



## Navigating Your Faith Journey: Use Your Hands

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*What does it take to grow in faith? Asking, studying, acting, and choosing guide believers to truth and peace.*

*Previous essays: [Navigating Your Faith Journey: Questioning is Good](#), [Navigating Your Faith Journey: Use Your Heart](#), [Navigating Your Faith Journey: Use Your Head](#)*

This is the fourth essay in a series on Navigating Your Faith Journey. In the first essay, we argued that careful, thoughtful questioning is not only acceptable but can be helpful to your faith journey. Then we promised three follow-up essays in the series where we would provide guidance on how to go about navigating your faith journey productively using your heart, head, and hands. In this final essay, we will focus on the role of your hands, or in other words, the need to put in the necessary work to successfully navigate your faith journey. As we noted in the third essay, we realize it is a bit artificial to think

that human beings can be broken down into separate parts like hearts, heads, and hands. Obviously, you need your heart (emotion) and head (thought) to engage in work (action). But, to use our car analogy from earlier, to be able to get anywhere, in addition to having an engine (heart) and steering wheel (head), you need to have tires. In other words, work (using your hands) is where the “rubber hits the road.”

A big part of the work of a faith journey is questioning, which involves asking questions, seeking answers, and then trying to act on those answers. This formula was outlined by Jesus when He taught His disciples to “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). Asking involves praying, seeking involves pondering and studying, and knocking involves acting on what we learn and observing the effects on our lives. Then, ultimately, as [Elder Neil Anderson](#) taught, “faith is not by chance, but by choice.”

The first step is to *ask*. We ask by praying to God. Nephi declared that God “... knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it” (2 Nephi 9:20). So, God is the ultimate source of truth. We can receive truth from Him as personal revelation, often through the Holy Ghost. The scripture that inspired Joseph Smith’s prayer in the sacred grove was: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). And when we ask God, “... the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in [Christ’s] name, he shall teach [us] all things ...” (John 14:20). But our ability to receive personal revelation depends on how we approach God in prayer, as we discussed in our second essay on the heart. Jesus demonstrated how to pray, and it involved asking both to know God’s will and expressing a sincere commitment to doing God’s will. He told the Father, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). We also need to “ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:6). And, we need to “[hearken](#),” which means “to listen with the intent to obey.” As [Elder Richard G. Scott](#) taught us, it is also helpful to write down our impressions. God gives revelation “line upon line, precept upon precept” (2 Nephi 28:30), so we are likely to receive more if we take seriously what He gives us.

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The second step is to *study*, or “seek,” as some scriptures suggest. In other words, we need to put in the work to learn about the gospel and the Church. We have been instructed to “... seek learning even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118). And as Joseph Smith declared, “A man [or woman] is saved no faster than he [or she] gets knowledge. ...” However, sometimes we fear more knowledge, wondering if it might lead us away from the Church. This is especially true when it comes to matters of church history. But, as Elder J. Reuben Clark was known to say, “If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation.” Thus, more knowledge of the gospel and the Church should lead to deeper faith and stronger commitment. The truth is on our side. In fact, some people who leave the Church only to return later note that they originally left because they didn’t know enough—though, at the time, they thought they did. However, once they learned more and had studied things out a bit more carefully, they returned (see the [Come Back Podcast](#)). The Lord has been clear that we need to study “the best books” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118), and nowadays that would include the best magazines, websites, blogs, podcasts, and so on. As we noted in our essay about using your head on your faith journey, not all sources of information are created equal. In that same essay, we also talked about the myth of objectivity. Often, people look for “objective” sources about the gospel and the Church, or the sources themselves may claim to be “objective,” but there is no such thing as an objective perspective on anything. While it is often useful to get multiple, diverse perspectives, it is important to follow the guidelines outlined in our previous essay for evaluating sources. Examining and weighing alternative perspectives is central to making thoughtful, informed decisions. It is further helpful to appreciate that while there are always at least two sides to any issue, that doesn’t mean both sides are equally correct, consistent, or reliable. Also, remember the first rule of religious understanding by [Krister Stendahl](#), “When you are trying to understand another religion, you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies.”

