



While others are still sound asleep, these Latter-day Saints in Alabama are already on the move—and for good reason.

SEMINARY

By Loran Cook

At 5:40 in the morning, when most people are still asleep, Jay McKinley and Amy Fuqua of the Monroe Branch of the Mobile Alabama Stake are at church with their scriptures and seminary manuals. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) said that seminary is one of the most significant experiences that any youth can have, and he encouraged youth to “regularly attend seminary and be a seminary graduate.”¹ It is a while until sunrise, but these two students and their teacher know the importance of the blessings they receive from following the prophet’s counsel to become seminary graduates.

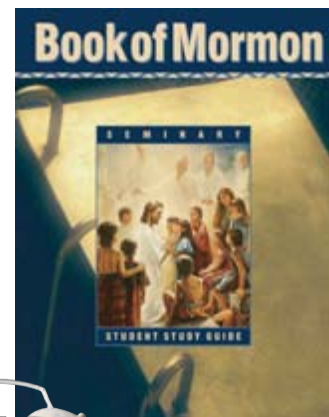
“Sometimes it is really hard to get up at 4:45 a.m., but it’s totally worth it,” says Amy. “I love the feeling I get when I have the Spirit with me so early.” All three agree that the early starts are tiring and hard to manage, but all know that the benefits of early morning gospel study far outweigh the challenge of juggling each of their schedules, chores, and lives on top

of seminary. Amy says, “When I think about it, having class at 5:40 a.m. isn’t a sacrifice at all.” The opportunity to learn more about the Savior is worth every effort, she says.

Jay and Amy’s seminary teacher, Sister Miranda Smith, agrees, and Jay says, “I have to go to bed earlier than normal in order to get up around 4:30 a.m. Sometimes when I have a lot of homework, my big brother will take over my chores.” In Monroe, seminary really is a group effort, even for those who don’t attend seminary. One of the reasons for the early seminary is that Jay’s school is an hour’s bus drive away and his bus driver picks him up from the chapel immediately after seminary.

One of the benefits gained from the early start is the friendship that comes from spending quality time together. “Sister Smith, Amy, and I have become close. We really didn’t hang out together, even at church, unless we had to,” says Jay. “Now we like being around each other and really are friends.”

BEFORE SUNRISE



Of course friendship is not the only reason for being in seminary; the true goal is the gospel knowledge that comes from studying the scriptures. All three who attend the class can see the benefits. Sister Smith says the best thing about early-morning seminary is “getting to start and end my day with a gospel lesson.” Not only is she the seminary teacher, but she is also a mother of four and a Cub Scout den leader, so she normally waits for her children to

These Alabama teens don't think of waking up early as a sacrifice, but rather see it as an opportunity.



THEIR JOY WAS FULL BY WALTER RANE

Through studying their scriptures in early-morning seminary, youth like Jay and Amy find strength and comfort.

go to bed so that she can have some quiet time to study the lessons and prepare for the next day's class.

Amy agrees that seminary has brought many spiritual benefits into her life. "I have a better understanding of the scriptures," she says. "Sometimes during the day I find myself thinking about scripture masteries I've learned, especially Moses 1:39."

When asked what their favorite lessons from the past few months have been, both Amy and Jay agree that they enjoyed the lessons about Nephi's journey to the promised land with his family in 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi. Jay says these chapters have been the most memorable so far.

"Whenever I read those chapters, I think about how I can make it through any trial that is placed in my way. Just like it says in 1 Nephi 3:7, 'I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.' He had such great faith and trust in the Lord, and in turn

the Lord placed great trust in him. That is something that I want."

Jay and Amy's efforts have not been lost on Sister Smith. Not only does she get up to teach them, but she is also inspired by her students. "They are definitely the reason I keep doing this," Sister Smith says. "I know they expect me to be there just as much as I expect them to be there. I've enjoyed seeing Amy and Jay grow in the gospel this year. Amy has been a member only for a few short years. She's always excited about the gospel and has a beautiful testimony. Jay tends to be a little quieter, but I know he has a strong testimony and knowledge of the gospel as well."

So what is it like to have early-morning seminary earlier than most schools have their classes? Jay says, "I find that I have more peace and patience as I go through school and other activities. It is such a blessing to have the scriptures in my life." Jay, Amy, and Sister Smith are forgivably tired at times but cheerful and positive about regularly attending seminary. They find strength and comfort in overcoming obstacles and fulfilling a prophet's advice to be seminary graduates. **NE**



NOTE

1. Ezra Taft Benson, "To the Young Women of the Church," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 81; and "To the 'Youth of the Noble Birthright,'" *Ensign*, May 1986, 43.



PREPARED BY BOOK OF MORMON PROPHETS

Jay and Amy aren't the only faithful teens taking early morning seminary. In Medicine Lodge, Idaho, Dax Tomlinson and Tate Staker, enjoy seminary taught by Dax's mother, Lana Tomlinson. Sister Tomlinson is preparing them not only for the day ahead but also for missions, and both Dax and Tate are excited to serve.

Dax and Tate have been impressed by Book of Mormon prophets who have helped them in their missionary preparation. Tate was particularly impressed by Samuel the Lamanite. Sister Tomlinson had the two young men stand on chairs, and the three of them took turns throwing marshmallows at each other to show how hard it was to speak while things were being thrown at you.

"That was fun," said Tate. "That story helped show that if you have enough faith, you can do anything. I really felt the Spirit when we were talking about Samuel."

Dax was impressed by the stripling warriors. In Alma 53:21 it says, "Yea, they were men of truth and soberness, for they had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before him."

"It teaches me to remember the commandments and choose the right all the time and follow the Lord," said Dax.

With missions in the near future, these young men are definitely being prepared through seminary to be "exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; but behold, this was not all—they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted" (Alma 53:20).



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE TOMLINSON FAMILY

Dax, Tate, and Dax's mother, Lana, discuss Book of Mormon prophets during early-morning seminary. Fresh pancakes are an added bonus.

