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The Scriptures—The Most Profitable of All Study

“May each of us . . . draw closer to our Father in Heaven and his Beloved Son through consistent study of the holy scriptures.”

From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

President Howard W. Hunter had a great love for the scriptures and was a dedicated student of them. This love and study were reflected in his teachings, which were filled with stories and other passages from the standard works. Often when teaching a gospel principle, especially in general conference, he selected at least one story from the scriptures, told it in detail, and drew applications from it.

For example, when teaching about being committed to God, he recounted the stories of Joshua; of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and of others in the Old Testament who showed such commitment (see chapter 19). When teaching about service, he used examples from the Book of Mormon to show how some people who received little acclaim were “no less serviceable” than others whose service was more visible (see chapter 23). When teaching about how to have inner peace in times of turmoil, he again used extended passages from the scriptures, including the story of Peter walking on the water (see chapter 2). When teaching about the sacrament, he provided context by reviewing the story of the children of Israel and the Passover (see chapter 15).

President Hunter knew the importance of the scriptures in helping a person gain a testimony of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, he often taught from the scriptural accounts of the Savior’s ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection. He declared:

“I am grateful for the library of scripture through which a greater knowledge of Jesus Christ can be learned by devoted study. I am grateful that in addition to the Old and New Testaments, the Lord, through prophets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has added other revealed scripture as additional witnesses for Christ—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—all of which I know to be the word of God. These bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter

Studying the scriptures is the most profitable of all study in which we can engage.

Central to all truth is the testimony that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Great Jehovah, the Savior of the World, and the Only Begotten Son of the Living God. This is the message of the scriptures. Throughout each of these holy books there is an appeal to believe and have faith in God the Eternal Father and in his Son, Jesus Christ; and from the first to the last of these books of scripture is the call to do the will of God and keep his commandments.²

When we follow the counsel of our leaders to read and study the scriptures, benefits and blessings of many kinds come to us. This is the most profitable of all study in which we could engage. . . .

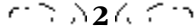
Scriptures contain the record of the self-revelation of God, and through them God speaks to man. Where could there be more profitable use of time than reading from the scriptural library the literature that teaches us to know God and understand our relationship to him? Time is always precious to busy people, and we are robbed of its worth when hours are wasted in reading or viewing that which is frivolous and of little value.³

We hope you are reading and studying the scriptures on a daily basis as individuals and as families. We should not take lightly the command of the Lord, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John

5:39). The Spirit will come into your homes and your lives as you read the revealed word.⁴

We ought to have a Church full of women and men who know the scriptures thoroughly, who cross-reference and mark them, who develop lessons and talks from the Topical Guide, and who have mastered the maps, the Bible Dictionary, and the other helps that are contained in this wonderful set of standard works. There is obviously more there than we can master quickly. Certainly the scriptural field is “white already to harvest” [see D&C 4:4]. . . .

Not in this dispensation, surely not in any dispensation, have the scriptures—the enduring, enlightening word of God—been so readily available and so helpfully structured for the use of every man, woman, and child who will search them. The written word of God is in the most readable and accessible form ever provided to lay members in the history of the world. Surely we will be held accountable if we do not read them.⁵



Studying the scriptures helps us learn and obey God’s will.

In order to be obedient to the law of the gospel and be obedient to the teachings of Jesus Christ, we must first understand the law and ascertain the will of the Lord. This is accomplished best by searching and studying the scriptures and the words of the prophets. In this way we become familiar with what God has revealed to man.

Among [the] Articles of Faith is one that declares, “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).

God’s will has been revealed in the scriptures, and for this reason we have been commanded to read them to find the truth. The Lord explained to Oliver Cowdery how to ascertain these truths. He said, “Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written; for in them are all things written concerning the foundation of my church, my gospel, and my rock” (D&C 18:3–4).

Paul wrote to his good friend Timothy, urging him to read the scriptures, and in his letter said, “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Then he added, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:15–16). . . .

Our Church leaders have laid great stress on the matter of reading the scriptures and the words of the prophets, ancient and modern. Fathers and mothers have been asked to read the scriptures so that they may properly teach their children. Our children are reading the scriptures as the result of the example being set by parents. We are studying the scriptures at our family home evenings, and some families are reading scriptures together at an early morning hour. . . . This is the way we learn to know the will of the Lord, that we might be obedient.⁶

Consider the scriptural sequence that begins with giving diligence to the word of God and then proceeds to the promise that if we do, we may go into his very presence:

“And I now give unto you a commandment . . . to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.

“For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.

“For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. . . .

“And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father” (D&C 84:43–45, 47).

That is a wonderful journey initiated by the word of God and which will culminate in exaltation. “The words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).⁷

I commend to you the revelations of God as the standard by which we must live our lives and by which we must measure every decision and every deed. Accordingly, when you have worries and challenges, face them by turning to the scriptures and the prophets.⁸

3

**To understand the scriptures requires
concentrated, consistent, prayerful study.**

We urge each of you to carefully consider how much time you are currently giving to prayerful pondering of the scriptures.

