



Navigating Your Faith Journey: Use Your Heart

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How can you make sure your heart is in the right place on your faith journey? Start with sincerity.

Part 2 in a 4 part series. Previous essay: [Navigating Your Faith Journey: Questioning is Good](#),

In this article, we provide suggestions for how to use your heart to more fruitfully navigate your faith journey. This follows our initial article where we argued that questioning, if done properly, can be a healthy part of your journey to a deeper, richer faith, and that while doubt is not a sin, it simply isn't very helpful. Here we will start to

offer a few suggestions for how to go about questioning more effectively and productively. Across a series of three articles, we will talk about the role of the heart, the head, and the hands in navigating your faith journey. We take this approach because we are psychologists, and psychologists study emotions (heart), thoughts (head), and actions (hands) to better understand what being human means. Thus, we think this triadic approach can help to capture the various ways we can invest our whole selves in the vital process of better understanding what our faith means and finding answers to specific questions about it.

Why start with the heart? The heart is like the engine, the head is like the steering wheel, and the hands are like the tires. It always helps to have nice power steering and good tires, but if the engine isn't working, you're not going anywhere, or at least not very fast or reliably. Just as the engine is the most important part of the car, your heart is the most important part of your faith journey. In the Saviors "Parable of the Sower," He taught that for us to understand His word, and for it to bear fruit, we need good soil (Matthew 13: 19-23). According to the parable, our soil can't be dry, stony, or thorny. In other words, our soil should be wet, soft, and free of weeds, ready to receive the seed. Otherwise, no matter how good the seed, no matter what beautiful thing it could grow into, nothing productive will happen. To frame what we are talking about here, we are going to use the acronym SHOW as we outline how it is possible to "show" God that our soil is good.

The "S" in SHOW stands for *Sincere*. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word "sincere" means honest (free of deception or pretense), pure (free of adulteration), and true (marked by genuineness). Indeed, as part of what is often referred to as "Moroni's promise," we are assured that if we ask God "with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ," we will be taught the truth through the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:4). Applied to your faith journey, this means you might ask yourself the following questions:

Just as the engine is the most important part of the car, your heart is the most important part of your faith journey.

1. *Are the questions I have really MY questions, the questions that I really want answers to, or are they just questions I've read or heard from others?* Dr. Jared Halverson, a religion professor and scholar of anti-Mormon rhetoric, has found that

often when students come to him with questions, the student's themselves aren't really invested in those specific questions. There is typically some **deeper concern**. We might have what Elder Lawrence E. Corbridge calls "**primary questions**" about foundational issues (e.g., Is there a God?), but spend a lot of time and energy going from one "secondary question" to the next. This can lead us to spend a lot of time "going down the rabbit hole," so to speak, but never really coming face-to-face with their deepest, most pressing question.

2. *Am I willing to accept any answer I receive from God, or have I already decided that only certain answers will count for me?* In the Book of Mormon, King Lamoni's father was seeking knowledge of God, and told Aaron, "Behold, I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may receive this great joy" (Alma 22:15). Now that's a sincere heart! In our day, Joseph Smith's heart must have been exceptionally sincere when he sought answers from God in his first uttered prayer, a prayer that ultimately involved God trusting him with restoring His Church in these latter-days. Ultimately, Joseph gave his life in following the answer he received to his question. In short, it is key that we always remember that ultimately it is answers from God we are seeking, even as we consult with and learn from others, and that we are never under any obligation to accept answers that come from any other source than God.

3. *Am I ready to follow whatever answer I receive?* Elder Dallin H. Oaks put it this way, "I do not ask out of curiosity but with total sincerity to act on the answer to my prayer." For, the Lord has said, "for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have" (2 Nephi 28:30). Not only that, but He also said, "For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation" (Doctrine and Covenants 82:3). In other words, if we don't really do anything with the revelation we are given, God is less likely to give us more, in part out of grace to keep us from being held accountable for it.

