"Finding Your Own Sacred Grove"

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All of us have questions about our lives, our future, or our faith. Some questions can be answered by other people. Some can only be answered by God.

Right now, I'm in the Sacred Grove located in Palmyra, New York, in the United States. Here, in the spring of 1820, our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, answered one of the most important prayers ever offered. They restored sacred truths to the earth, inviting a flood of revelation that blesses you, me, and all of God's children today and proves that God does answer prayers.

It all began here in and around this small cabin where Joseph Smith and his family lived in Palmyra. Joseph and his family were farmers. Their circumstances were humble, and Joseph didn't have access to much education. However, Joseph and his family did have great faith in Jesus Christ and in the Bible.

When Joseph was 14, there was a religious revival in his community. Many churches tried to persuade people to join them, each claiming to be the way to God. Joseph was confused by all these claims. He later wrote, "So great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong."[1]

He continued:

> 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 James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: "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."
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> 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, knowing that if any person needed wisdom 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 understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.[2]

Joseph decided that he "must either remain in darkness and confusion, or … ask … God."[3]

So, on the morning of a beautiful spring day in 1820,[4] Joseph walked to a grove of trees near his family's home.

Here in this quiet forest that is now known as the Sacred Grove, Joseph knelt to make the first vocal prayer of his life.[5] Joseph's prayer was not answered immediately. Like many of our attempts to obtain answers to our prayers, Joseph experienced opposition. But rather than give in to despair, he "exert[ed] all [his] powers to call upon God."[6] Eventually he said:

> I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. … When the light rested upon me, I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, *This is my Beloved Son, hear Him!*[7]

In response to his prayer, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph. Joseph received forgiveness of his sins.[8] He also asked which church he should join. He was told that he "must join none of them, for they were all wrong."[9] Joseph was also taught many other things.

A few years later, an angel visited Joseph. He stated that he came from the presence of God, that his name was Moroni. Eventually, God, through Moroni, commanded Joseph to translate the Book of Mormon from gold plates found not far from here. Later, other heavenly messengers, including the New Testament Apostles — Peter, James, and John — appeared, giving Joseph prophetic and apostolic priesthood keys and authority to restore the original Church that Jesus Christ established during His earthly ministry again to the earth. Think about how significant that is. Christ's New Testament Church is once again on the earth. Christ's Church was reestablished on April 6, 1830.

Until his death in 1844, the Prophet Joseph continued to ask questions and receive answers through revelations that bless us today.

The restoration of Christ's Church restored truth, priesthood authority, and the saving ordinances of Christ's gospel to the world. It also allows you and me to come unto Jesus Christ and obtain all the blessings God our Father desires to give to His children.

As I have pondered Joseph Smith's experience in this Sacred Grove, here are a few of the things I have learned:

First, there are questions no one can answer for us but God. These include personal questions. Whom should I marry? What career should I pursue? What do I need to do to better manage all my responsibilities? They also include the things of God.[10] Which church should I join? Does the Book of Mormon contain the words and gospel of Jesus Christ? Should I be baptized?

Second, God answers prayers. In the scriptures, God has commanded us to ask and knock at least 39 times.[11] Each time He commands us to ask, God promises that He will answer those petitions. Most prayers will not be answered by an appearance of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. But God has promised that we can know the truth of all things through the Holy Ghost.[12] I have found that answers to my prayers come as I am humble and, like Joseph Smith, willing to act upon the answers I receive.

Third, our prayers are not always answered immediately. Sometimes our faith must be tried before we will receive answers.[13] Nevertheless, we should continue to ask until our faith is sufficient and our hearts are prepared to receive and act on the answers we seek.

Fourth, Heavenly Father knows us personally, *by name*. Just as Heavenly Father knew Joseph Smith's name, He knows yours. He is your Father in Heaven, and you are His child. He knows everything about you — your sorrows and challenges, your hopes and dreams. He wants you to be joyful and to live with Him again.

Fifth, we can be forgiven of our sins. In fact, Heavenly Father sent Jesus Christ "to appease the demands of justice"[14] so that we can repent, be forgiven of our sins, and be made whole. Through Jesus Christ, we can eventually return to God's presence with resurrected, perfected bodies to dwell with our families in a state of never-ending happiness.

Sixth, there are prophets who speak with God Himself. President Dallin H. Oaks, the current President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is God's prophet on the earth today. He receives revelation from God, just as the Prophet Joseph Smith did, for the whole world.

And seventh, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the true Church, authorized and led by Jesus Christ. This is the church that sponsors BYU-Pathway Worldwide. It is Christ's Church restored again on the earth, led by living prophets and apostles under Christ's direction. Jesus Christ Himself said this Church is "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth."[15] I testify that this is true.

I have loved spending this time with you in the Sacred Grove. I invite you to find your own Sacred Grove: a place where you can pour out your heart out to your Heavenly Father.

Before this devotional, I invited each of you to come prepared with a question for God. Now I invite you to follow Joseph Smith's example and act in faith. Search the scriptures for answers, ponder God's will for you, kneel and pray, and ask God. Ask Him about your concerns and your problems.

If you haven't yet done so or have not yet received an answer, please ask God if The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Christ's restored Church. I promise that if you will ask with a sincere heart and with a willingness to act on the answer you receive, God will answer that prayer.[16] When you receive that answer, I invite you to act by making covenants with Jesus Christ through baptism by someone holding the priesthood authority of God.

I testify that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ love *you*, individually. They will answer your prayers and show you the truth.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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[1] Joseph Smith—History 1:8
[2] Joseph Smith—History 1:11–12
[3] Joseph Smith—History 1:13
[4] See Joseph Smith—History 1:14
[5] Ibid
[6] Joseph Smith—History 1:16
[7] Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17
[8] See "History, circa Summer 1832," p. 3, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org
[9] Joseph Smith—History 1:18
[10] See Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 2:11 (in 1 Corinthians 2:11, footnote c); see also Jacob 4:8
[11] See Matthew 7:7–8; 18:19; 21:22; Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 9:45; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:10; John 14:13–14; 16:23; James 1:5; 1 John 3:22; 1 Nephi 15:11; 2 Nephi 9:42; Enos 1:15; 3 Nephi 14:7–8; 18:20; Mormon 9:21; Ether 3:2; Moroni 7:26; 10:4–5; Doctrine and Covenants 4:7; 6:5; 11:5, 14; 12:5; 14:5; 18:18; 42:61; 42:68; 46:7; 49:26; 50:29–30; 66:9; 75:27; 88:63; 103:35; 132:40; Moses 6:52
[12] See Moroni 10:5; Doctrine and Covenants 18:18
[13] See Ether 12:6
[14] Alma 42:15
[15] Doctrine and Covenants 1:30
[16] See Moroni 10:4