

# MAKING Spiritual Education A PRIORITY

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**By Joel Childress**

One Saturday afternoon at the beginning of a new semester of college, I called a good friend whom I had not seen for several months. He and I talked for a while and caught up on each other's lives. I asked him what his schedule was like, and he mentioned that he was taking some business classes and an institute class. He admitted that he had initially signed up to get the free parking the institute offered to its students, but he also said that he was really enjoying the course.

I thought about that for a moment. I had spent four years at Arizona State University and had not attended a single institute class. In the past I usually rationalized this by saying that I didn't have time (I was attending school and working full time). After all, I am married, and certainly my family needed my time and attention. I did not want to take more time away from them by adding more classes, but at that moment while talking to my friend, I realized that maybe I *could* fit institute into my schedule. (Besides, I thought, free parking would be nice!) I talked it over with my wife and then enrolled in a class.

The parking spot, I'll admit, was great, but it was just a convenience. The real blessing of institute was found in the classes I took. Over the next several weeks, I realized what I had been missing the past

four years—a regular, midweek spiritual uplift. I was able to study the scriptures, sing beautiful hymns, and feel the Spirit. I couldn't believe I had cut myself off from such spiritual nourishment just to save a bit of time two days a week.

As I have made institute part of my remaining college experience, I have found that even with the extra commitment, I still have plenty of time to complete my assignments for my other classes—in some cases, well before the due date. I am able to study more effectively at school and at home. In addition, it has helped me to be a better husband and father when I am at home.

When I read the scriptures, instead of just checking it off my to-do list, I am reading with "real intent" (see Moroni 10:4; see also 2 Nephi 31:13) and finding passages that have new meaning to me. Institute has also helped me to be more vigilant in keeping my covenants and has brought me closer to my Heavenly Father. In short, the investment of my time spent at institute has repaid me tenfold.

I cannot get back the missed opportunities from the years when I did not attend institute, but I can take advantage of the ones I have going forward. I am grateful for the blessings I have found in making spiritual learning a priority. ■