As one of the Lord's servants, I challenge you to do the following:

1. Read, ponder, and pray over the scriptures daily as individual members of the Church.

2. Hold family scripture reading on a regular basis. We commend those of you who are already doing this and urge those of you who have not yet started to begin doing so without delay. . . .

May each of us go forth with a firm resolve to be more prayerful; to seek to live more fully by the Spirit; and to draw closer to our Father in Heaven and his Beloved Son through consistent study of the holy scriptures.⁹

Reading habits vary widely. There are rapid readers and slow readers, some who read only small snatches at a time and others who persist without stopping until the book is finished. Those who delve into the scriptural library, however, find that to understand requires more than casual reading or perusal—there must be concentrated study. It is certain that one who studies the scriptures every day accomplishes far more than one who devotes considerable time one day and then lets days go by before continuing. Not only should we study each day, but there should be a regular time set aside when we can concentrate without interference.

There is nothing more helpful than prayer to open our understanding of the scriptures. Through prayer we can attune our minds to seek the answers to our searchings. The Lord said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). Herein is Christ's reassurance that if we will ask, seek, and knock, the Holy Spirit will guide our understanding if we are ready and eager to receive.

Many find that the best time to study is in the morning after a night's rest has cleared the mind of the many cares that interrupt



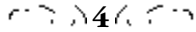
Scripture study “is the most profitable of all study in which we could engage.”

thought. Others prefer to study in the quiet hours after the work and worries of the day are over and brushed aside, thus ending the day with a peace and tranquillity that comes by communion with the scriptures.

Perhaps what is more important than the hour of the day is that a regular time be set aside for study. It would be ideal if an hour could be spent each day; but if that much cannot be had, a half hour on a regular basis would result in substantial accomplishment. A quarter of an hour is little time, but it is surprising how much enlightenment and knowledge can be acquired in a subject so meaningful. The important thing is to allow nothing else to ever interfere with our study.

Some prefer to study alone, but companions can study together profitably. Families are greatly blessed when wise fathers and mothers bring their children about them, read from the pages of the scriptural library together, and then discuss freely the beautiful stories and thoughts according to the understanding of all. Often youth and little ones have amazing insight into and appreciation for the basic literature of religion.

We should not be haphazard in our reading but rather develop a systematic plan for study. There are some who read to a schedule of a number of pages or a set number of chapters each day or week. This may be perfectly justifiable and may be enjoyable if one is reading for pleasure, but it does not constitute meaningful study. It is better to have a set amount of time to give scriptural study each day than to have a set amount of chapters to read. Sometimes we find that the study of a single verse will occupy the whole time.¹⁰



**Contemplating the brief scriptural account of Jairus
brings a great depth of understanding and meaning.**

The life, acts, and teachings of Jesus can be read rapidly. The stories are simple in most instances and the stories are simply told. The Master used few words in his teachings, but each one is so concise in meaning that together they portray a clear image to the reader. Sometimes, however, many hours might be spent in contemplation of profound thoughts expressed in a few simple words.

There was an incident in the life of the Savior that was mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. A significant part of the story is told by Mark in only two short verses and five words of the following verse. . . .

“And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him [that is, when he saw Jesus], he fell at his feet,

“And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.

“And Jesus went with him” (Mark 5:22–24).

The reading time of that portion of the story is about thirty seconds. It is short and uncomplicated. The visual picture is clear and even a child could repeat it without difficulty. But as we spend time in thought and contemplation, a great depth of understanding and meaning comes to us. . . .

. . . Jesus and those who were with him had just recrossed the Sea of Galilee, and a multitude of people who had been waiting met him on the shore near Capernaum. “And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue.” The larger synagogues of that day were presided over by a college of elders under the direction of a chief or a ruler. This was a man of rank and prestige whom the Jews looked upon with great respect.

Matthew doesn’t give the name of this chief elder, but Mark identifies him by adding to his title the words, “Jairus by name.” Nowhere else in the scriptures does this man or his name appear except on this occasion, yet his memory lives in history because of a brief contact with Jesus. Many, many lives have become memorable that otherwise would have been lost in obscurity had it not been for the touch of the Master’s hand that made a significant change of thought and action and a new and better life.

“And when he saw him [that is, when Jairus saw Jesus], he fell at his feet.”

This was an unusual circumstance for a man of rank and prestige, a ruler of the synagogue, to kneel at Jesus’ feet—at the feet of one considered to be an itinerant teacher with the gift of healing. Many others of learning and prestige saw Jesus also but ignored him. Their minds were closed. Today is no different; obstacles stand in the way of many to accept him.

“And [Jairus] besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death.” This is typical of what happens frequently when a man comes to Christ, not so much for his own need, but because of the desperate need of a loved one. The tremor we hear in Jairus’s voice as he speaks of “My little daughter” stirs our souls with sympathy as we think of this man of high position in the synagogue on his knees before the Savior.

Then comes a great acknowledgement of faith: “I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.” These are not only the words of faith of a father torn with grief but are also a reminder to us that whatever Jesus lays his hands upon lives. If Jesus lays his hands upon a marriage, it lives. If he is allowed to lay his hands on the family, it lives.