The third step is to *act and observe*. This is the “knock” part of ask, seek, and knock. In addition to praying to seek personal revelation and learning about the gospel and the Church, it is also important to observe the effects of the gospel and the Church in our own life, the lives of others, and the world more broadly. Alma invites us to “experiment upon [God’s] words” (Alma 32:27). [Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary](#) defines “experiment” as “A trial; an act or operation designed to discover some unknown truth, principle, or effect, or to establish it when discovered.” In other words, just as scientists systematically conduct experiments to discover and verify truths about the temporal

world, we can, on a smaller scale, run our own case study experiments on the gospel in our own lives. If applying a gospel principle in our life warms our heart and enlightens our mind, we are on the right track—we have evidence of the truthfulness of the principle (Alma 32:28). As the Lord taught, “by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20 and 3 Ne. 14:20) because “a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit” (Luke 6:43-44). Thus, as we see changes in ourselves—such as in our personality, attitudes, habits, and relationships—that provides further evidence for the truthfulness of the principles, to the point that eventually we can say we “know” it is true (Alma 32:29-34). In this way, we can come to know the truth in a deeply personal, directly experiential way that speaks to both our hearts and our heads—but only if we do the work with our hands.

We could write an entire essay on the word *know*, and perhaps we will at some point. It seems we often restrict knowing to mean knowing with our senses—seeing, touching, hearing, tasting, and smelling. This is what philosophers call *empiricism*. It is only one of several ways of knowing, but it has become predominant in our society over the last few hundred years due to the scientific revolution, driven by pioneering thinkers like Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, John Locke, and René Descartes. Despite empiricism’s popularity—it is one of those often taken for granted assumptions we spoke about in the previous essay—it is not the only, or even necessarily the best way to “know” the truth or reality of things. Take just a moment and brainstorm some things you might say you “know” are true, but which you have not observed with your senses. For example, do you know by observation that the sun revolves around the moon, that humans have walked on the moon, that there is a continent called Antarctica, or that there was a European explorer named Columbus who sailed to America? Probably not. Have you observed with your senses your love for family members? Maybe you have observed actions that you infer are evidence of love, but have you directly observed love? Probably not. Thus, in our view, although quite helpful for addressing many questions, empirical knowing is often overrated. In both science and daily life, we claim to know a lot of things that we haven’t observed—and even some things we can’t observe—but for some reason when it comes to answering

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questions about the gospel and the Church we often demand and prioritize observable evidence as though it were the only type that counts. As you can see from our discussion of Alma above, we can also know the truth of things by our feelings, thoughts, and the consequences that certain experiences have in enlightening our minds and changing our lives.

In addition to observing the effects of the gospel in our own lives, we can also observe its effects on other people. Pioneering psychologist [Albert Bandura](#) called this *observational learning*. We might observe the impact on the lives of family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and others when they live or do not live the gospel. This helps us identify patterns and trends beyond just what we observe in our own lives. If we see something in our life and then see the same thing in other people's lives, we gain confidence in that principle. We are moving beyond the case study. And, in addition to observing the consequences of the gospel in our own lives and the lives of others around us, we can also learn a great deal by studying the lives of those who have gone before us (including in the scriptures). History often teaches many important truths by powerfully showing how the consequences of decisions and patterns of acting play out over time, for good or ill.

For decades, social scientists have studied the role of religion in people's lives. So, we can also look at the scientific evidence. Some of this research is [theoretical](#), where social scientists articulate models for the role of religion in life. Some of this research is [qualitative](#) and involves identifying themes in interviews with people about the role of religion in their lives and relationships. And some of the research is [quantitative](#), involving statistical analyses of outcomes of religion. Although there are exceptions, the bulk of the social sciences research suggests that religion leads to positive outcomes for individuals, families, and society. There is also [substantial evidence](#) that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are doing relatively well. Sociologist Christian Smith conducted the [largest study](#) ever of adolescent religious development in the United States. Based on his [in-depth analyses](#), he stated, "... in general comparisons among major U.S. religious traditions ... it is Mormon teenagers who are ... faring the best." One of his collaborators similarly claimed that "... topping the charts—in religious devotion, in overall well-being, in integration of faith and life—were the Mormons." In fact, she included a chapter in one of her books titled "[Mormon Envy](#)," where she speculated on why Latter-day Saint youth are doing so well compared to both youth of other faiths and those who are not religious. In short, for most people in most



situations, the gospel seems to work, and the Church seems to be doing something right. But we invite you to investigate the research yourself.

