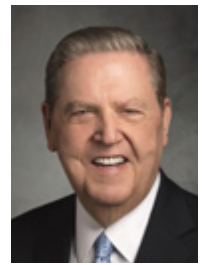


MAKING  
YOUR LIFE A  
SOUL-STIRRING  
JOURNEY OF

# Personal Growth



**By Elder  
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Learning, living, and teaching the gospel are at the heart of growing toward our divine potential.

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Editors' note: In this article written for the *Ensign*, Elder Holland shares the powerful principles of conversion that serve as a foundation for the Church's new *Come, Follow Me* curriculum.

**W**hat a thrilling time it is to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! When I think about recent developments in the Lord's kingdom, it seems obvious that God is taking us on a soul-stirring journey with hills and vales and vistas so stunning we can scarcely imagine them until we climb a little higher and there they are before us.

In the past year alone, we've bid farewell to a beloved prophet and lovingly sustained a new one. We've taken a new approach to Relief Society and Melchizedek Priesthood quorum meetings, with greater emphasis on

counseling together to accomplish the Lord's work. In that same spirit, we've seen the Lord bring high priests and elders together in one quorum and witnessed a seismic shift in the way priesthood holders and sisters minister to God's children. If that's not enough to take your breath away, consider the First Presidency's recent

### **He Wants to Change Our Hearts**

Even so, as we look back on where we've been, I hope we can see more than just modified policies, new programs, and revised manuals. The Lord's work has always been ultimately about people, not programs. Whatever changes He directs in an organization or a schedule or a curriculum, what He's

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announcement about new resources to support personal and family scripture study, with corresponding changes to Primary and Sunday School materials—to say nothing of ongoing advancements in the areas of missionary work, family history research, and temple work.

And surely there is more to come. As our ninth article of faith declares, “We believe all that God has revealed”—that's often the easy part. It takes a special kind of faith to “believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom,” and then to be ready to accept them, whatever they are. If we are willing, God will lead us to places we've never dreamed we could go—as lofty as our dreams might already be. His thoughts and His ways are certainly much higher than ours (see Isaiah 55:8–9). In a sense, I suppose we're not unlike those in Kirtland to whom the Prophet Joseph Smith said, “You know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap.”<sup>1</sup>

really hoping to change is you and me. He wants to change our hearts and enhance our future.

No, we can't yet see those great and important things that lie beyond the next bend in the trail. But we do have some idea about the ultimate destination:

“It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

“What manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

“You shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:20).

I don't know about you, but to me that sounds like a long journey—and an exhilarating one! Such a divine goal, lofty though it is, is at the heart of what makes the restored gospel so attractive and inspiring. Deep in our souls is an echo—a memory—that tells us this is why we came to



earth. We accepted our Father in Heaven's plan first and foremost because we wanted to become like Him. We knew that it was a staggering goal that would never be easy to achieve. But we simply couldn't be satisfied with anything less. Our souls were created to grow, and we were stirred then and now to make the journey.

### **Learning and Becoming**

Teaching, learning, and living the gospel are key principles at the heart of growing toward our divine potential and becoming like our Heavenly Parents. Sometimes we call this process *eternal progression*. Sometimes we call it *conversion*. Sometimes we simply name it *repentance*. But whatever we call it, it involves learning. The Prophet Joseph Smith said:

“You have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, . . . by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one. . . .

“When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation.”<sup>2</sup>

So let's talk about learning. As a teacher at heart, I love the word and the idea, though I do think we should define it a little better than we usually do. For gospel purposes I don't just mean the accumulation of knowledge, though that is part of it. I also don't just mean passively listening to a lecture or memorizing facts. I mean learning in the sense of growth and change, of insight leading to improvement, of knowing the truth, which in turn leads us closer to the God of all truth.

President Russell M. Nelson tied together learning and this converting change of heart when he taught that as “the Holy Ghost gives conviction to the earnest seeker of truth,” it fosters faith, which “promotes repentance and obedience to God's commandments.” These essential ingredients of conversion turn us “*from* the ways of the world *to* . . . the ways of the Lord,” which “brings a mighty change of heart.”<sup>3</sup>

This isn't about knowing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel or diagramming the allegory of the olives trees, as useful as such exercises may be. This kind of learning is about changing ourselves,

about being different (better) because we know more of what God knows.

