

The Power of Diligent Learning

BY ELDER JAY E. JENSEN
Of the Presidency of the Seventy



Make the most of the many opportunities you have to learn.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord counsels, “Wherefore, now let every man [and woman] learn” and learn “in all diligence,” for he or she that learns not “shall not be counted worthy to stand” (D&C 107:99–100).

The scriptures contain 144 references to learning. Consider some of them:

“Yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

“Learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God” (Alma 37:35).

“Learn to be more wise than we” (Mormon 9:31).

“Learn of me, and listen to my words” (D&C 19:23).

“Seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

“Study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D&C 90:15).

“[Seek] diligently to learn wisdom and to find truth” (D&C 97:1).

As we consider the mandate of such divine admonitions, it is important to reflect on how gospel learning occurs. Gospel learning requires careful reasoning, study, and prayer. However, it is important to remember that

each of us is a dual being: a personage of both body and spirit. Because we are spiritual beings, it is essential that we learn by the power of the Spirit.

Learning by the Spirit

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “All things whatsoever God in his infinite wisdom has seen fit and proper to reveal to us . . . are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all; and those revelations which will save our spirits will save our bodies.”¹

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord further emphasizes His divine pattern for teaching and learning:

“Why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?”

“Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:21–22).

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphasized the blessings of following this pattern by explaining what it means to understand and be edified: “The



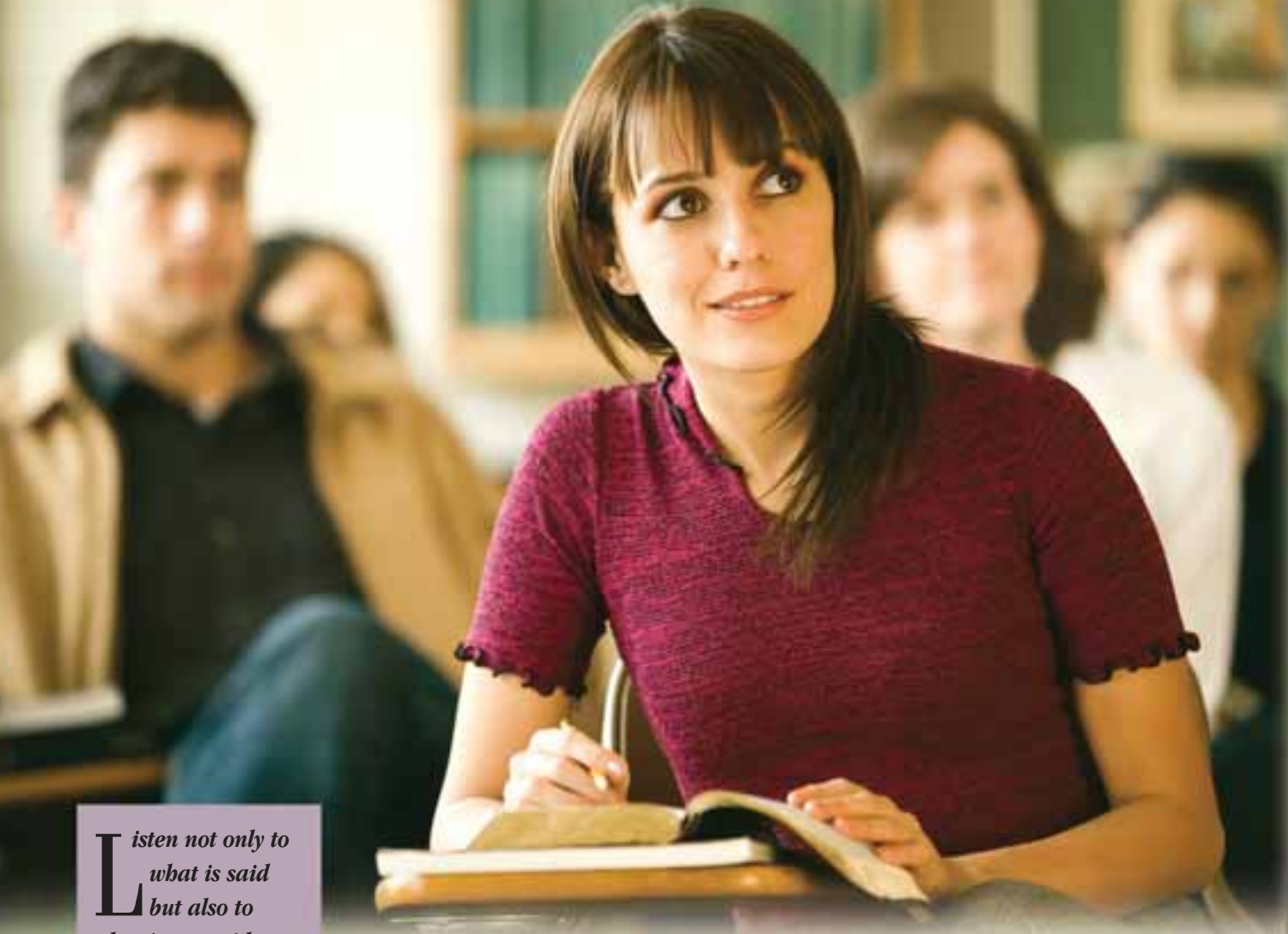
Gospel
learning
requires
careful reasoning,
study, and prayer.