The "H" in SHOW represents *Humble*. Humility is the opposite of pride, so lacks haughtiness or arrogance. But it also implies submissiveness and an acknowledgment of our lower place in the hierarchy. We love Proverbs 11:2 here, which says, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." In other words, be careful how smart you think you are, or you might end up doing something quite

foolish! Regarding your faith journey, this means asking yourself the following questions:

1. *Am I teachable?* The teachable part of humility is often referred to as “meekness.” Elder David A. Bednar describes meekness as “a particular spiritual receptivity to learning both from the Holy Ghost and from people who may seem less capable, experienced, or educated, who may not hold important positions, or who otherwise may not appear to have much to contribute” (April, 2018).
2. *Do I acknowledge the limitations of human understanding, and in particular my own understanding?* The Lord instructed the prophet Isaiah that “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). We find it amusing that, given the mess our world is in these days, anyone would presume having anything figured out based solely on human perception and understanding.
3. *Am I willing to admit many others have studied my questions a lot longer than I have?* We are confident that no matter what your question is, you are not the first person to have that question. It is likely your question has been pondered, debated, and studied for decades, centuries, or even millennia. Often the people doing so have advanced degrees in the topic and have studied it as part of their career. So, don’t presume you can emerge on the scene, do a little of your own “research,” and suddenly have THE answer. Most important questions take time, sustained effort, and persistence before yielding satisfying answers. Indeed, some of the most personally and spiritually important questions we can ask may well take a lifetime of study, contemplation, and experience to work through to a meaningful resolution.

It is important to be clear about the true nature of humility. It is easy to misunderstand what it means to be humble and equate it with being so open-minded or self-effacing that you never take a firm stand on any issues, always deferring to others. While being humble means being teachable, open-minded, and willing to learn from others and question your own assumptions, it also means that you are prepared to give yourself over fully and meekly to God, ready to do His will and follow His counsel even in the face of opposition. Being humble in this sense means that we recognize that it is possible to be *too* cautious about coming to conclusions and overly hesitant about

acting on the truth as we come to know it. It is vital that we remember that being humble and teachable is not compatible with confidently making judgments about what is true, even in the face of challenge from those who disagree, and especially in light of spiritual confirmations that come from the Lord. As the Christian philosopher [Dietrich Von Hildebrand](#) wisely taught, “humility is above all a recognition of the glory of God, and in a secondary sense only, a recognition of our own unimportance.”

The “O” in SHOW stands for “Openness.” In the New Testament, openness was a key characteristic that differentiated Jesus’ followers from his critics. His followers were empty vessels eager to be filled, while his critics were full vessels resistant to receiving anything more. Indeed, Christ’s lesson about the consequences of trying to put “new wine into old bottles” (Mark 2:22) illustrates this point nicely. More recently, Elder Dale G. Renlund [taught](#) the importance of openness to receiving ongoing personal revelation from God. On your faith journey, we encourage you to ask yourself the following questions:

When our heart is truly ready, we can more fully engage our head and our hands in our personal faith journey.

1. *Am I truly open to letting go of my preconceived ideas and assumptions?* It’s hard for God to give us a round peg when the only hole for truth we will permit is a square one. In the Salem Witch Trials, the accused were asked questions such as, “How long have you been practicing witchcraft?” More recently, leading up to the Iraq War, U.S. officials asked, “Where are Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction?” Clearly, in both cases, the questions were asked with certain preconceived ideas in place, to which only a narrow range of possible answers we allowed or sought. When we are truly seeking answers to our questions, it is vital that we take time to consider what our typically taken for granted assumptions might be. It is especially important to be aware of [how our assumptions might close down certain avenues of discovery](#), steering us in one direction when we really need to be going in another. It is often the case that we experience a faith crisis because we’ve absorbed some fundamentally secular assumptions about the nature of God or the meaning of faith, revelation, sexuality, identity or whatnot that we now take for granted as being unquestionable, plain old common sense, and just the ways things are. Then, in turn, those assumptions frame our questions or concerns in ways that make it difficult for religious teachings and practices to provide convincing or

“rational” answers. Thus, it is often “hidden,” unacknowledged secular assumptions that create for us our doubts and crises of faith, all of which could likely be avoided or more fruitfully navigated were we more [aware of their secular or cultural origins](#).

