

LAY HOLD *upon the* WORD OF GOD



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The Apostle Paul said the following about our day: “In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1). We see fulfillment of this prophecy in the nightly news. Paraded before us is a steady stream of those who have fallen prey to false doctrine.

It seems apparent that “the cunning plans which [the devil] hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men” (Alma 28:13) are having an ever more powerful effect. We are enticed by sophisticated arguments enhanced by appealing images and music. Many people are swayed by those who “call evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20; 2 Nephi 15:20). Paradoxically, those who are guilty of gross sin point their fingers scornfully at the righteous, accusing them of being intolerant, while they themselves are prejudiced against those who sustain God’s moral code.

How do we remain steadfast in the face of this escalating onslaught? The Book of Mormon, written specifically for our day, has the answers, as explained by President Ezra Taft Benson:

Three simple steps—study, ponder, and pray—enable us to learn eternal truths so they are anchored to our souls by the power of the Holy Ghost.



“There is a power in the book which will begin to flow into your lives the moment you begin a serious study of the book. . . . You will find the power to avoid deception. You will find the power to stay on the strait and narrow path.”¹ The words of Mormon reinforce this promise: “Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course . . . and land [his soul] . . . at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven” (Helaman 3:29–30).

As we study the Book of Mormon, it will provide vital doctrine and spiritual strength to overcome the attack on righteousness. When we “lay hold upon” the word of God,



His words sink deeply into our minds and hearts, strengthening us against deception and temptation.

Moroni explains the pattern to follow in our study: “When ye shall read these things, . . . ponder [them] in your hearts. . . . Ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:3–4).

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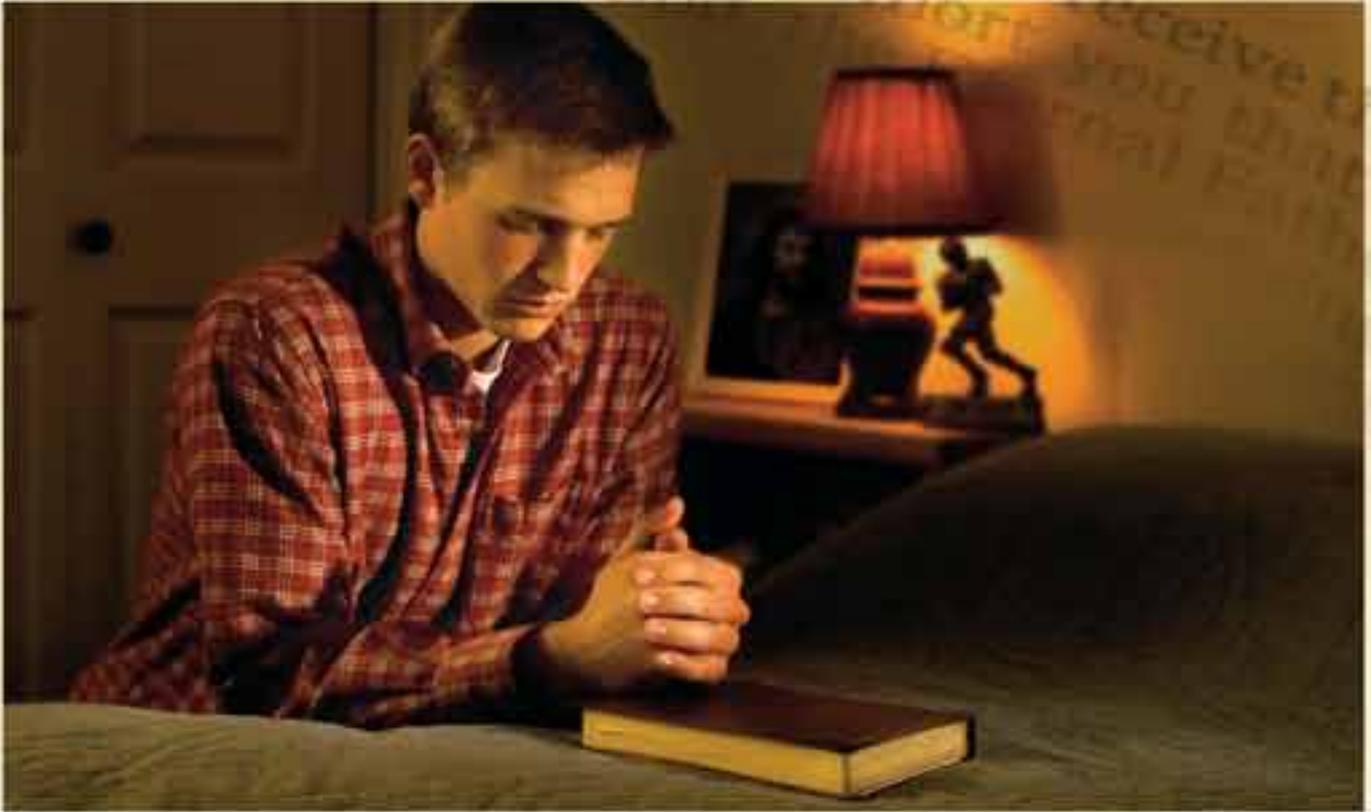
Study

The scriptures are a pure source of spiritual truths. The Lord said, “These words [of scripture] are not of man . . . but of me” (D&C 31:13). As we lay hold upon the word of God, it is essential that we study the scriptures, and the

Book of Mormon should be the centerpiece of our study.² The quantity of our study is not as important as the quality. However, it is crucial that we set aside a specific time each day to drink of the “living water” found in the scriptures (see John 4:10–14).

