

Denver Snuffer Podcast 176: Firm Mind

In this installment, Denver discusses what it means to have a firm mind in every form of Godliness.

DENVER: The right pathway is always filled with peril. King Benjamin said, and this is from the traditional account: *(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."*

That list is pretty all inclusive. We have to watch ourselves, we have to watch our thoughts, we have to watch our words, and we have to watch our deeds, and beyond that observe the commandments. King Benjamin could not tell us all of the ways we could fail to do those things. There really is no list that can be compiled that says, don't do this and don't do that, and don't do this and don't do that, and have an exhaustive list of all the don'ts. It can't be done. In fact, about the only way to avoid all the don'ts is to have a handful of the do's, the things that you ought to do in order to honor God. Christ summarized those basically in two brief statements: "Love God with all your heart", and "love your fellowman as yourself". It's practically impossible for us to avoid errors by putting together a list of what to avoid, so I wouldn't attempt it.

Then there is the weakness of mind and spirit of mankind. Moroni discussed the ministering of angels and he described in these words: *"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 fulfill 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). If you go through those verses and you look at what he's saying it requires a firm mind in every form of godliness.

A firm mind can be descriptive of a variety of things including someone that's just stubborn. But it's not stubbornness, it's a firm grasp on the things that lead to godliness, not excesses, not foolishness, and we'll get more into that in a bit. Their purpose in ministering is to equip the person who has an audience and those who hear the message to be called to repentance; not a lot of flowery, fancy things but repentance, because essentially without repentance, that is turning to face God in all you do, none of us are going to make it. He goes on to say that the purpose of calling people to repentance is to *"fulfil and do the works of the covenants"* (Moroni 7:31).

There is sort of a pattern here in what is happening. Angelic ministerence comes to people of a firm mind and every form of godliness, calls repentance in order to fulfil and in order to do the work of the covenants. “To fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father”, that requires that people bear testimony of Him. These are the essential things that are needed. It doesn’t require a fanciful or a flowery imagination. It does not require that we bear testimony of ourselves. It doesn’t require us to do something other than to fulfil and do the work of the covenants. Therefore, I would suggest this is a pretty good guide to consider when you’re evaluating all of the competing claims that are now being made by people, to having inspiration or revelation or the word of God to them.

We are vulnerable to being mislead even as we claim to be inspired. I’m going to read from a recent study from the National Academy of Science. I read from it because it’s a really interesting study result:

“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.”¹

That’s a problem that you find everywhere. God wills this to be so – well, because God agrees with me that it ought to be so, and therefore I’m comfortably in tune with God.

The greatest help given to us to solve the contradiction between praying to God and the answer being **exactly** what we wanted, exactly what we expected, and exactly what makes us right and everyone else wrong; the greatest guide is the scriptures. They provide us a lifeline for measuring any inspiration we think we obtain from God. But that’s not enough if

¹ Believers’ estimates of God’s beliefs are more egocentric than estimates of other people’s beliefs, by Nicholas Epleya, Benjamin A. Converse, 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.

it's not coupled together with prayerful, ponderous thought, and time and experience. I want to compare these statements from Joseph Smith about this topic:

"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).

That seems to suggest that answers can come suddenly, quickly, perhaps even easily. But Joseph also said this:

"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).

That second quote is taken from a letter that Joseph Smith composed while he was in Liberty Jail in which he had plenty of time to fashion the language. The first quote, sadly, is taken from a source which may not be reliable or accurate. The source for that first quote is Willard Richard's Pocket Companion in which he quoted something which, if Joseph Smith said it, Joseph said it while Willard Richards was in England on a mission and he could not possibly have heard it. He doesn't even attribute it to Joseph Smith. But when the documentary history was being compiled they used the Willard Richards Companion to take that language and attribute it to a talk given by Joseph in 1839 because most of the stuff in the Pocket Companion can be tracked to Joseph, and therefore they conclude this one likewise fit that same category. The second one is clearly, unambiguously from Joseph Smith and describes the process. Now, while Joseph was in the Liberty Jail on occasion he would have a friendly face show up, or he would have a letter arrive. On one of the occasions he got letters from other people and his wife, Emma. Joseph, who had been brooding at the time and longing for the companionship of some friends, describes what his mind was going through at the time of the letter and his response to it. He says his mind was frenzied, and any man's mind can be when contemplating the many difficult issues we are called upon to confront.

