

Mike Ohman

## **It isn't anything like mine, But, God has a plan!**

I ask your forgiveness as I speak to you today. I have felt prompted to share some very personal experiences.

A few months ago, Elder David A. Bednar gave a moving talk to the missionaries at the MTC. His message was simple. He asked a very stimulating question, *"How does one recognize the Spirit?"*

*"You will succeed as you learn to follow the Spirit, and, learn to understand the Holy Ghost and how He works.*

So, he said, *How do YOU recognize the Spirit?*  
*The answer is simple and direct. Now, listen carefully,* he said.

*Quit stewing about it.*  
*Quit Fussing.*  
*Quit worrying.*  
*Just be good boys and girls.*  
*Just be worthy.*

*Sometime you will look back and see that you were in the right place at the right time. And you will recognize that you were prompted and directed.*

*I have seen so many wonderful people who are paralyzed by not having an immediate prompting to be guided. . . .NOW! Should I get married, should I go to school, should I buy this car, or should I do this thing?*

*Most of us just need to press forward. Take that step in the dark, make that leap of faith."*  
I was raised in a home filled with music. My mother was a good pianist and my father was an untrained vocalist and drummer. Together, when they got on the dance floor, others would move aside to watch them "cut a rug".

My earliest musical memories are of sitting on the piano bench next to my mother as she played and I learned to sing the Primary Songs, and little folk songs of the day. She taught me the notes and I began to experiment with the piano. Some of my fondest musical memories are of playing piano duets with my mother.

In my pre-teen age years, Dad and I often worked together in our garden. Most mundane jobs were done to music. It had rhythm and tempo. Those important elements were used to advantage. Planting potatoes was accompanied by "I've been working on the railroad! Or, "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey?" It was in this setting that I learned to harmonize.

At age 12 Mom took me to the church and taught me how to turn on the Hammond organ and how to work the drawbars. In a few weeks I was called as the ward organist. When I was 16, my parents bought a Hammond Organ and I began private lessons with Gene Halliday in Ogden. At 18, I graduated from high school with a four year scholarship, a gold watch as outstanding musician, and had made a commercial organ recording.

Immediately after graduation, my family moved to Northern California and I was hired by the Hammond Organ Company to demonstrate new models for dealers on the West coast.

At 19, I was called to serve in the West Mexican Mission and came to the Language Training Mission at BYU for Spanish training. I dislocated my shoulder and had to go home for surgery. My mission was then transferred and I served in the Western States Mission, headquartered in Denver, Colorado. While there, I fell in a rather unkempt shower and tore the previous surgery apart. I went home for a second, more radical operation on my shoulder. Many weeks later, I returned to Denver. Baptisms were scarce in those years. My one experience was with Paul Rudolph, a Tlinket Indian . . . we call them Eskimos. I felt discouragement from my mission experience. Two major surgeries, some permanent disability and some "Oh woe is me" left me with the thought, "What a waist of time!"

After my mission, I went to BYU as a music education major with organ as my instrument. My first experience was memorable. Professor JJ Keeler asked about my background. From that time on he called me Mr. Hammond.

I soon discovered that my training on the Hammond Organ was not at all acceptable to the world of classical organists. One must have special shoes. One must sit "just so" on the bench. Classical organists write fingering, pedaling, phrasing, registration and piston numbers on their music. Precision and exactness, I soon learned, are far more important than digital dexterity, showiness, and improvisational skills.

It was discouraging to say the least. I felt I had something to offer in the world of jazz and popular organ playing. But, I was at the bottom of the barrel when it came to the more churchly instrument. I felt something like the venerable May West, who is believed to have said, "I used to be Snow White, and then I drifted!"

I left BYU for several years and developed a restaurant chain of three stores called Pipes and Pizza. It was a good business. One Sunday afternoon, I opened the Church News and saw a picture of Paul Rudolph. I could hardly believe my eyes. I opened to the article and read about his accomplishments. He was the son of the Tlinket Tribal Chief, who had died. As is the tribal custom, Paul had become the Tribal Chief. He had invited his people to learn about the church so that they would understand his religious beliefs. Several hundred people eventually joined and he had been called as the bishop. As a boy, he had learned to chant the genealogy of his people, since there was no written language. Through the efforts of wonderful people in Salt Lake, Paul was able to have his chant transcribed so that temple work could be completed for the people of his tribal ancestors.

All of a sudden, my missionary experience had become a success. I felt embarrassment for my rather immature attitude and asked the Lord's forgiveness. I made a commitment right there and then that I would do everything I could to help prepare my children for missions. And, if one could serve the Spanish speaking people of the world, it might in some way vindicate what I had been unable to accomplish during my mission.

*"Just be good a boy and a good girl and someday you will look back and see that you were in the right place at the right time!"*

1976 we sold our interest in the Utah stores, and moved to California to operate that business.

One evening, a familiar voice was on the telephone. Newell Dayley said, "I will be in Los Angeles next week; can I come and visit with you?" He was kind. He asked about our family, our church service, our happiness. He asked if I had considered finishing my degree and opened my mind to other possibilities. My wife and I talked and prayed and fasted. I came back to BYU for one semester to complete my required California Teachers Certification. I returned home to teach music in the Ventura County School Systems.

I loved teaching, but I was uncomfortable in the environment of fenced campuses, drug dealers, and budget cuts. After more prayer and soul searching, we sold our business and returned to BYU to graduate school.

Many powerful experiences began unfolding in our lives. I was called to a bishopric and saw the Church from a very different perspective.

I was privileged to serve as a guest organist at the Salt Lake Tabernacle. That was a treasured experience. The mixing of a unique building, the magnificent tonal pallet of the organ, and the feeling of reverence and awe that permeates ones soul; coupled together to create genuinely sacred moments.