You can see that the kind of learning I'm talking about is far too big to fit into a classroom or to be wrapped up in a 50-minute lesson. Scriptures, prophets, parents, sunshine, rainy days, spiritual promptings, and the everyday curriculum of life itself all provide opportunities for us to learn about God and His plan, for surely "all things bear record" of Him

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(Moses 6:63). Eventually we all discover that He is willing to teach us not only at church but anywhere and anytime—in informal moments with our children and our friends, our neighbor or our workmates, the man or woman we see on the bus or the employee who helps us at the market—wherever and whenever we are willing to learn.

But all these truths God is trying to teach us each day are only so many seeds sown in rocky soil or among the thorns to be burned up or choked out unless we take Alma's counsel to nourish them by experimenting on the word, or as James says, to be doers of the word and not hearers only (see Mark 4:1–20; James 1:22; Alma 32:27–43). As we learn truth and choose to act on it, our testimonies grow (see John 7:17). Then, as we make the truth a part of us by striving to live it consistently even in the face of challenges, it changes us and we become more like the Father of truth.<sup>4</sup>



### Gospel Learning Is Centered in the Home

This is why we say that gospel teaching, learning, and living must be “home centered and Church supported.”<sup>5</sup> First, the home is where we spend most of our time—certainly more time than we spend at church (overworked bishops notwithstanding). We wouldn't expect our physical bodies to survive long on one meal a week—even if it is a very good meal. Similarly, if a one-hour Church class, even an excellent Church class, is the main setting for our “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20), then we are in danger of spiritual malnourishment.

Second, the home is both classroom and lab, where learning and living the gospel are so seamlessly combined that they are almost indistinguishable. This living laboratory experience simply can't be recreated in the classroom alone.

Perhaps most important, the home is—or can be—an echo of heaven, a reminder of the

eternal goal we came here to pursue. As President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, put it: “Though earthly families are far from perfect, they give God’s children the best chance to be welcomed to the world with the only love on earth that comes close to what we felt in heaven—parental love. Families are also the best way to preserve and pass on moral virtues and true principles that are most likely to lead us back to God’s presence.”<sup>6</sup>

Have I frightened you parents? I hope not. This emphasis on teaching, learning, and living at home is not meant to be an added burden for individuals and families. Quite the opposite, actually—we hope that by acknowledging and supporting your efforts at home, we can in some way lighten the burden you carry there. Or, better yet, perhaps we can strengthen you to “bear [it] with ease” (Mosiah 24:15).

### **Supporting Gospel Learning at Church**

This expanded view of embracing the gospel outside of the classroom doesn’t mean that the classroom isn’t important. Of course we hope that meaningful learning still happens at church. In fact, the supporting role of Church classes is critical to home-centered learning. But in order to help change lives, teaching at church can’t be independent of what’s happening in those lives. It must be relevant to and draw on the experiences of both teachers and learners.

Clearly then, focusing on a manual or a chalkboard or the arrangement of chairs or even some excellent discussion questions may not be the right focus. The individual child of God and his or her eternal progress must be the object of our effort and affection. We are trying to touch lives, and we only touch chairs or chalk or audiovisual equipment if that helps us touch a life. To paraphrase

### **LEARNING AND LIVING THE GOSPEL AT HOME**

Research by both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint researchers has found that home-centered religious practices have a powerful and lasting effect on children. As children grow into adulthood, they often maintain the religious beliefs and patterns established in the home of their youth.

Parents who establish their families on principles of righteousness as found in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” give their children advantages that accumulate over time, bringing spiritual and temporal blessings to them.

Also, Church research in the United States has found that children and youth in Latter-day Saint families who have daily family prayer, family scripture study at least several times a week, and weekly family home evening are about 20 percent more likely than others to attend church weekly, be endowed, or marry in the temple when they become adults.

