

A Higher EDUCATION



As the Commissioner of Church Education, Elder Paul V. Johnson of the Seventy is responsible for overseeing seminaries and institutes. Here are some answers to questions raised during a discussion Elder Johnson had with students at the Alta High School Seminary in Sandy, Utah.

How does seminary relate to your schoolwork and to your general education?

I think it really lays the foundation. When you're studying other subjects, if you know who you are and what God's plan is for you, both during this earth life and afterward, it really brings into focus those other subjects.

Another secret a lot of people don't understand is that when you're doing what you should and you've got the Spirit in your life, it actually increases your capacities in your other schoolwork.

*Why seminary?
Why institute?
Because without
them your
education is
incomplete.*



What can I do to make my seminary experience more meaningful?

You're part of the process. Seminary isn't just a teacher lecturing to you. When you're willing to make comments or to explain a gospel principle or to bear your testimony, that helps to bring the Spirit into the class and into your life.

And there's another key that sometimes we don't think about to make seminary a really powerful experience. When you learn principles in the gospel, or relearn them, you apply them in your lives outside of class. And when you do that, the power of the whole seminary experience multiplies. That is what the gospel is about. It's what happens in your life. It's what you are becoming. And the way you become the type of person you are isn't just by listening to or being able to

explain gospel principles. It's to have them in your heart, and to use them when you deal with your friends or when you face challenging situations. That willingness to apply what you've learned is one of the most powerful ways to make seminary a great experience for you.

If seminary conflicts with sports or other activities, what should I do?

That type of question is going to come up a lot in your life, not just about seminary but about Church things generally. Find a way to fit it in and let the rest of your life flow around it. When you're doing what you're supposed to, the Lord will bless you.

Would that also go along with seminary studies and schoolwork?

I wouldn't make the seminary studies and the schoolwork one or the other. You really can find a way to do them both. You may have to cut out video games or movies or something, but do them both.

There's a scriptural principle: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;



Elder Johnson tells students that seminary and institute are vital and valuable.



and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). When we get our eye single to the glory of God, and we get our hearts right, we plug the spiritual things in first. We find a way.

Can you think of some things that you learned as a seminary student that helped you?

I gained an interest in studying the scriptures and learning about the doctrines of the gospel. Seminary really helped me to get ready to go on a mission.

I had a great family. My dad and my mom understood the gospel and taught it to us. But studying and trying to learn something on my own made a difference for me.

What's the difference between released-time and early-morning seminary, and what is home-study seminary?

Seminary is supposed to be a daily experience for everyone. Released-time seminary takes place in areas where schools allow students to be released from school for one class period to attend seminary, which is held off-campus at a nearby Church-owned building. Early-morning seminary is held before school, sometimes in a chapel and

sometimes in a home. Home study is used where members are really spread out and it's not possible to get together every day. Home-study curriculum is designed so that every day you study the scriptures, answer questions, and do activities. Then once a week you get together as a class.

So there's really no place in the world where you can't participate in seminary?

That's correct. In fact, right now we're actually studying the possibility of an online



seminary for people who are really isolated. We have seminary students in almost 140 countries right now, so it's really spread out.

Why go to seminary all four years? Couldn't you just go to one year and get enough out of that?

There are several reasons. For one, you get a chance to study all the standard works. For another, during each of those years, you get the advantages we've been talking about of being in touch with the gospel every day and learning something new every day. You get an in-depth study of the scriptures through that whole course. If you missed a year, that doesn't mean you shouldn't come the next year. But it really is a blessing in your life if you can come all four years. It makes a big difference.



As they talk, Elder Johnson and the students agree that the real knowledge is spiritual knowledge.



I've already been to seminary for four years and studied all the standard works. Why should I go on to institute?

Because it's the best! You don't want to miss it. No matter where you go for higher education, we've tried to provide an even higher education, through an institute program. When you're in seminary, you do get a basic foundation of the gospel and the standard works. Institute builds on that foundation. It gives you a chance to interact with other young single adults, to learn more about the gospel. It has courses that are outside the four courses that you've taken in seminary. You get a chance to serve other people. It is really a wonderful, tremendous opportunity. Don't miss it!

What's the difference between the lessons they teach in seminary and the lessons they teach on an institute level?

Institute offers a greater variety of courses. For example, they have a course about preparing for marriage. They also have courses about subjects you have already covered in seminary, but as you take a New Testament

class in institute, it will continue to expand your gospel knowledge. There's a little more flexibility in the institute curriculum. It focuses more on issues that may be relevant to the institute-age student rather than the seminary-age student. They're great courses. You're going to love them.

For kids who aren't old enough to go to seminary yet, is there something you could suggest to help them get ready, mentally and spiritually?

I'm going to turn that one back to you as students. What would you say?

Student: You can tell them that they need to read scriptures every day to get in touch with the Spirit. Start now to develop the habit of reading every day.

Student: In ninth grade, my brothers asked me why I go to seminary and what's so important about it. I showed them my scripture mastery cards. My brother was in third grade at the time. He went through his scriptures and marked all the scripture mastery scriptures. He asked me why those were important, and I said those were the ones we were asked to memorize. He started studying and learning them. It gave him a head start later on.

Student: First of all, be a good example to



ENROLL IN SEMINARY AND INSTITUTE

“Without guidance, [a] student may choose another elective instead of seminary, or another course instead of an institute class. That would surely be a mistake. It would be like adding one more brick to the house of knowledge when there is little mortar to hold it all together. . . . Students, if your values are in place, you will not hesitate to forego an elective class that may decorate your life in favor of instruction which can hold together the very foundation of it. Then, once enrolled, attend, study, and learn. Persuade your friends to do the same. You will never regret it; this I promise you.”

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Agency and Control,” Ensign, May 1983, 67.



them. If you say, “I had such a great day in seminary,” they’re going to think that seminary is cool. They’ll wonder what makes it so good, and they will want to take it when they get a chance. Have a good attitude. There’s always someone looking up to you and watching what you do.

Elder Johnson: Those are great ideas! Talk about it. Tell them what you learn in seminary. Let them see what you’re reading in the scriptures. Have them quiz you on scripture mastery scriptures. Tell them something that you learned.

At the distribution center, you can get the bookmarks and give them to your little brothers and sisters. Get them a red pencil. Explain what’s on the bookmark—the chronology, and so on. You can give it to them and say, “Here’s what we do,” and get them excited about it.

What would you say would be the most important thing a student can gain from seminary and institute?

The real testimony that Jesus is the Christ. The understanding that the *real* knowledge is the spiritual knowledge. It’s what comes from the Holy Ghost to our souls individually. That’s the most powerful truth, the most powerful thing that can come out of seminary and institute. It doesn’t just change what you know; it changes who you are, and it changes how you look at the world. And that kind of higher education helps to make your other education complete. **NE**