2. *Am I open to letting go of my own expectations for when and how God will answer my questions?* Perhaps the most epic example of this was the Jews praying for a Savior for millennia, but then not recognizing Him when He came among them, all because their expectations for the coming of the Messiah were too narrow and rigid. They expected a military leader who would deliver them from Roman rule, not a spiritual leader who would deliver them from sin and death. Of course, having expectations is not a bad thing. We all have them. The problem here was that so many of the Jews actively resisted questioning or reconsidering their expectations about the Messiah and how he might come among them. More personally, if we trust that God is all-knowing and all-powerful, then we can trust He knows what’s best for us. And, as a loving Father in Heaven, he relates to us individually, in our own personal way. As C. S. Lewis conveyed, “My idea of God is a not divine idea. It has to be shattered from time to time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence?” And you are likely familiar with his [parable of the house](#), where he demonstrates how God intends much more thorough renovations of our lives than we would like or can even imagine. Hence, the recent invitation by President Russell M. Nelson to learn to “Hear Him.” Explore how God speaks to you personally. It may be through His word in the scriptures, or from modern prophets (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It may be through the testimonies of others (Doctrine and Covenants 46:14). It may be through thoughts in your mind, or feelings in your heart (Doctrine and Covenants 8:2). It may be through music (Doctrine and Covenants 25:12). It may be through the beauty of the earth and being in nature (Alma 30:44). It could be aided by mindfulness practices ([At-one-ment](#), Thomas McConkie). Learn how to “Hear Him” for yourself. Then, as they say in 12-step programs, “Let go, and let God.”

3. *Am I open to a variety of ways of learning truth, including observation, reason, and revelation?* Recently, [Elder Dale G. Renlund](#) taught the strengths and limitations of each, with poignant examples. Observation is important to verifying truth, but it can also be misleading. Reason is important for understanding truth, but it doesn’t always work in the real world. Both observation and reason can build faith, but they are constrained by mortality, hence the need for revelation. When he recently spoke at BYU, [Dallas Jenkins](#), the director of the television series *The Chosen*, testified that “God does

impossible math.” Thus, we ought not to let human observation and reason put limits on what God can teach us and do for us.

The “W” in SHOW stands for *Willingness*. Everything we have already discussed pertaining to being sincere, humble, and open relies on willingness. Agency is fundamental to God’s plan. We learn this from the books of Abraham and Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, particularly regarding the premortal council in heaven, and the numerous Book of Mormon passages that teach about our freedom to choose. Elder D. Todd Christofferson articulated it this way, “It is His plan and His will that we have the principal decision-making role in our own life’s drama. God will not live our lives for us nor control us as if we were His puppets, as Lucifer once proposed to do” (October, 2014). On your faith journey, it will be important to ask yourself these questions:

1. *Am I truly willing to have a change of heart?*
2. *Am I truly willing to have a change of mind?*
3. *Am I truly willing to change how I live my life?*

As we stated earlier, we are focusing on how you can use your heart, head, and hands on your faith journey. But if you are not willing to do what must be done to see your questions through to their authentic answers, then the whole process is a futile endeavor doomed from the beginning. Elder Deiter F. Uchtdorf taught a powerful lesson several years ago in General Conference about how even very small navigation errors can lead airplanes way off track and send them far from their intended destination. As such, it is vital that you embark on your faith journey with willingness, not only a desire for meaningful answers but a commitment to seeking them out in the best way possible and then acting with full purpose as those answers dictate. Hence why Elder Dale G. Renlund [encouraged](#) us to have an “inclination toward faith” as we proceed on our faith journeys.

We hope these suggestions can help you SHOW God that you have good soil, ready for the seeds of His word to be planted and grow. As Alma instructed in the Book of Mormon, if we allow the seed of word of God to be planted in the soil of our hearts, and then nourish it, the seed can grow into a plant that bears fruits in our lives, and this will give us knowledge. Similarly, the experience of Enos teaches us about how the word of

God he had learned from his father “sunk deep into [his] heart,” preparing him for very personal revelation and very profound spiritual transformation (Enos 1: 3). When our heart is truly ready, we can more fully engage our head and our hands in our personal faith journey. In forthcoming essays, we will discuss in greater detail how to use your head and hands to navigate your faith journey.

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