Of course, children have their agency, so parents’ faithful religious observance in the home, such as regular family prayer and scripture study, does not always result in a child’s acceptance of parental values. The likelihood of inter-generational transmission of religious beliefs and behaviors increases when parents set a good example, have a close and loving relationship with their children, and have open conversations about religious topics. One’s family tends to be such a powerful influence on individual religious observance that a significant minority of “prodigals” eventually return to the fold in mortality.

While the implications of this research suggest positive outcomes where there is rich home-centered gospel learning, they also suggest that Church support is especially important for new converts or other members who live in homes where gospel practices may be weak. These members may benefit from modeling and mentoring, such as having family home evening with another family, learning how to have family prayer consistently, observing positive ways to talk about religion at home, and ministering alongside more experienced members.

the Savior, what doth it profit a teacher or a class if it sponsors the world's greatest doctrinal presentation and none of that doctrine becomes evident in the life and love, the thought and the feelings of the individual member, the person God so much wants to save and exalt?

The true measure of success will not be how smoothly the lesson went, how well we filled the time, how many compliments the teacher gets afterwards, or

even how many class members participated. Success depends on what happens in the life of the learner. Did Brother Herrero find something in the scriptures in class last week that helped him get through the challenges he's been facing? Or better yet, did something happen in class that enhanced his ability to find during the week the answers he needs? When he shared that experience this week, did Sister Schmidt find the hope and faith she needed to believe that God would help her too? (See "You Don't Get Fit by Watching Others.")

All of this may mean that, if you are a teacher, what you see in one of our new teaching resources will be somewhat different from what you're used to seeing in our old manuals. You may find less specific instruction about what to do and how to do it. That was by design, to urge you to pray for, watch for, and draw on your own experiences and your own inspiration, as well as that of the people you teach. (See "Are You Soloing or Leading the Choir?")

So let's assume the course of study is the New Testament and I'm the Sunday School teacher. I don't necessarily come to class with a quiver full of factoids about the setting of Matthew 5, inspirational quotes from wise people regarding the Sermon on the Mount, and creative activities about how to be a peacemaker, all organized and timed to take us right up to five minutes before the hour. Instead, I study and live the principles in Matthew 5 just as I expect the learners to do. The only difference is that I might do it with more thought and prayer about each of my class members

and how these principles might be meaningful to them. Then, in class, under the influence of the Spirit, I encourage them to edify and support one another in their strivings to study and live by Matthew 5. I help them see connections between their lives and the precious doctrine in the scriptures. Above all, I

## YOU DON'T GET FIT BY WATCHING OTHERS

Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles compared gospel learning to a trip to the fitness center. Learners, he said, "do not get stronger by watching someone else do the exercises. They learn and then participate. As their spiritual strength increases, they gain confidence and apply themselves all the more" ("A Classroom of Faith, Hope, and Charity" [evening with a General Authority, broadcast for Church Educational System religious educators, Feb. 28, 2014], [broadcasts.lds.org](http://broadcasts.lds.org)).

## ARE YOU SOLOING OR LEADING THE CHOIR?

Often teachers feel like a soloist, as if everything depends on them. Instead, they can view themselves more like a choir director. A teacher's role is unique and needed—they direct the discussion, inspire gospel living, and point everything back to pure doctrine. But the music comes from all of us. Teachers help us find the gospel voice we each have inside by inviting and inspiring us to have our own experiences in studying the scriptures. Then, when we come to class, we share our personal insights and discoveries. This will add to the chorus.

pray for inspiration in the moment to turn a fact into faith, to turn a question into a quest.

Of course, in Primary my role may be a little different. But my goal is not to keep the little ones entertained for 45 minutes or keep them quiet so I can say what I want to say without interruption. My purpose is to build them up as independent learners, to help them see how their lives are enriched by gospel truths, and to support their parents—their most important gospel teachers.