Just like Joseph, we have perpetual conundrums and contradictions. We all face them. Some are of our own making but others are just inherent in living in this existence. When we thoughtfully consider the challenges, just like Joseph it seizes the mind, and like Joseph in Liberty Jail, makes us reflect upon so many things with the "avidity of lightning". That was Joseph's word. The mind is in this frenzied state, and with the avidity of lightning he's jumping from subject to subject, a fence to a fence, from things that console to things that outrage you. From things you know to be true to things that offend you. Back and forth, and

back and forth until, as Joseph puts it, "...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[.]” It’s almost poetry, the way Joseph describes what he went through there. But it is poetry describing the actual bona fides of Joseph receiving answers from God.

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. Before I asked I hesitated and pondered the issue for two months. I discussed it with my wife and several others, and then discussed again the views of others with my wife. I read emails from people involved in an active discussion about the meaning of the term.

It requires humility to approach God and ask Him 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 purer 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 the victim.

Let me give you a description of the Prayer for the Covenant: It took months of pondering, testing, questioning beforehand, before I even dared to ask. The idea that presented itself 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 in Kirtland but having a new volume of scripture was at least equally important to that. 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. 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 upon and not suppress. I want you to think of Joseph's description that says: "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[.]"

Joseph did not act hastily when the impression came to him. He couldn't shake it. It persisted. He reflected upon it again and again. I don't know whether that's days, weeks, or months, but I can tell you before the Prayer for the Covenant was offered, for me it was months because if it isn't of God I have no right to step forward and do something. I ought not be volunteering for things of that nature. At length I determined that I should act on the impulse and therefore I ought to offer a prayer for the acceptance of the scripture. When I began to compose the prayer the content was provided by inspiration from Heaven and not my own words. It took me nearly 200,000 words to write a history of the Restoration from the time of Joseph to the present, in a book that's fairly lengthy. The Prayer for the Covenant, coming by inspiration, only took a few pages and stated in more concise terms, more correctly the history of the Restoration from the beginning until now. The Prayer for the Covenant, the Prayer for the Scriptures, is not me being clever and insightful and succinct. The words were given, and the words are God's view of what has happened.

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. 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.

Perhaps the Book of Mormon contains one account to give us hope. Following conversion, one group of Lamanites were led by a king who encouraged them to lay down their un-bloodied weapons rather than ever shed blood again. This meant they could not defend themselves. After their king finished his proposal this took place:

And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together, they took their swords and all [their] weapons which were used for the shedding of man's blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth. And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man's blood. And this they did vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren, they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother, they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness, they would labor abundantly with their hands. And thus we see that when these Lamanites were brought to believe and to know the truth, [that] they were firm and would suffer, even unto death, rather than commit sin; and thus we see that they buried the weapons of peace, or they buried [their] weapons of war for peace. (Alma 14:9 RE)

When their resolve was tested, they passed. Rather than take up arms they laid down their lives:

Now when the people saw that they were coming against them, they went out to meet them and prostrated themselves before them to the earth, and began to call on the name of the Lord; and thus they were in [the] attitude when the Lamanites began to fall upon them and began to slay them with the sword... Thus without meeting any resistance, they did slay a thousand and five of them; and we know that they are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God. Now when the Lamanites saw that their brethren would not flee from the sword, neither would they turn aside to the right...or...the left, but that they would lie down and perish, and praised God even in the very act of perishing under the sword—now when the Lamanites saw this, they did forbear from slaying them; and there were many whose hearts had swollen in them for those of their brethren who had fallen under the sword, for they repented of the thing which they had done.

And it came to pass that they threw down their weapons of war, and they would not take them again, for they were stung for the murders which they had committed. And they came down even as their brethren, relying upon the mercies of those whose arms were lifted [up] to slay them.

And it came to pass that the people of God were joined that day by more than the number who had been slain.... (Alma 14:10-12 RE)

This event is astonishing and many have been shocked by the extreme behavior of these believers. *We* are not being asked to lay down our weapons and be killed. *We* are only being asked to lay down our hostility, slander, and abuse of one another to become peaceful and loving. This is a good thing that benefits everybody. Despite this, we keep our pride, ambition, jealousy, envy, strife, and lusts. These destructive desires are preferred over forgiving offenses in meekness, love, and kindness. None of us are asked to die for a covenant, but are only asked to be more like Christ and forgive and love one another. This seems so difficult a challenge that we quarrel and dispute among ourselves. We remain haughty and self-righteous and fail to realize self-righteousness is a lie, a mirage, utterly untrue. We must trade our pride for humility, or we will never be able to keep the covenant. Remember, it is a group who must keep the covenant, not individuals. Together we must act consistent with the obligation we agreed to perform before God.

Why are there angels?

That's a great question.

[Angels] are subject [to God], 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 fulfill and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the

children of men, ... declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ (Moroni 7:30-32; see also Moroni 7:6 RE).