The fourth step is to *choose*. It seems like it would be awesome to know that if we effectively navigate our faith journey, it will invariably, unequivocally, lead us to a sure knowledge of the right answer to all our questions. But apparently God has other plans! It turns out that no amount of asking, seeking, or knocking will lead us directly to the definitive truth that will force our acceptance of it and compliance with it. There is always agency, which is so foundational to God's plan for us that he was willing to lose a third of the hosts of heaven over it before the world even started (Doctrine and Covenants 29:36-38). [Elder Dale G. Renlund](#) spoke to the important roles reason and observation play in coming to know truth (which we have discussed above as *study* and *act and observe*) but then concluded by noting that "As we use observation and reason to build faith, our own inclinations toward or away from faith are critical." He discussed the experiment encouraged by Alma that we noted above, and said that in this kind of experiment, "a favorable outcome depend[s] on an inclination to believe." Tying it together, he said, "When we start with an inclination to believe, observation leads to faith. As faith grows, reason facilitates the transformation of faith into revelatory knowledge, and revelatory knowledge produces added faith." On the other hand, "Faith atrophies when we shift our inclination away from faith towards skepticism and doubt." In short, asking, seeking, and knocking are important on our faith journey, but God usually leaves enough wiggle room that we must choose whether we want to lean toward or away from faith.

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We just described what we called the four action steps for doing the work on your faith journey. But we caution against thinking of these steps as a sequential checklist, as they may not always proceed in that order, and they are continually interconnected. We can think of ways in which each of the four steps motivates and informs the others. This is similar to how the [first principles and ordinances](#) are not a "one and done" effort, but a lifelong process.

We should also stress another crucial point: not all questions are equally worth asking. [Elder Lawrence Corbridge](#) distinguished primary questions from secondary questions. He suggests the following as four primary questions:

1. Is there a God who is our Father?
2. Is Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Savior of the World?
3. Was Joseph Smith a prophet?
4. Is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the kingdom of God on the earth?

These are primary because they constitute what many consider the [key elements of a “testimony.”](#) We would like to add a fifth question that could be considered a shortcut of sorts to answering the previous four questions: Is the Book of Mormon the word of God? Joseph Smith declared the Book of Mormon as the [“keystone of our religion.”](#) Further, [Elder Tad Callister](#) argued it can be the “keystone of our testimonies.” In essence, if we know the Book of Mormon is true, we will know that God is our Father, Jesus is the Christ, Joseph Smith was a prophet, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God’s restored church on the earth today. You may have a lot of other questions on your metaphorical “shelf,” as they say, but satisfactory answers to these primary questions will resolve most of those secondary questions. It doesn’t seem logical or efficient to gain a testimony of the Book of Mormon yet still hold onto doubt based on archeology regarding horses and elephants in the Americas!

Focusing on secondary questions leads down what some call the [“rabbit hole.”](#) It’s a never-ending pursuit because the possible questions are endless. Literal rabbit holes are dark, dank, and meandering, as are metaphorical ones! We can seek divine assistance in knowing what questions to ask. In numerous places throughout the scriptures, we are invited to pray for the Spirit to guide us in praying according to God’s will (Romans 8:26; 2 Nephi 32:8-9; Doctrine & Covenants 46:30). Our third essay in this series explained how questions may be guided (or misguided) by faulty assumptions about God, the nature of the universe, truth and knowing, and so forth.

Prioritize the Spirit (Holy Ghost) as your guide.

This concludes our four-part series of essays on navigating faith journeys. We hope we have provided some inspiration and guidance to help you along the way. Nevertheless, this is your individual journey. In some ways, we are all on the same journey, while in other ways, each journey is unique. As such, we encourage you to prioritize the Spirit (Holy Ghost) as your guide. In the words of Nephi, “For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5). Jesus also taught, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). And Moroni promised that, “... by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5). With a spin on the Jedi blessing, we close with “May the [Spirit] be with you.”

## About the authors

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