

Teaching the Scriptures for Student Learning

John Hilton III, Education Week 2006

Have High Expectations

“You can make it far more likely that [your students] will choose what will let them claim a constant companionship of the Spirit...It begins with expectations, yours and theirs. If you expect little, they will feel your lack of faith in them and in the Lord’s promised outpouring of the Spirit. If you communicate, by word or action or even by your tone of voice, that you doubt their spiritual capacity, they will doubt it. If you see [powerful potential] in them, they will at least have the chance to see it in themselves. Your choices of what you expect will have powerful effect on their choices of what to expect of themselves” (Elder Henry B. Eyring, “Raising Expectations.” Church Educational System Training Broadcast, 4 August 2004, 2).

Helping Students Prepare Their Hearts

“You, as the teacher, must do all in your power to prepare the hearts of men so the Spirit can teach” (Elder Gene R. Cook, *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 38).

“It’s important that you know this. The inspiration you may draw from [your church meetings] depends only partly in the effort [the speakers] have expended in the preparation of their sermons. It depends much more considerably on what preparation you have made for their message” (Elder Boyd K. Packer, “Follow the Brethren,” *BYU Devotional*, 23 March, 1965).

“A message prepared under the influence of the Spirit to further the work of the Lord—is not given to be enjoyed. It is given to inspire, to edify, to challenge, or to correct. It is given to be heard under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, with the intended result that the listener learns from the talk and from the Spirit what he or she should do about it...when we come to hear a servant of the Lord, we are not “to trifle with the words” that he speaks. It is our duty to open our ears to hear and our hearts to understand. And what we should seek to understand is what we should do about the message” (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, *CES Fireside*, May 1, 2005).

Helps for Students in their Personal Scripture 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...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...can be acquired” (Elder Howard W. Hunter, *Ensign*, 11/79, 64).

For the gospel to be written in your heart, you need to know what it is and grow to understand it more fully. That means you will study it. When I say "study," I mean something more than reading. It is a good thing sometimes to read a book of scripture within a set period of time to get an overall sense of its message, but for conversion, you should care more about the amount of time you spend in the scriptures than about the amount you read in that time. I see you sometimes reading a few verses, stopping to ponder them, carefully reading the verses again, and

as you think about what they mean, praying for understanding, asking questions in your mind, waiting for spiritual impressions, and writing down the impressions and insights that come so you can remember and learn more. Studying in this way, you may not read a lot of chapters or verses in a half hour, but you will be giving place in your heart for the word of God, and He will be speaking to you” (Elder D. Todd Christofferson, *Ensign*, May 2004).

Principles

“As you seek spiritual knowledge, search for principles. Carefully separate them from the detail used to explain them. Principles are concentrated truth, packaged for application to a wide variety of circumstances. A true principle makes decisions clear even under the most confusing and compelling circumstances. It is worth great effort to organize the truth we gather to simple statements of principle” (Elder Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, 11/93, 87).

On Student Discovery and Participation

“An answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime. The most important learnings of life are caught—not taught...Consider how missionaries help investigators to learn by faith. Making and keeping spiritual commitments, such as studying and praying about the Book of Mormon, attending Church meetings, and keeping the commandments, require an investigator to exercise faith and to act. One of the fundamental roles of a missionary is to help an investigator make and honor commitments—to act and learn by faith. Teaching, exhorting, and explaining, as important as they are, can never convey to an investigator a witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. Only as an investigator’s faith initiates action and opens the pathway to the heart can the Holy Ghost deliver a confirming witness” (Elder David A. Bednar, *Seek Learning By Faith*,” February 3, 2006).

“Never, and I mean never, give a lecture where there is no student participation. A ‘talking head’ is the weakest form of class instruction” (Elder Richard G. Scott, “To Understand and Live Truth.” Church Educational System Broadcast, February 4, 2005, 3).

“The more class members read their scriptural reading assignments...[and] bring their scriptures to class...the more will be their inspiration, growth, and joy as they try to solve their personal concerns and challenges” (Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, *Ensign*, Jan. 1989, 15).

“Were I a teacher of young students, I would have them commit to apply this principle: I will seek to learn by what I hear, see and feel. I will write down the things I learn and will do them...Every student who consistently does that will be blessed by inspired direction in life...

“When you encourage students to raise their hand to respond to a question, they signify to the Holy Spirit their willingness to learn. That use of moral agency will allow the Spirit to motivate and give them more powerful guidance during your time together. Participation allows individuals to experience being led by the Spirit. They learn to recognize and feel what spiritual guidance is. It is through the repeated process of feeling impressions, recording them, and obeying them that one learns to depend on the direction of the Spirit more than on communication through the five senses” (Elder Richard G. Scott, CES Symposium, August 98).