I was assigned to go to Jerusalem to inspect the Marcussen Pipe Organ installed in the BYU Center for Near Eastern Studies. While there, I was privileged to have some time alone sitting under a tree on the shores of the Sea of Galilee reading the New Testament. I read about the Savior's walk on the water, and Peter's dramatic attempt. I read about the Saviors call to the fisherman to "cast your nets on the other side." I wondered if I might somehow be in the vicinity of these and other great miracles. Is it possible that the Savior might have been where I was then privileged to be?

From over my shoulder came the sound of a voice. Abada, Abada, he called. I turned to see a Bedouin shepherd calling one of a small herd of sheep. Abada was easy to identify. Her tail perked up, her head raised from grazing, and she followed her master as he led her to the edge of the fresh water. There he knelt down beside her and washed her eyes and face and her rump. Then he carefully examined and cleaned each foot. After she had her fill of the fresh water, he wrapped his arms around her neck and petted her, and snuggled her, and spoke softly and lovingly to her. Then he stood, led her back to the fold, and called another. I watched with tenderness as he repeated the process over and over with each of the twelve or so sheep.

I became witness to the Saviors instruction to "feed my sheep, feed my lambs".

Soon after my return, I was called as bishop of my home ward. I quickly understood the lesson. Leave the ninety and nine, and go after the one.

At my release as my home ward bishop after 6 ½ years, I was called as a bishop on campus to a freshman ward. We sent out approximately 50 missionaries a semester. After 3 ½ years I was released from that wonderful service.

While serving as bishop our first son was called to serve a mission. I was full of great anticipation as that process unfolded. When his call came to Santiago, Chile, I was beside myself in joy. Tears flowed easily as I understood how much the Lord loved me, and answered my plea. When our second son received his call to Anaheim, California, Spanish, my gratitude was so deep and my heart so full, I could hardly speak. Our third child, a daughter, was then called to Santiago West, Chile. There are no words to express my feelings. I just looked at her letter and wept. Our fourth, another daughter, had been engaged to be married twice. She finally said, “Dad, I think I need to serve a mission, but I don’t want to learn a language, but instead want to learn a culture. I suggested that she needed to talk with her Heavenly Father, that I had nothing to do with such matters. Her plea was heard and she was called to Atlanta, Georgia. She was blessed with learning a culture. Each missionary served with spiritual awareness and humility. I was awakening to the power of the Spirit and the knowledge that He knows us and loves us and wants to help us.

*Quit worrying, quit stewing, and just be worthy!*

Another assignment came to serve in a BYU stake presidency with Newell Dayley. Our stake was comprised of single adults under 30. We sent many women on missions, and were privileged to witness hundreds of marriages in our years together.

The MTC was our next adventure. We were called to serve in a Spanish Branch. Imagine, some 40-plus years after being called to serve in Mexico, to now be able to serve with those wonderful Latino missionaries. I knew the Lord had a plan for me. I was asked to play for Devotionals and accompany the missionaries to sing. No one sings with the joy and exuberance of 2500 committed missionaries as they belt out Called to Serve.

In 2004 I was asked to go to Jerusalem again to work on the organ. I took my wife. On the way back we spent two weeks in London and 10 days in Sweden. For many years our family has been stopped in getting genealogy beyond my great-great grandfather. I felt prompted to take my genealogy and to see if someone could help.

We flew to Stockholm. From Stockholm we drove 7 ½ hours north to Harnosand; and then we drove 20 miles inland to Sabra and found the City Library that was for some unknown reason open on a holiday afternoon. It just happened that a young man about 25, was at the library and could speak English fluently. He helped us locate the cemetery and my great-grandfather’s grave and the family farm on a City map. He asked why we had come all this way. I told him that I was interested in genealogy and was trying to track down some information about my ancestors. That I had come to a dead end and thought I might find some clue if I came to the land of my heritage. This young man said he was very interested in genealogy and wanted to see my genealogy sheets. After a brief study of a few ancestral lines, he said, “I think some of your lines coincide with some of mine. Let me go home and get my genealogy and I will meet you at your hotel.

He provided us with links to new information and several hundred names for which we were able to complete the temple work. He also provided us with a book on the history of Sabra, Sweden, which included pictures, stories, accounts of importance, and yes, more genealogy. Consider the magnitude of that simple encounter just because of what I will describe as a step in the dark, a leap of faith, just pressing on!

We feel that our steps have been guided.  
We have felt the prompting of the Holy Ghost.  
We have tried to be a good boy and a good girl.  
We have tried to honor our covenants.  
We feel that the Lord has guided us in our journey through life.

I have been blessed with significant opportunities as an organist.  
Teaching music theory at BYU has been a most rewarding and satisfying journey.

Serving in the councils of the Church has deepened my testimony. I know we are lead and guided by a prophet of God.  
For 25 years I have served in the Executive Council of the School of Music. I have been personally involved in the recruiting, admission, scholarship awarding, teaching, and nurturing of hundreds if not thousands of wonderfully talented music students. What a significant blessing in my life.  
I have seen my four children serve honorable missions, marry in a temple, and I can now extend my arms to 15 grandchildren.

Like the saints of an earlier time, we have learned that:  
*The Lord is extending the Saint's understanding,  
Restoring their judges and all as at first.  
The knowledge and power of God are expanding;  
The veil o'er the earth is beginning to burst.  
We'll sing and we'll shout with the armies of heaven,  
Hosanna, hosanna to God and the Lamb!  
Let glory to them in the highest be given,  
Hence forth and forever, Amen and amen!*

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.