



Our learning in the gospel is our responsibility. The Church has shouldered much of that burden for too many years, and the time has come to put the job back into the laps of the members. The question that will be answered in the course of this year is why it is so important that we learn for ourselves. The days of relying on someone else's light and knowledge are drawing to a close. We must learn to stand on our own two spiritual feet and figure out how to gain the knowledge discovered by all the prophets past and present the same way they gained their knowledge. I hope your knee pads are in good repair.

The purpose of these articles

In the past, the curriculum from the Church had very specific things for members to learn from each lesson. Everything in the lesson was geared to help them grasp those concepts and to remember those lessons. Writing commentary on those lessons was pretty easy because they were so well defined. This is no longer the case. Now we, as families and individuals are being told that we need to examine our own lives and decide for ourselves what it is the Spirit wants us to learn this week as we study this particular book of scripture. How's that for nebulous.



It is very important to recognize that even though specific scriptures are being discussed, the Spirit may need you, for your own welfare, to connect these verses to

something not even discussed in the lesson this week. One or more of the verses may trigger topics on a completely different subject. If that happens then, by all means, pursue that other topic. The prophets have told us in General Conference that if the Spirit prompts us in areas not even being discussed in that Conference talk, to write that prompting down and search after it, for this is what the Lord wants us to learn at this time.

The point here is that gospel learning is extremely personal and individual. I may have holes in my learning that you don't have, and you may need something I don't need right now. So relying on the Holy Ghost as our teacher is the only path to true and full gospel learning. He is our divine teacher, the member of the Godhead dedicated to teaching us the ways of Christ and the Father.

As I write about each of these lessons I will be following the impulses and promptings I receive, but these are not to be mistaken for those you, personally, need to receive. Hopefully, between the Church material of study for this week, and something I write, you will have a fertile field from which to harvest gospel principles and knowledge for your personal studies. I will do my best to point out wherever I can questions you can ponder or associated principles that will help you see a bigger gospel picture.

Each weekly topic is divided into three main sections. My articles will also be broken into these same three components.

Record your impressions

The question I would like you to consider is this: How well do you know yourself? Another way of wording it is, "How aware of yourself and your thoughts are you?" I have a friend who gets really moody and sulks for days on end before he finally figures out what is bothering him and can talk to his wife about it. Then there is my sister. She is always right on top of how she feels and what she is thinking. You always know where you stand with her because she is so aware of her own feelings and thoughts that she can convey those thoughts and feelings to you at a moment's notice.

When we approach gospel learning it is important that we learn to recognize our own thoughts and feelings. To do this takes pondering, thinking, and feeling time. We have to grant ourselves not only permission to have time to ourselves, but we much actively carve out for ourselves at least a few minutes each day for this all-important activity.

The reason for this is because this is how the Spirit teaches us. Rarely will we need to have an angelic visitation, a voice blasting from the heavens, or a supreme vision of the eternities to teach us what we need to know or do. It has been my experience that 99.9% of the time the Spirit teaches me in one of the following ways:

- I have a prompting/feeling/impression to do something good. It may be for someone close to me or someone far away. I may need to go talk to that person, do something for someone, or call someone on the phone or write a letter/text, etc.
- Thoughts that I have learned to recognize over time are not my own come into my head and tell me things. If I am giving a blessing these thoughts tell me what to say. If I don't say them they pester me until I do say them. If I try to change them in any way I suddenly become confused and can't continue until I correct myself. It is difficult to describe how I can tell that it is the Spirit and not my own voice in my head. I have just come to learn, with practice, that the thoughts that were not there one minute, and are there now, and I can't identify where they came from, are those I accept as being from the Spirit.
- Emotions, especially the emotion of gratitude sometimes wells up within me when reading a passage of scripture, listening to a talk, or when thinking about a gospel principle. When the tears start to flow, unbidden, because I can't contain my gratitude, I attribute that recognition of the Lord's kindness to his children as coming from the Spirit.
- Visions come. I'm not talking about visions like the tree of life. I've never had anything like that. But there are times when I am thinking about gospel-related topics and pondering them and suddenly I start to "see." I see the connection of this principle to that principle. I see how it applies in my life. I see what I can do to learn it better or how to correct something that is amiss in my life. This is what the



scriptures and the prophets refer to as the eyes of our understand, or our spiritual eyes. It is when we begin to grasp eternal truths in ways we never considered before. Or it may be a confirmation of things we have learned before, but have not had a confirmation of that principle or piece of knowledge in a long time.