The words, “and Jesus went with him” follow. We would not suppose that this event had been within the plans for the day. The Master had come back across the sea where the multitude was waiting on the shore for him to teach them. . . . He was interrupted by the plea of a father. He could have ignored the request because many others were waiting. He could have said to Jairus that he would come to see his daughter tomorrow, but “Jesus went with him.” If we follow in the footsteps of the Master, would we ever be too busy to ignore the needs of our fellowmen?

It is not necessary to read the remainder of the story. When they got to the home of the ruler of the synagogue, Jesus took the little girl by the hand and raised her from the dead. In like manner, he will lift and raise every man to a new and better life who will permit the Savior to take him by the hand.¹¹



**The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and
Covenants will bring us closer to Christ.**

The Book of Mormon

One of the most significant resources the Lord has provided to assist us in accomplishing this divine work is the Book of Mormon, subtitled “Another Testament of Jesus Christ.” [President Ezra Taft Benson] forthrightly admonished us not to neglect reading and abiding by the precepts of this sacred volume of scripture. “Its great mission,” he taught us, “is to bring men to Christ [and thus to the Father], and all other things are secondary.” (*Ensign*, May 1986, p. 105.) We hope you brothers and sisters are feeding your spirits by regularly reading the Book of Mormon and the other scriptures and using them in your ministries.¹²

The Book of Mormon is the word of God. We invite you to read this wonderful record. It is the most remarkable volume in existence today. Read it carefully and prayerfully, and as you do, God will give you a testimony of its truthfulness as promised by Moroni (see Moroni 10:4).¹³

It is through reading and studying the Book of Mormon, and prayerfully seeking confirmation of its contents, that we receive

a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that the Church of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth.¹⁴

Reading [the Book of Mormon] will have a profound effect on your life. It will expand your knowledge of the way God deals with man and will give you a greater desire to live in harmony with his gospel teachings. It will also provide for you a powerful testimony of Jesus.¹⁵

The Doctrine and Covenants

The Doctrine and Covenants is a unique book. It is the only book on the face of the entire earth with a preface composed by the Creator himself. Furthermore, this book of scripture contains more direct quotations from the Lord than any other existing book of scripture.

It is not a translation of an ancient document, but is of modern origin. It is a book of revelation for our day. It is a unique and divinely inspired selection of revelations that came through prophets of God in our day in answer to questions, concerns, and challenges they and others faced. It contains divine answers to real-life problems involving real people. . . .

Did you realize that by reading the Doctrine and Covenants you can hear the voice of the Lord through scripture? [see D&C 18:33–36]. . . . That voice of enlightenment will usually come into your mind as “thoughts” and into your heart as “feelings” (see D&C 8:1–3). The promise of that witness is . . . available to every worthy man, woman, and child who prayerfully seeks for such a witness. Should not each of us resolve to read, study, ponder, and pray over these sacred revelations?¹⁶

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- What experiences have helped you learn that studying the scriptures “is the most profitable of all study”? (See section 1.) How can we strengthen our commitment to be “women and men who know the scriptures thoroughly”?

- How does studying the scriptures help us be more obedient? (See section 2.) How have you seen that “the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do”? (2 Nephi 32:3).
- What aspects of President Hunter’s counsel about how to study the scriptures could help you? (See section 3.) How has consistent, prayerful study of the scriptures blessed you?
- What insights can we gain from President Hunter’s account of the Savior healing the daughter of Jairus? (See section 4.) How can pondering just a few verses like this enrich your scripture study?
- How have the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants helped you draw closer to the Savior? (See section 5.) What are some other ways these sacred volumes have influenced you? Consider sharing your testimony of these scriptures with family members and others.

Related Scriptures

Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 30:5; 1 Nephi 15:23–24; 2 Nephi 3:12; Alma 31:5; 37:44; Helaman 3:29–30; D&C 98:11

Study Help

“Reading, studying, and pondering are not the same. We read words and we may get ideas. We study and we may discover patterns and connections in scripture. But when we ponder, we invite revelation by the Spirit. Pondering, to me, is the thinking and the praying I do after reading and studying in the scriptures carefully” (Henry B. Eyring, “Serve with the Spirit,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 60).

Notes

1. “Reading the Scriptures,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 65.
2. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 50.
3. “Reading the Scriptures,” 64.
4. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 53–54.
5. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 51.
6. “Obedience” (address given at the Hawaii Area Conference, June 18, 1978), 3–5, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; the last paragraph is also in *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 52.
7. “Eternal Investments” (address to CES religious educators, Feb. 10, 1989), 3; si.lds.org.

8. "Fear Not, Little Flock" (address given at Brigham Young University, Mar. 14, 1989), 2; speeches.byu.edu.
9. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 51–52.
10. "Reading the Scriptures," 64.
11. "Reading the Scriptures," 64–65.
12. "The Mission of the Church" (address given at the regional representatives' seminar, Mar. 30, 1990), 2.
13. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 54.
14. "The Pillars of Our Faith," *Ensign*, Sept. 1994, 54.
15. "Evidences of the Resurrection," *Ensign*, May 1983, 16.
16. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 55–56.