There's a system that was adopted before the foundation of the world that was designed to bring to pass the salvation/the resurrection of all mankind after we fall into the grave. That system requires a lot of things to come together in order to achieve the purposes of God. You might think that the purpose of angels (in some of the online extravagant claims that we read that people make) is to appeal to the vanity and the pride of those to whom they come.

But my experience teaches me that the purpose of angels is to, first, cry repentance to the individual—because every individual before God is in need of repentance. There are none of us who have gone through life, or who go through life daily, without giving offense—however unintended and however slight—we, nevertheless, give offense to our fellow man and to God. We excuse ourselves—we just don't measure up. The office of the angelic ministrant is to snap you back out of the fog of "indifference to the casualness in which you discharge your daily obligations" and to awaken you to the **peril** that each of us face if we don't repent and return to God. It's to make us soberly assess our own personal inadequacies. But their office isn't to get someone, somewhere, to pay attention to them and to try and be a better boy or girl. Their office is to invoke the salvation process, itself, for the benefit of mankind.

Those to whom angelic ministrants have come from heaven are given assignments to labor for the salvation of others. They use their own resources, and they wear out their lives and their time in pursuing the obligations imposed upon them, which include:

- the salvation of others,
- the crying of repentance to others,
- the bringing to pass the fulfillment of the covenants that God made with the Fathers.

If they're not laboring on an errand such as that, but they claim to be receiving "God and Jesus in their living room who came and told them all about this or that," I don't know who they're entertaining—but it certainly doesn't fit the model, and it certainly doesn't fulfill the covenants of the Father nor do the work that's necessary in order to prepare the people for the coming of the ~~world~~ [Lord] *so that the whole earth is not utterly wasted at His coming* (see JSH 3:4 RE).

Salvation for the souls of men is something that no one ought to be trifling with, least of all those who are vain and proud. And I don't care if that vanity comes because they think they're somehow specially chosen by some imagined encounter with the Great Beyond, or if they think they've been so careful in their study of scripture that they know better than all others because they can clearly see a pattern through their own study, labor, and effort. I don't care what you think the correct interpretation of the scriptures are or will be. It's fair game to look at 'em in whatever fashion you want to look at them. But when an angel from heaven **tells** you what God is doing—or when the Lord Himself declares **what and how** he

intends to go about vindicating the covenants that **He** made with the Fathers—then there's no room to come up with a contrary interpretation. The fact is, your interpretation, then, is wrong. And the humble man and the searcher for light and truth will adapt what they understand from their learning and study to what it is that the Lord has declared. And what they will find is that if they'll conform to the word of the Lord, that their study and their learning is still of great benefit because it helps them to see things more clearly.

Scriptures are sometimes written, deliberately, in a way that conceals how the Lord intends to fulfill them—in order to let those who may mean mischief never arrive at the correct formula. And the proud and the haughty and all those that do wickedly are not necessarily irreligious or not necessarily unpersuaded that there's a restoration that is taking place through Joseph—they simply will not **yield** to what it is that God says they mean; they will not **yield** to the work that God says He now has underway.

So, angels align with the work of God, and they help bring about the repentance of **all** mankind.

The work of salvation is the work of mortals. The burden of salvation is the burden of mortals. **It does not happen** that resurrected beings, translated beings, or “second-life” beings come back and do the work that would change the conditions for mortality.

When the three Nephites exceeded their natural life, they were no longer seen publicly. But they **ministered to** Mormon and Moroni who, in turn, then ministered to the public. John ministers to people as a ministering angel, as is described in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Angels minister—as explained in Alma and as explained by Moroni in the Ether chapter seven (I think it is)—angels minister to people “of a firm mind in every form of godliness” (in Moroni's description), and (in Alma's description) angels minister to the “chosen vessels.” Then the chosen vessels are the people that are of a firm mind [who] spread the message down. So, if you're talking about a translated being who functions as an angel or if you're talking about a resurrected angel ministering, they minister to people that are then sent on an errand—but the errand involves a mortal going out to preach.

And other mortals have to hear the word from people to whom the angels have ministered, in order for **them** to rise up and to receive what they need to receive in order for themselves also to qualify to be ministered to by angels. And then the process proceeds from there, who preach and teach to the chosen vessels so that they're prepared to receive the Son. And then the Son has a ministry with people in which He prepares and presents them to the Father. And it is an orderly process that's described in both Alma and in Moroni.

See, the religion that Joseph restored divides things up into categories that the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon clarifies:

- You have “belief” if you have a correct understanding of true teachings that are given to you in an authentic way that actually reflect the religion that God would like you to possess.