These are just some ways I learn by the spirit. You can probably add more to this list if you think about how the Spirit works with you. Notice how many of those items in the list are involved with emotions and feelings. We need to learn to recognize how we feel and what we feel if we are to become sensitive to the Spirit in our daily lives.

What seek ye?

The first question in this section is from John 1:38.

38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?

Before you consider this question, consider this question: Do you believe the Lord ALWAYS fulfills his promises? Really, do you? How many times has the Lord promised us that if we seek we will find, knock and it will be opened to us? If he always keeps his promises then when we consider the question "What seek ye?" we must also be prepared to receive the answers to the questions for which we seek. For if he always keeps his promises we need to expect to receive the answers we seek.

That alone is enough to scare away the feint of heart. Many are willing to ask for knowledge, but how many of us are willing to receive then live by what we have received? I used to tell my children that if you pick up a stick you pick up both ends. You can't carry around a stick that has only one end. If we set out to seek for spiritual knowledge then there is a responsibility that comes with it, and that is to live by the knowledge we receive because we asked in the first place. This is an important lesson to teach children AND adults.

Our opportunity

This is such a great opportunity this year to begin this method of study, because we get to begin by studying the life and teachings of our Savior. Be sure to mark and look up all the JST references, as those are the references the prophets have pulled from Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible. I promise you that if you will read every one of those

references as you read through the New Testament this year, you will find that the nature and character of Jesus is very different from the man painted in the King James version of the Bible. By reading all the footnotes with the JST mark and the passages in the back of the Bible just in front of the maps, you will see a much more compassionate and loving Savior.

Ideas for Personal Scripture Study

Matthew 19:16-22 tells us the story of the rich young man who wanted to know how to be saved in the kingdom of God. Here are the verses. We'll look at lessons to be learned after you read the passage.

16 ¶ And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

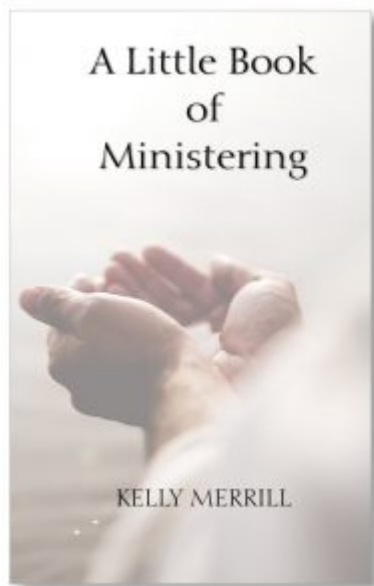
19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

What does it mean to "Come follow me?" It wasn't enough for the man to keep the commandments. To be "perfect," which means to be whole or complete, the man needed to do more than just obey. Obedience is the starting point, but obedience alone won't save us. The Savior told him to give up his attachments to his worldly goods and become his disciple. A disciple is one who has adopted a master and follows in his path.



Doing good is not always enough. Doing the good that is needed by our neighbor is what we should focus on. This is how the Savior ministered to those around him, and this is how the latter-day prophets have demonstrated ministering to us.

The purpose behind ministering to others is to learn to think, feel, and behave as the Savior. When we learn to forgive, be patient with others, and seek for their welfare at all times, we become holy as a people, and instead of worrying about having to go to holy places for refuge, we will make holy the places we are in.

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To become a disciple of Christ we must seek to learn how to live like He lives, think like he thinks, act like he acts, and feel like he feels. We must dedicate our whole soul, our whole being to becoming like our master, Jesus, the Christ.

At this point many will say, "Whoa! I'm not sure I want to surrender myself to that kind of life." And if we are still in love with the things of this world, that would be a natural thing to say, for the natural man is an enemy to God. But does God expect us to follow him with complete abandon from this moment on and never look back? Well, it would be nice if we could, but most of us have to grow into that kind of life. Most of us take a while to let go the things of the world and instead embrace the things of holiness. It is a gradual process. But it requires that we make a conscious decision to begin. It doesn't happen by accident or without our permission. We must choose that kind of life. We must pursue it purposefully, and with deliberate intent.

As you study the life of Christ and his teachings this year, look for ways in which he invites us to learn of him and come to him. He constantly invites us to participate in the kind of life he lives, for only his kind of life offers the joy and eternal happiness we all claim we want. So talk this over with your friends or family. How can you begin to give up parts of the world and your love/dependence on worldly things and replace them with spiritual habits?

