who have a “short order cook” for their God can do what I cannot.

There are many who dispute the inspiration others have received. I have two concerns with the decision a good person makes to dispute with others: First, the Lord's example is to refrain from disputing, as He did. When confronted He would respond, but He did not go about picking a fight with others. He responded. The only exception was when He went up to Jerusalem to be slain. Then He went into the seat of Jewish power and authority to throw it down and provoke their decision to finally judge, reject and crucify Him. He, and not they, controlled that timing. His provocation at that time was a deliberate act on His part because His "time had come" for the sacrifice.

Second, there are the Lord's teachings:

3 Ne. 11: 28-30: "neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been. For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away." The Lord then declares The Doctrine of Christ.

The more we contend and dispute with one another the better we become at contention. We polish the rhetorical skills to oppose others. That spirit of contention can take possession of us and when it does, we are hard-pressed to be a peacemaker with others. Matt 5:7-9: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

But peace should not be made at the cost of truth. Truth must be the only goal. Truth, however, belongs to God. Our desires, appetites and passions are prone to make us stray well beyond the bounds set by our Lord.

Therefore when our pride is gratified, we should question if what we are advancing is truth.

When our ambition is served, we should question if we are in the Lord's employ or our own.

When we insist upon control, we should question if we are like our Lord or instead like His adversary.

When we use any means for compelling others, we should wonder if we are mocking the God who makes the sun to shine and rain to fall on all His fallen children without compulsion.

When we display unrighteous dominion, we should question whether we are worthy of any dominion at all.

Our tools must be

-persuasion

-gentleness

-meekness

-unfeigned love

-pure knowledge

All mustered “without compulsory means” to persuade others to accept the truth.