

How could we help our children become more active gospel learners?

By Doug Hart

Some time ago, my wife and I became concerned about a pattern of behavior developing in some of our teenage children during family scripture study, family home evenings, and even our impromptu, one-on-one gospel-centered conversations. They were meeting a minimum learning standard—a physical presence, occasional eye-contact, and one-word answers—but they were not engaging in active learning.

We knew that in order for them to gain strong testimonies and to experience deep, personal conversion by the power of the Holy Ghost, they needed to do more. The Savior wants

Elevating

His disciples to not just hear His words—He wants them to act on His teachings with faith (see *Teaching in the Savior's Way* [2016], 30).

One night we talked with them about our feelings. Our intent was to counsel with them in a Spirit-guided discussion. Our discussion, however, quickly deteriorated into a one-way lecture. Our boys heard our message, but their minds and hearts remained unaffected.

That experience troubled us, so my wife and I began to ponder how we could help our children become more proactive in their gospel learning, inspiring them to act instead of being acted upon by our speeches and lectures. Our questions led us to develop a plan based on what we learned from searching the scriptures,

Our Family

the words of latter-day prophets, and other Church resources related to teaching and learning. Our plan reads:

Leading Our Children to Seek the Holy Ghost in Family Discussions

Cultivate love and respect. Love softens hearts. Expressions of love will help prepare our children for the influence of the Holy Ghost. It will also nurture their desire and willingness to engage in active, spiritual learning. Respecting our children by listening to and validating their perspective and feelings will help them feel safer and more willing to share what they are feeling.

Teach by the Spirit. Carefully observing and listening to our children will prepare us to discern by the Spirit what to say next, what question to ask, or what invitation to extend that will

Discussions

lead them to seek the Holy Ghost's influence in their learning.

Anchor every discussion in the word of God. While sharing our own thoughts and opinions about the gospel together can be helpful, the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets will often provide a deeper, more powerful connection to the Spirit (see D&C 84:45).

Make the Savior the basis of all gospel-centered discussions. Substance and power will come to our discussions as our children see how what we are discussing relates to the Savior and His Atonement, “the very root of Christian doctrine” (Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 56).

Ask inspiring questions. Effective questions will lead our children to draw truth and understanding directly

from the scriptures and words of the prophets with the Spirit's help. What they learn in that way will mean more to them than our clearest explanations of the very same material.

Encourage family members to do the talking. When our children use their own words to express what they are seeing, thinking, or feeling, they invite the Holy Ghost to help them know what to say and how to say it. That process will help them see and understand more clearly what the Lord wants them to learn and feel.

Be patient! The Holy Ghost will work with our children as they search their minds and hearts for truth and understanding. We need to resist the temptation to cut their search short by prematurely jumping in with personal opinions and self-conceived solutions.

Lead by example. Striving to learn and live the gospel in the same way we ask of our children will help us qualify for the support and guidance of the Spirit in our discussions.

As we've tried to implement our plan, we are learning that inviting the influence of the Holy Ghost into our family discussions will take practice and time. But we refuse to get discouraged or give up. Just the other night, our 10-year-old daughter, prompted by a verse from the Book of Mormon we were reading as a family, asked in sweet sincerity, “How do you learn by the Holy Ghost?” I smiled. I knew we were getting somewhere! ■

The author is currently serving as the mission president of the Brazil Curitiba Mission.

The new teaching guidebook *Teaching in the Savior's Way* includes suggestions for teaching teens and younger children. See teaching.lds.org.