I once asked my Stake President how I could overcome a particular habit that wasn't doing me any good, and his advice was to fill my life with so much good that I no longer had time for that habit. Easier said than done, but he was exactly right. The more I filled my life with good things of my choosing, the less time I had to think about the bad

habit. Gradually it faded into the background and disappeared. It wasn't until I began this process that I began to realize how much time I had been devoting to worldly things. That was a shock to me. I was so embedded in the world I couldn't even see how worldly I had become.

Here is one last thought on this section of the the week's study material. The manual suggests keeping an eternal perspective. This is difficult if you haven't yet learned how to have an eternal perspective. Remember that the world sees life as just a brief period that lasts for some 80 odd years then vanishes into the ether forever. To the world life in its totality consists of what we call mortality. They have no vision of our life before earth or the eternities that will exist after mortal life. So to the world, everything in life has a sense of urgency to it.

We too should have a sense of urgency to what we do, but for a very different reason. We need to learn to see our lives as a continuation of something that began eons in the past and will continue forever. We are at a critical junction in our progression, a time of testing before we are granted our resurrected body. That alone should shake us up. For the body we have earned (and that is a terrible word for it, because it isn't like a paycheck), is what we will have for the rest of eternity.

What we are trying to do is to become, not do. We need to become more like Christ. This is the test of mortality. Mortality is a measure of our commitment to living a Christlike life. How we learn to live that kind of life in mortality is what will determine the kind of body we receive in the resurrection. This is the eternal perspective. We don't need to know everything right now. This life is only about demonstrating our commitment to the plan of salvation our Father presented to us in the premortal realm. So see this life as a process, and recognize that it is governed by a forgiving Lord who wants us to learn to be forgiving, loving, and patient, just like he is. When this becomes our focus in life, and not power, money, or influence/popularity, we will find that life is ever so much happier and easier to deal with.

Ideas for Family Scripture Study and Family Home Evening

Here are a few thoughts about the importance of spending time as a family studying the scriptures and applying the gospel principles in your daily lives.

“We counsel parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform” ([“Letter from the First Presidency,”](#) *Liahona*, Dec. 1999, 1).

I mentioned earlier in this article that mortality is a test of our desire to become like Christ. We are held responsible for the spiritual and physical education of the children we bring into the world or adopt into our lives. As you may have guessed by now, knowing how to identify the Spirit's influence in our life is not something we come equipped knowing. We either have to stumble upon it (the hard way to learn it) or someone needs to point out his influence so we learn to recognize it when we are alone (the easy way to learn it). If you, as a parent really want to do your child a solid, teach them how to recognize the influences of the Spirit in their life. Of course, you have to have learned it first so you can point it out to your child when the Spirit enters the conversation.

The number one priority for all parents is the spiritual welfare of their children, for their eternal souls depend on what we teach them. We can't control what they do with that knowledge when they grow up, but if we don't teach them to seek after the Lord and to live like Christ then we have to answer to some degree for the sins they may commit as adults.

This means that the "divinely appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform" rest squarely upon the shoulders of those who accept the responsibilities of being parents. No soccer, play, or football practice, social committee, game with the guys, or crafting project can compete with the eternal importance of being with and teaching our children to follow Christ. This is also a great way for adults to learn to sharpen their ministering skills, since parenting is all about ministering.

Ministering application

The key to this lesson is to take responsibility for where we are spiritually. Here is a quote from the manual by Elder Bednar.

Elder David A. Bednar taught: “As learners, you and I are to act and be doers of the word and not simply hearers who are only acted upon. Are you and I agents who act and seek learning by faith, or are we waiting to be taught and acted upon? ... A learner exercising agency by acting in accordance with correct principles opens his or her heart to the Holy

Ghost and invites His teaching, testifying power, and confirming witness. Learning by faith requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception” ([“Seek Learning by Faith,”](#) *Ensign*, Sept. 2007, 64).

When we choose to follow Christ and become like him we also choose the life that makes that possible. If we choose the one, but not the other, then we are fooling ourselves. We cannot follow Christ unless we also choose to learn to live, think, and feel like him. That means turning our lives outward, away from our personal interests to the needs of others. This is where our ministering efforts come in. Ministering is how we practice living like Christ. It is a great way to learn to listen to the Spirit, apply the teachings we learn about in the scriptures, and how we emulate the lives of the living apostles and leaders of the Church. To follow Christ is to DO something, anything, like Christ. It is an active process that we deliberately choose to do. And the blessings that come because of those choices we make will flow into our lives as naturally as the rain upon the grass or the dew upon the leaves.