verb *understand* refers to that which is heard. It is the same message to all. *Edified* concerns that which is communicated by the Holy Ghost. The message can be different and tailored by the Spirit to the needs of each individual.”²

In 2 Nephi 33:1, Nephi reminds us of another aspect of learning by the Spirit: “When a man speaketh by the power of

the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.” This is a powerful promise. Yet it is fulfilled only if we invite the Savior into our lives.

The Savior stands at the door and knocks (see Revelation 3:20). The Holy Ghost stands at the door and knocks (see 2 Nephi 33:1–2). All we have to do is use our agency and invite Them in.



Listen not only to what is said but also to what is not said: the unspoken promptings of the Holy Ghost.

Inviting Diligent Learning

In the February 2007 worldwide leadership training meeting on teaching and learning, President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, provided specific counsel on how we can invite such diligent learning. I would like to summarize a few of the things I learned from President Packer about learning.

First, President Packer taught that being diligent learners means we want to learn. We show this desire when we are teachable and when we can be taught without resenting it. When we resent instruction and correction, we offend the Spirit and limit our opportunities for growth and progress.

Second, we need to pray—particularly in specifics. Pray formally and informally for

yourself and for the teacher. The teacher may not say something quite right. He or she may be weak and feeble in words and expression. But the Holy Ghost is not, and each of us can pray for ourselves and for the teacher: “Oh, Father, the teacher does not know the load and burden that I currently carry. Help him or her to teach me directly.” When you start doing that as a learner, you start getting answers.

Third, and this is so significant: listen. In particular, President Packer encourages us to listen to those who are experienced: “I learned early on that there is great value in listening to experience in older people. . . . I remember in the Quorum of the Twelve, LeGrand Richards didn’t walk as fast as the other Brethren, and I would always wait and

open the door for him and walk back to the building with him. One day one of the Brethren said, ‘Oh, you’re so kind to take care of Brother Richards.’ And I thought, ‘You don’t know my selfish motive’—as we would walk back, I would just listen to him. I knew that he could remember Wilford Woodruff, and he would speak.”³

Further, listen not only to what is said but also to what is not said: the unspoken promptings of the Holy Ghost. Each is important. Hopefully, you are always sensitive to what is not said by the teacher. If you are, the Holy Ghost will tailor the message to your needs.

Fourth, as you listen, it is important to organize what you learn. Take what you have heard, and then make it yours by writing it down and expanding it. If you really want to ensure that you’ve got it, find somebody to whom you may teach it. Generally speaking, until you can articulate what you’ve learned, you haven’t really learned it. Make the effort to organize what you learn; it will be worth it.

