

FINDING ANSWERS FOR MYSELF

By Heather J. Johnson

As I've studied the gospel throughout my life, I've found that I have a lot of questions about many different topics. Through pondering and studying out these questions, I've gained a better understanding of how to receive revelation. One experience is particularly clear in my mind.

I had questions about some of the cultural issues that are found in the Book of Mormon. My faith in the Book of Mormon wasn't shaken. I still knew it was true and that reading it blessed my life. I continued reading and studying, focusing on what I did understand. One day I was reading a chapter where one of these cultural issues comes up. As I read the chapter, I started thinking about this issue in a way I never had before. I grabbed my study journal and started writing furiously.

When I finally had my thoughts recorded, I realized that my new understanding was based around a concept I had been learning about in

one of my college classes that semester. Heavenly Father wanted to answer my question, but He waited until I had learned a new paradigm to work with.

I continue to seek understanding with this and other issues, but I'm grateful for the ground I have gained. Through this experience and others, I've found several principles that help me effectively ask questions and find answers.

Approach the question with humility and patience

I've found that revelation comes to me more easily as I ask questions with this type of attitude: "This doesn't make sense to me, but I'm confident that as I gather more information, this issue will make more sense." This is different from an attitude of, "This is completely illogical. I need answers now."

I sometimes think of revelation like rain. We can't demand that the rain fall right when we want it to. We can go to a tropical rain forest where it's more likely to rain, and we can prepare to



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with faith.

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rain now!



collect rainwater by setting out rain barrels, but we still don't get to decide when it rains.

We can go to places and do things that invite revelation—things like attending church and the temple, reading the scriptures, and praying. We can be prepared to receive revelation by taking time to ponder and by using a study journal. But we don't get to decide when the revelation comes.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught:

"We should recognize that the Lord will speak to us through the Spirit in His own time and in His own way. . . .

"So we do all we can. Then we wait upon the Lord for His revelation. He has his own timetable."¹

Demanding immediate answers to our questions is as misguided as a man standing in the middle of a sand dune waving his fist at the sky and expecting it to rain immediately. Both rain and revelation will eventually come, but on God's schedule, not ours.

Ask God

One day at work, I started feeling frustrated—every way I tried to approach the project felt wrong. After struggling for a while, the impression came: "I care about this project too, you know. Why don't you ask Me about it?" I immediately stopped working to say a prayer and ask for

guidance, which was mercifully given.

As I've reflected on that experience, I've come to realize that the impression could be applied to any aspect of my life. "I care about Church history. Why don't you ask Me?" "I care about what you study in college. Why don't you ask Me?" "I care about Church policies and procedures. Why don't you ask Me?"

Because God is our loving Heavenly Father, He wants to counsel with us about our questions and our lives (see Alma 37:37). He won't always give us complete answers—sometimes He wants us to figure things out through our own experience, or sometimes He chooses not to speak on certain topics—but He will always listen to us and minister to us in the way that is best for us (see Matthew 7:7–11).

Study it out

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord counsels us to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). We shouldn't expect to receive knowledge that we haven't prepared for—finding answers will take effort on our part. As I've studied, I've found these strategies to be helpful:

- Don't overlook simple explanations. Often, particularly when I'm reading the Doctrine and Covenants, I've resolved my concerns simply by double-checking a date or looking at a footnote.
- Ponder the question from different perspectives. How do cultural differences impact my question? How does considering the larger historical context inform my question?

Chieko N. Okazaki (1926–2011), former First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, made this observation about the relationship between study and faith: "What happens if you try to paddle a boat using only one oar? You go around and around in circles. If you paddle hard, you go fast. If you paddle slowly, you turn gently. But you still just go around in circles. It's the same with trying to make study replace faith or trying to exercise faith but without study. We can often find ourselves just going around in circles. I think that the Holy Ghost cannot give us some answers until we are actively seeking knowledge."²

Focus on the most important questions

Recently I found some questions I had written down a few weeks previously while reading the scriptures. I realized that I still hadn't found

answers to these questions. But I also realized that finding the answers wouldn't really change how I lived, other than I would know a few more particulars about the Bible. I debated whether to research the questions, but I decided that my time could be better spent.

We all have lots of demands on our time, and most of us can't spend all day searching for gospel answers. Our gospel study time will be most meaningful when we spend it finding answers to questions that will help us better understand the plan of salvation and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not to say that questions regarding finer points shouldn't be asked and studied. But finding answers to them should not replace studying the "weightier matters" (Matthew 23:23) of how to live and how to treat others. We don't want to be like the Pharisees, who were inclined to "strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24).

Record answers

Life is busy and full of distractions, and often I'll forget what I've learned. A couple months after my experience with the issue I had with the Book of Mormon, I again started to feel very confused and unsettled. But when I went back to my study journal, I was able to reconnect the dots and remember what I had learned about the issue.



On another occasion I was preparing for a Church speaking assignment. While looking through a study journal from my mission, I was amazed at the number of quotes, scriptures, and insights I had collected and filed under different topic headings—I didn't remember most of it. I learned a lot for my life now from what I had written down in the past.

Focus on what we do know

In our seeking, we will have times when we don't receive answers—even after careful and prayerful searching. In these cases, I like to think of this statement by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

"In moments of fear or doubt or troubling times, hold the ground you have already won, even if that ground is limited. . . .

*"... In this Church, what we know will always trump what we do not know. And remember, in this world, everyone is to walk by faith."*³

We all will have questions. The defining factor for each of us will be how we pursue the answers to those questions. If we demand answers in a spirit of doubt, we will limit our progression and slow our acquisition of knowledge. If we seek answers with patience and faith and keep the commandments, we will eventually know all things (see D&C 93:28). ■

The author lives in Idaho, USA.

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "In His Own Time, in His Own Way," *Ensign*, Aug. 2013, 22, 24.
2. Chieko N. Okazaki, "Rowing Your Boat," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 92.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lord, I Believe," *Ensign*, May 2013, 93–94.



CONTINUE IN PATIENCE

"Brigham Young taught that when something came up which he could

not comprehend fully, he would pray to the Lord, 'Give me patience to wait until I can understand it for myself' [*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 75]. And then Brigham would continue to pray until he could comprehend it.

"We must learn that in the Lord's plan, our understanding comes 'line upon line, precept upon precept' [D&C 98:12]. In short, knowledge and understanding come at the price of patience."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Continue in Patience," *Ensign*, May 2010, 58.

study and faith