- You have “unbelief” when you have something other than **that**. If an error creeps in, you have unbelief. By and large, Christianity today is composed, essentially, of unbelief held by unbelievers because they cannot have belief without true doctrine, and you cannot reject the words of God and claim to be a believer in Him.
- The word “faith” is applied to those to whom angels have ministered.
- And the word “knowledge” is applied to those who have entered into the presence of the Lord. Joseph Smith was attempting to restore a form of Christianity designed to give mankind knowledge. So, you “shall see my face and **know** that I am.”

In another place (this is language from the Testimony of St. John), the Lord said:

*Remember that I will ask the Father, and he will provide...you another Comforter, that he may be by your side endlessly. You will obtain the record of Heaven, the truth of all things which is denied to the world because the world refuses my Father, and therefore **they** do not know him. But **you** know him, for he is with you, and shall provide answers to guide you. **I will not leave you comfortless. I will stand at your side also.***

...To those who show love for me, my Father will show love to them, and I love all those, and I will personally minister to them. (TSJ 10:11-12, emphasis added; see also John 14:15-21 KJV)

This is the gospel of Christ. This is the promise that was made. In the Book of Mormon that Joseph Smith restored, we have a promise:

It shall come to pass that if the gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day...

...“that day” being the time when the Book of Mormon should come forth, “that day” not being when the Lord was resurrected. At the time of the Lord’s resurrection, what He said was, “They understood me not that I was not gonna go to the Gentiles at that time. They were gonna hear about me through the ministry of my servants, but I will not show myself to the Gentiles in that day.” Here Nephi is writing about the time in which the Book of Mormon would come forth, a much later time period—the difference between approximately 33 AD and 1830 AD, so:

*It shall come to pass that if the gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word and also in power, **in very deed**, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks, and harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father. Yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land for ever. (1 Nephi 3:25 RE, emphasis added; see also 1 Nephi 14:1-2 LE)*

...if they will hearken unto the things that the Lord intends for them to receive in that day.

So, there’s a process that’s described in the Book of Mormon, the religion that Joseph Smith restored.

He sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory...

See, angels come to visit with and minister to people. Those to whom the angels minister now are able to behold the glory of God.

*And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore, **God conversed with men...***

The angelic “faith” secures for them “knowledge”—because it’s their ministry to bring them into the presence of God.

Therefore, God conversed with men and made known unto them the plan of redemption which had been prepared from the foundation of the world. And...he made known unto them according to their faith, and repentance, and their holy works. (Alma 9:7 RE, emphasis added; see also Alma 12:29-30 LE)

This is a religion Joseph Smith was restoring. This is what’s testified to in the Book of Mormon as the manner in which these things unfold. It’s a question that gets posited by Moroni, towards the end of the Book of Mormon:

Hath miracles ceased? Behold, I say unto you, nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. For behold, they [the angels] are subject unto him [God], to minister according to the word of his [God’s] command, shewing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry [that is, the job that angels are employed by God to perform; this is the office that they occupy; these are their responsibility—the “office of their ministry”] is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill 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...

Angels declare things to men; the men to whom it is declared are called “chosen vessels.” Now understand: **This** is Moroni. In **Alma**, it’s made clear that angelic ministrants don’t just come to men. They come to men and to women and to children—but we’re not in Alma now, so don’t be hung up on the fact that he is addressing the office and the calling in the masculine. Okay? It’s of no moment.

...declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him; and by so doing, the Lord...prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the holy ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men. (Moroni 7:6 RE; see also Moroni 7:29-32 LE)

All of this serves the purpose of accomplishing and fulfilling the covenant word God gave previously to those that secured covenants with God in past generations—so that God’s promises are vindicated, and no word that God ever pronounced from the beginning to any of those that have received a covenant from God will fall to the earth unfulfilled. They will all be fulfilled. And the system in which that takes place is:

- Men who have faith receive the ministering of angels. The purpose of the ministry of the angels is to assist so that the fulfilling of the covenants can take place by declaring it unto the “chosen vessels.”
- They, in turn, have the obligation to disseminate the information to the residue of the people so that **they** may have faith in and receive ministering by the Holy Ghost so that the work can be done.

The foregoing excerpts were taken from:

- Denver's fireside talk titled “That We Might Become One”, given in Clinton, UT on January 14th, 2018
- Denver’s conference talk titled “Civilization”, given in Grand Junction, CO on April 21, 2019
- Denver’s Q&A session at the Keeping the Covenant Conference in Boise, ID on September 22, 2019
- Denver's comments about Joseph Smith, delivered in Manti, Utah on October 17, 2021; and
- Denver's talk titled "True Blue Mormon: Independent Faithfulness," presented at the Rescuing the Restoration conference held in Boise, Idaho on February 26, 2022