Our spirits, like our bodies, need daily nourishment. An occasional scriptural feast with frequent periods of fasting from the word will leave us spiritually malnourished. The Book of Mormon is particularly powerful in providing spiritual sustenance. In fact, its reference to the names or titles of the Savior—an average of once per 1.7 verses³—is a clear sign of its highly concentrated spiritual value.

In our study, it is essential that we “liken all scriptures unto us” (1 Nephi 19:23). Likening is the process by which we allow the scriptures to transform our character. If our object in studying the scriptures is to enable ourselves to answer questions in Church classes, little lasting benefit will result. Being able to quickly find the scriptural answer



to a gospel question is an admirable skill. But of greater worth is to consistently apply the scriptures to our lives and steadily become *living scripture*. We must daily sup at the table of the Lord, “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20). As we properly assimilate this spiritual food, it will be transformed into Godlike character.

Ponder

Pondering the scriptures is indispensable to laying hold upon the word. Pausing occasionally during our study affords us a chance to focus more fully on the spiritual feelings that often accompany, affirm, and augment the truths we have read. It provides access to our hearts for doctrinal truths that may otherwise dwell only in our minds.

In His powerful sermon to the Nephites, the Savior taught the importance of pondering: “I perceive that ye . . . cannot understand all my words . . . at this time. Therefore, go ye unto your homes, and ponder upon the things which I have said” (3 Nephi 17:2–3). It is vital that we ponder so that we may be receptive to the Holy Ghost and more fully comprehend and internalize what we have studied.

Many great revelations through the ages have come to those who were pondering upon spiritual truths (see, for

example, 1 Nephi 11:1; Helaman 10:2; D&C 138:1). When studying, take time to ponder.

Pray

Prayer quite naturally accompanies and enhances studying and pondering. It is an indispensable means by which to invite the Spirit. For example, Ammon and his fellow missionaries “waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth” by “search[ing] the scriptures diligently” and through “much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God” (Alma 17:2–3).

The absence of pondering and prayer would essentially leave spiritual learning to the intellect. However, reason alone will not secure the blessings available from the scriptural “well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). For instance, in rejecting the inspired preaching of Samuel the Lamanite, “the people began to harden their hearts, . . . saying: . . . It is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come” (Helaman 16:15, 18). Reasonable or not, Christ did come! Hence, unaided logic is shown to be “the foolishness of men” (2 Nephi 9:28).

The Lord taught Oliver Cowdery this sequence for

spiritual learning: “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:8). Study and pondering must be accompanied by prayer because “the things of God knoweth no man, except he has the Spirit of God” (Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Corinthians 2:11).

During my missionary service, a minister responded to an invitation to pray about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon by saying that eternal truths are not revealed by the Spirit. He believed that truth is received through the mind alone. Indeed, as Nephi foresaw, we live in a day when some “priests [and others] . . . teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 28:4). Those not taught by the Holy Ghost and unaccustomed to thoughtful pondering and humble prayer are left at the mercy of “the precepts of men” (2 Nephi 27:25; 28:14, 26, 31; D&C 45:29).

Those who seek the learning of spiritual things through reason alone will forever chase a pot of spiritual gold at the end of a vanishing intellectual rainbow. Without the Spirit, men will never be “founded upon a rock” (Matthew 7:25; see also Jacob 4:14–17), though they may stumble over it from time to time. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Study and reason can *find* the truth . . . , but only revelation can *confirm* it.”⁴ To learn the truth by the Spirit is to feel its power in the heart and soul.

Without the confirming witness of the Spirit, an intellectual conviction of sacred truths could easily be shaken by a persuasive argument,

just as sunlight is swallowed by nightfall. However, prayer can bring a celestial sunrise, shining eternal light on critical doctrine. As President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) stated, “Through the Holy Ghost the truth is woven into the very fibre and sinews of the body so that it cannot be forgotten.”⁵



HELPS FOR HOME EVENING

1. The following activity or one similar to it could help your family remember the principles found in the article. Consider creating the “three steps” from the article using stairs, rocks, or levels of a hill. Indicate the first step as “study.” Give each person a treat to “feast upon” with a scripture reference from the article attached and have them read the scripture. Move to the next step and pause for a minute to ponder the scripture just “feasted upon.” Move to the prayer step. Read the first sentence of the prayer section. Discuss what blessings can come from the scripture and what can be learned by following this pattern.

2. Read together the same verse of scripture. Share with one another what you found or how you felt about this scripture. Invite family members to search for guidance from the scriptures as you study during the coming week.

Blessings

When we learn eternal truths through the power of the Spirit, they will sink deeply into our hearts, making them “an anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19). Such learning helps to firmly fasten our fortress of faith to “the rock of our Redeemer” (Helaman 5:12).

As we “lay hold upon the word of God,” it lays hold upon us, guiding our thoughts, words, and deeds, drawing us ever closer to the Great Source of those inspiring words. We need now, perhaps more than ever before, to “lay hold upon the word of God” so that we can quickly and powerfully overcome the “cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil” and his followers. May we do so through our daily study, pondering, and prayer. I testify that as we follow these steps, enduring to the end, our souls will “land . . . at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven” (Helaman 3:30). ■

NOTES

1. *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (1988), 54.
2. See Ezra Taft Benson, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 5.
3. See Susan Ward Easton, “Names of Christ in the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, July 1978, 60–61.
4. *The Lord’s Way* (1991), 65.
5. “The Sin against the Holy Ghost,” *Instructor*, Oct. 1935, 431.