Now, having stunned the parents, perhaps I have frightened the teachers. If so, let me reassure you with two thoughts: (1) You are teaching people, not lessons, and you know the people better than any lesson manual

*Success depends  
on what happens  
in the life of the  
learner.*



possibly can. (2) Your personal efforts to learn and live the gospel are the best possible preparation to teach the gospel to others. Remember that the best way to invite the Spirit into our lives—and into our teaching—is to learn and live the gospel ourselves. The Spirit is the ultimate teacher in this Church, and fortunately, there is no limit to that influence.

### **He Marked the Path and Led the Way**

It is our great desire that the Lord will lift us to new heights of spiritual growth through new ways of learning and living the gospel. With His help, we will share the gospel with our friends, not because we feel it is an obligation but because

the gospel is part of our everyday lives, and we can't open our mouths without some truth of the gospel tumbling out! Ideally, our friends of other faiths will see increased light in our lives and will find the missionaries—even before the missionaries find them—to get for their own families some of what they have seen. Temple marriages, family history work, priesthood power and ordinances, moral purity, caring for the poor—all of that will be the blessed result of deeply converted disciples of Christ learning and living the gospel every day, with full, appropriate, consistent support from Sunday classes. That is what the Lord is leading us toward, and it truly is a soul-stirring journey!

*I bear witness  
that as we learn  
His will, as we  
gather light and  
truth and make  
it part of us  
every day, that  
light will grow  
in us.*





We use the phrase “Teaching in the Savior’s Way,” but I hope that it never becomes a catchphrase or a cliché. Really, all we mean by it is that we need to be Christlike, as teachers and as learners, to try to share the gospel the way He did. This is a chance to join the disciples, to go into the highways and byways with Jesus, looking for one who may be lost. This is a chance to climb the Mount of Beatitudes with the multitudes and sit by the shore of Galilee with the throng. This is a chance for all of us to touch the hem of the Master’s clothing and be healed.

I have always loved these poetic words penned by Eliza R. Snow for one of the most moving hymns in the Church:

*He marked the path and led the way,  
And ev’ry point defines  
To light and life and endless day  
Where God’s full presence shines.<sup>7</sup>*

Brothers and sisters, I am honored to walk with you toward the glorious future our Father in Heaven has in store for us. I know your hearts. I know that you love the Lord and want to do His will. I bear witness that as we learn His will, as we gather light and truth and make it part of us every day, that light will grow in us, “brighter and brighter until the *perfect day*” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:24; emphasis added) when we can be with Him because we will be like Him. ■

#### NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 137.
2. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 221, 268.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “Jesus Christ—the Master Healer,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 86.
4. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32–34; see also David A. Bednar, “Converted unto the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 106–9.
5. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.4.
6. Henry B. Eyring, “Gathering the Family of God,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 20.
7. “How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” *Hymns*, no. 195.



#### NEW INSIGHTS WILL COME

“As you ponder and pray about doctrinal principles, the Holy Ghost will speak to your mind and your heart. From events portrayed in the scriptures, new insights will come and principles relevant to your situation will distill upon your heart.

“You cultivate such revelatory experiences by living according to the light already given you and by searching the scriptures with pure motives—with real intent to ‘come unto Christ.’ As you do so, your confidence will ‘wax strong in the presence of God,’ and the Holy Ghost will be your constant companion.”

President Russell M. Nelson, “Living by Scriptural Guidance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 18.

#### HOW SHOULD I USE THE NEW COME, FOLLOW ME RESOURCES?

The new *Come, Follow Me* resources for individuals and families, Sunday School, and Primary are meant to help us have meaningful experiences learning from the scriptures at home and at church. So how will these new *Come, Follow Me* resources work together?

- In 2019 you will be invited to study the New Testament. *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families* will provide ideas to support your personal and family study at home. Use this resource in any way that is helpful to you.
- Each week, adults, youth, and children throughout the Church will study and discuss the same chapters of the New Testament.
- If you are a Sunday School or Primary teacher, use *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families* to enhance your personal and family study. You will also receive a teacher’s manual to help you create engaging classroom experiences that support the scripture study that class members are doing at home.

For more information about the new *Come, Follow Me* resources, visit [comefollowme.lds.org](http://comefollowme.lds.org).