Preparing to Learn

In addition to what we do in class, we can do many things to invite diligent learning even before we come to class.

President Packer counseled: “Arise from your bed early . . . and then reflect in the morning when your mind is clear. That’s when the ideas come.”⁴ I know that is true. As we arise early to study, pray, ponder, and listen, revelation will come.

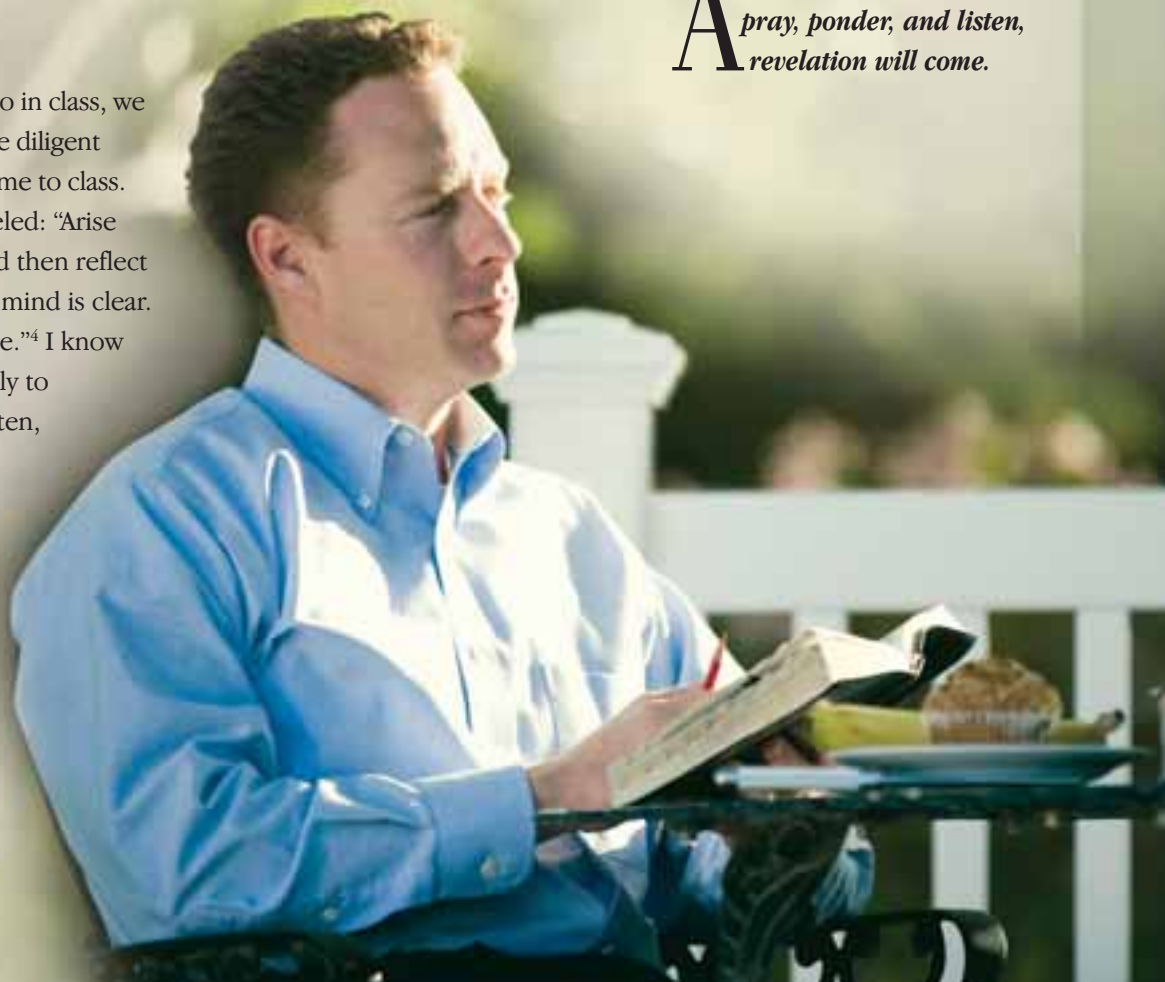
Also, be punctual to your meetings, particularly sacrament meeting, one of the most spiritual meetings in the Church. As you come, be reverent; leave yourself open to revelation. Come and listen to

the prelude music. Don’t seek out somebody to talk to. Come as a diligent learner, and prepare yourself to receive revelation.

