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Church Magazines

How do you make the connection between the prophets of old and your life as a youth today?

Most of us can remember times when we were comforted, inspired, or taught by the scriptures, and we treasure these moments, because they can be among our most spiritual and potentially life-changing experiences.

And then there are the other times—those moments when the scriptures seem like a person trying to speak to us from across a wide gorge with a whipping wind in between. So how do we build a bridge over this chasm of centuries, languages, and customs?

Nephi said he “did liken all scriptures [to himself and his family] that it might be for [their] profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23), and modern prophets have told us we should try to do the same. So here are a few bits of advice for bridging the gap you may sometimes feel between yourself and the scriptures.

1. Look for the big picture.

Sometimes when you broaden your view and look at a scripture outside its immediate context, it's easier to see how it's relevant to your life. A quick way to do this is to review some of the headings to the surrounding



chapters. And sometimes it's necessary to ask yourself how what you're reading fits into other parts of the scriptures—or even into Heavenly Father's plan in general.

2. Look for principles.

Elder Richard G. Scott has taught, “Search for principles. Carefully separate them from the detail used to explain them. . . .

It is worth great effort to organize the truth we gather to simple statements of principle” (“Acquiring Spiritual Knowledge,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 86). So, for instance, after reading a chapter of scripture, think of a statement (a complete sentence rather than just a word or phrase) that summarizes a principle taught in that chapter, and maybe even write it down. When you do this, you may find that the principles you come up with and the way you state them will have a more personal application.



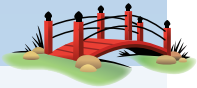
1. Example: When you're reading King Benjamin's sermon (Mosiah 2–5), you will come across familiar scriptures such as Mosiah 2:17 (“when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God”), and that's good. But as you read through those chapters, it's helpful to go back and briefly review the themes from his entire address and even the chapter before it (Mosiah 1) to understand what he was trying to teach his people and how he was doing it.

You can then ask yourself questions such as:

- “Why was King Benjamin giving this address?”
- “What does serving others have to do with giving thanks to God?”
- “What does accepting the Atonement have to do with helping the poor?”
- “What does all of this have to do with taking Christ's name upon me?”

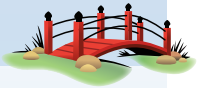


2. Example: In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), the Savior teaches the parable of the wise man and the foolish man (Matthew 7:24–27). After reading this parable, you might state the principle it teaches this way: “Building my life on the teachings of Jesus Christ will help me withstand temptation and persecution.” Can you form other statements of principle from the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount?



3. Example: As you read about the following people in the scriptures, think about their relationships to one another and how those relationships are like ones that you are familiar with:

- *Naomi and Ruth.* What was their relationship, and how did Ruth's faith affect how the relationship developed (see Ruth 1)?
- *Jesus, Mary, and John.* How does Jesus's different relationships to these two people affect the way you feel when you read John 19:26–27?
- *Nephi and Zoram.* How did Nephi convince this stranger that he would be safe with him (see 1 Nephi 4)?
- *Captain Moroni and Pahoran.* How does understanding the relationship between these two (Pahoran was basically Moroni's boss) make Pahoran's reaction to Moroni's letter all the more remarkable (see Alma 59–61)?



4. Example: As you read John 21, imagine you are Peter when the Savior asked him three times, "Lovest thou me?" How would you feel? How would you answer?

Or read Doctrine and Covenants 41 and think how you would feel if the Lord said something about your character like what He said about Edward Partridge in verse 11. How would this make you want to act?



5. Example: In Mormon 3 we read that Mormon stepped down as the leader of the Nephite armies because of their wickedness. Why might he have gone back later to lead them when it seemed hopeless (see Mormon 4–5)?

3. Look at the relationships between people.

Across the world and throughout history, basic human relationships are pretty much the same—parents, children, friends, neighbors, business and work associates, strangers, countrymen, civic and religious leaders. We all understand these relationships, so when you look at the relationships between the people you're reading about, you can more easily draw connections to your own life.

4. Use your imagination.

Do what you do when you read other books—imagine yourself in the middle of the story. For instance, imagine you're the person writing it, and try to get a sense for his feelings and his purpose. Or think of yourself as someone living at that time and in that place, and ask yourself how you would have reacted to the prophets' words. Or imagine you're the person it's being written to (which isn't such a stretch, since a lot of times that's actually the case), and think about how the prophet is trying to connect with you.

5. Focus on why people do what they do.

Identifying motives is a great way to connect to people of the past. Customs and circumstances may have changed, but the basic things that drive people to do what they do haven't really changed much over the centuries. People 3,000 years ago sinned, repented, obeyed, and served for the same basic reasons people do those things today. As you read, consider what's driving the people you're reading about (love, pride, greed, selfishness, faith), and try to relate those things to yourself and the world you live in.

6. Try rephrasing certain passages.

The language of the scriptures is beautiful and inspiring, but when you sense a language barrier in a passage of scripture, you may need to rephrase it in your mind. Break a sentence down into its basic parts, and then replace difficult words or rearrange the sentence so that it makes more sense. Then you can often more easily see the connection to yourself.

As you diligently study the scriptures and try to forge a stronger connection with them, you will likely find that your mind will be more active and your heart will be more open to the Spirit. When this happens, you will be better able to hear the words of the scriptures speak loudly and clearly across the gap of centuries and continents, and then they can sink deep into your heart. And that will be a cherished experience well worth the effort. **NE**



6. Example: You're reading 2 Peter 1:12–13:

WHAT YOU READ

Wherefore I will not be negligent

to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle,

to stir you up by putting you in remembrance.

WHAT YOU THINK

Well, "negligent" means you're not doing your duty, so Peter will always do his duty. What duty?

So, his duty is to give them reminders of what they already know.

According to the footnotes, "meet" means "right," and "tabernacle" is referring to the body, so Peter's saying that as long as he lives, it's right for him to . . .

So, as long as he lives, Peter will remind people of the truth and "stir them up"—kind of like shaking someone who's asleep. Hmm. That's like the Church leaders at general conference. They tell us what we need to hear and remind us of truths we should know.

And they'll keep doing it as long as they live—just like Peter.



A KEY TO REVELATION



"Pondering a passage of scripture can be a key to unlock revelation and the guidance

and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Scriptures can calm an agitated soul, giving peace, hope, and a restoration of confidence in one's ability to overcome the challenges of life. . . . Scriptures can communicate different meanings at different times in our life, according to our needs."

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Power of Scripture," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 6.

