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Of the Seventy

HOLD FAST TO THE ROD

Continually studying the scriptures helps us keep our eyes, minds, and hearts focused on the Savior, and as we apply and live the teachings found in the scriptures, we become more like Him.

During their journey in the wilderness, Lehi and his family awoke one morning to find “a round ball of curious workmanship” on the ground. It had two spindles, one pointing “the way whither [they] should go” (1 Nephi 16:10).

The Liahona, or ball, also provided “a new writing” that gave them “understanding concerning the ways of the Lord.” This writing was “changed from time to time, according to the faith and diligence which [they] gave unto it” (see 1 Nephi 16:28–29).

Lehi and his family already had the brass plates, which contained the writings and prophecies of several Old Testament prophets. The brass plates and the Liahona constituted their scriptures, and Lehi’s people were expected to study and give heed to them continually. If they did so, they progressed in their journey; if they did not, they tarried in the wilderness and were afflicted with hunger and thirst.

What was the Lord trying to teach them—and us—through the workings of the Liahona?

One of the primary purposes of the scriptures is to help us know, understand, and become like the Savior (see 3 Nephi 27:27). Continually studying the scriptures helps us keep our eyes, minds, and hearts focused on Him. As we apply and live the teachings found in the scriptures, we become more like Him. As we become more like Him, we become candidates for eternal life (see John 5:39).

Lehi’s Dream

In Lehi’s dream, or vision, four groups of people were represented. The first three groups entered the path that led to the tree of life. The gate to the path is baptism (see 2 Nephi 31:17–18), so we are talking about members of the Church in these first three groups.

I will not discuss the fourth group—those heading directly toward the great and spacious building. As we consider the other three groups, however, you might want to do an internal evaluation to determine the group to which you belong and ask yourself to which group you would prefer to belong.

Group 1

“And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood.

“And it came to pass that they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree.

“And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:21–23).

Members of this group apparently did not read or study the scriptures, listen to or watch general conference, read the *Ensign*, or attend Sunday meetings, all of which offer the word of God. Consequently, they lost their way.





TO GAIN FAITH

“In order to gain and to keep the faith we need, it is essential that we read and study and ponder the scriptures.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Be an Example and a Light,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2015, 87.

Group 2

“And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree. . . .

“And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost” (1 Nephi 8:24, 28).

Note that this group caught hold of and clung to the rod of iron. They held on until they reached the tree of life and partook of its fruit. But they became ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, stopped focusing on the Savior, and were distracted by the attractions, temptations, and riches of the world. Then they too became lost.

The key to understanding these verses is the phrase “clinging to the rod of iron.” I compare the word *clinging* to a “white knuckle” experience. If you have been

white-water rafting, you recall that you clung so hard to the raft that your knuckles turned white. Then, when you came to calm waters, what did you do? *You let go!*

In the gospel context, this can occur when you are asked to prepare a talk or when you face a crisis, such as a death in the family or the breakup of a relationship. You look up general conference talks you seldom listen to or consult scriptures you generally neglect. You seek spiritual guidance and support because of your spiritual weakness. Then, when the crisis is over, *you let go!* You put the scriptures back on the shelf, regress to old habits of infrequent Church attendance, and abandon daily prayer—at least until the next crisis, or white-water experience, arrives. In other words, you turn to the Savior for help only when a desperate need arises instead of continually.

Members of this group had been baptized, and many had probably been ordained to the priesthood, received temple ordinances, served full-time missions, and married in the

temple. But *they let go!* They stopped reading the scriptures *continually*, fell into forbidden paths, and were lost.

Thankfully, most young adults and returned missionaries remain faithful to gospel truths they have learned and shared. They also focus their lives on the Savior through daily scripture study and prayer. We are grateful for them and their faithfulness. They are the future of the Church and the future parents of those who will carry the Church forward.

Group 3

“Behold, [Lehi] saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree” (1 Nephi 8:30).

Note the phrase “continually holding fast to the rod of iron.” This group read the scriptures *continually*. They kept their focus on the Savior *continually*.

The scriptures are the most important thing we can study. They should take precedence over chemistry, physics, accounting, dance, music, sports, or any other secular study or activity.

Start every day with the scriptures. Prayer and scripture study go hand in hand. They are inseparable companions. Constant prayer will lead you to the scriptures, and continual scripture study will lead you to prayer. Both keep you focused on the Savior and give you access to revelation and to the peace that can come only by “continually holding fast to the rod of iron.” Prayer and scripture study will lead you to the temple. They will make you want to keep the Sabbath day holy. They will help you avoid and overcome the temptations of the adversary.

Now I draw your attention to the phrase “they came forth and *fell down* and partook of the fruit of the tree.” A key to understanding this phrase is found in 1 Nephi chapter 11:

“And it came to pass after I had seen the tree, I said unto the Spirit: I behold thou hast shown unto me the tree which is precious above all.

“And he said unto me: What desirest thou?

“And I said unto him: To know the interpretation thereof.”

The angel responded, “Look!” Then Nephi saw in vision

the Virgin Mary, whom the angel identified as “the mother of the Son of God.” Next, Nephi saw Mary bearing a child—“the Lamb of God”—in her arms.

Now note verse 24: “And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many *fall down* at his feet and worship him” (see 1 Nephi 11:9–24; emphasis added).

The tree represents the love of God, as manifested through His Son, Jesus Christ (see 1 Nephi 11:21–22). Those in Group 2 who arrived at the tree did not fall down, as did those in Group 3. Is it possible to be in the presence of the Son of God and not know it? You have only to read the New Testament to find the answer. The Savior ministered for three years, teaching and performing miracles, but few recognized Him for who He was.

Search the Scriptures

Ask yourself these questions:

- What can I do to ensure that I continually hold fast to the rod of iron so that when I arrive at the tree of life, I will recognize the Savior and fall down and worship him?
- What can I do to keep my eyes, mind, and heart focused on the Savior?
- What can I do to become more like the Savior?

The answer to all three questions is found in the scriptures. “Search the scriptures,” the Savior said, “for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). If you immerse yourself in the scriptures each day of your life, you will have strength to resist serious transgression; more important, you will come to know the Savior. You will be able to keep your eyes, mind, and heart focused on Him.

As you come to know Jesus Christ, apply His teachings, and follow His example, you will become like Him. As you become like Him, you will be a candidate to live forever in His presence. ■

From a devotional address, “Continually Holding Fast to the Rod of Iron,” given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on May 12, 2015. For the full address, visit web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.