Further, we can make a commitment to accept the responsibility for learning no matter how well the teacher or speaker can teach. Several years ago President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) remarked: “Testimony meetings are some of the best meetings in the [Church] in the whole month, if you have the spirit. If you are bored at a testimony meeting, there is something the matter with *you*, and not the other people. You can get up and bear your testimony and you think it is the best meeting in the month; but if you sit there and count the grammatical errors and laugh at the man who can’t speak very well, you’ll be bored. . . . Don’t forget it! You have to *fight* for a testimony. You have to *keep fighting!*”⁵

Now that is a very powerful observation.

A *s we arise early to study, pray, ponder, and listen, revelation will come.*





I want to follow the example of the Savior; a master teacher. But what made Him a master teacher? He was first a learner.

Making the Most of Opportunities

Above all, stay at it. President Packer was very emphatic about this in his interview. Don't give up. Be persistent in learning. Make the most of the many opportunities you have to learn.

Many years ago Elder Marion D. Hanks, while an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke of the power of making the most of our opportunities to learn. Elder Hanks told a story about Louis Agassiz, a distinguished naturalist, who was approached by an obscure spinster woman who insisted that she had never had a chance to learn. In response, Dr. Agassiz asked her to consider the chances for learning that she already had:

“What do you do?” he asked.

“I skin potatoes and chop onions.”

“He said, ‘Madame, where do you sit during these interesting but homely duties?’

“On the bottom step of the kitchen stairs.”

“Where do your feet rest?”

“On the glazed brick.”

“What is glazed brick?”

“I don't know, sir.”

“He said, ‘How long have you been sitting there?’

“She said, ‘Fifteen years.’

“Madame, here is my personal card,” said Dr. Agassiz. “Would you kindly write me a letter concerning the nature of a glazed brick?”

The woman took the challenge seriously. She read all she could find about brick and tile and then sent Dr. Agassiz a 36-page paper on the subject.

Elder Hanks continued:

“Back came the letter from Dr. Agassiz: ‘Dear Madam, this is the best article I have ever seen on the subject. If you will kindly change the three words marked with asterisks, I will have it published and pay you for it.’

“A short time later there came a letter that brought \$250, and penciled on the bottom of this letter was this query: ‘What was under those bricks?’ She had learned the value of time and answered with a single word: ‘Ants.’ He wrote back and said, ‘Tell me about the ants.’ . . .

“After wide reading, much microscopic work, and deep study, the spinster sat down and wrote Dr. Agassiz 360 pages on the subject. He published the book and sent her the money, and she went to visit all the lands of her dreams on the proceeds of her work.”⁶

Now there's something very fundamental about that, to invite diligent learning and not be content with mediocrity.

We can become better learners, and by being better learners, we will be better teachers. I want to follow the example of the Savior, a master teacher. But what made Him a master teacher? He was first a learner. May the Lord bless each of us as we follow Him and become better learners. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2007), 475.
2. “To Understand and Live Truth” (an evening with Elder Richard G. Scott, Feb. 4, 2005), <http://lds.org/library/display/0,4945,5344-1-2783-8,00.htm>.
3. “Principles of Teaching and Learning,” *Liabona*, June 2007, 52; *Ensign*, June 2007, 84.
4. *Liabona*, June 2007, 52; *Ensign*, June 2007, 84.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society course of study, 2006), 75.
6. “Good Teachers Matter,” *Ensign*, July 1971, 61–62.