



1-2014

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Steven T. Lunford

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### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Lunford, Steven T. "Helping Students Interact with the Word of God." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 15, no. 1 (2014): 168-185. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol15/iss1/11>

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We are teaching people, not just subject matter. It's better to take a few good ideas and get good discussion than to be frenzied, trying to teach every word in the manual.

# *Helping Students Interact with the Word of God*

STEVEN T. LINFORD

Steven T. Linford ([linfordst@ldschurch.org](mailto:linfordst@ldschurch.org)) is the institute director of the Orem Utah University Institute of Religion.

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It is inspiring to read of the powerful impact that Jesus Christ had on people during his mortal ministry. As people interacted with him, they experienced life-altering outcomes. There were many people who were healed, and others who had their fear turned to faith and confidence. Some couldn't see or understand, and the Savior gave them vision or helped to open their minds. He often left people feeling peace, comfort, and strength. His words encouraged individuals when they were distraught. He lifted those who felt isolated, those who had sinned, and those who were hurt. Jesus changed, forgave, and instructed people, and ultimately loved and helped them too. Many cried tears of joy when they were with him. Although there were those who persecuted him and sought to harm him, there were others who were completely devoted to him and followed him. Ultimately, Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane and felt the weight of all mankind on his soul. He bore all things for us, he atoned for us, and he helps us to become free of whatever problem, issue, or difficulty we encounter. He deeply cares for each one of us.

Although most of us don't have the privilege to see him or to interact with him face-to-face in this life, we can experience outcomes similar to those with

whom he interacted in mortality, as we interact with his words. As we think about those times in our lives when we have been instructed by the Lord's words, and those of his servants, we too "can testify that [we] have heard [his] voice, and know [his] words" (D&C 18:36). We remember when we were burdened, and his words strengthened us. Other times his words fortified our faith and renewed our hope. His words, spoken as though he himself were there, heal, forgive, nurture, and edify us. His words help us pass through our ailments, challenges, and difficulties. Just as those of old were greatly touched through their personal interactions with Jesus Christ, we too can be touched through edifying interactions with his words today. As religious educators, it is critical to spend substantial class time in the scriptures, helping our students interact with him through his words, and be changed by him.

Over the years and through my various assignments, I have observed hundreds of lessons taught in seminary and institute classrooms. One thing I have consistently observed is that the most edifying time in class<sup>1</sup> is often when students are given time to interact with the scriptures in a meaningful way, discovering truth that is relevant to them, and being invited to share what they find. It is similar to what Elder Robert D. Hales described when he said, "Faith-promoting incidents occur in teaching when students take a role in teaching and testifying to their peers."<sup>2</sup> Often, it appears that the Holy Ghost reveals insights, stirs feelings, and reminds students of experiences that relate to the scriptures. As students appropriately share what they are learning and feeling, the scriptures and the class come alive with spiritual energy. As one student is sharing, others will often spontaneously add their personal witness and share experiences. It is amazing to see classrooms come alive with youth who are studying the scriptures and discussing them in a marvelous way. As I observe this, I sometimes reflect on the vision shared by Henry B. Eyring in 1981, who was then serving as Commissioner of the Church Educational System. He said:

I have a hunch that four or five years from now you will see more Latter-day Saint youth in our classes pondering the scriptures, talking about them with each other, teaching each other from them, believing that they really do have the answers to the questions of their hearts. I really believe this, but it is going to take a miracle for young people to do that. It's going to take a miracle. It hasn't happened yet except in a few cases. It's not the rule among our students, not yet. Therefore you are talking about a miracle. We need a miracle for us to succeed. We need a miracle, and how are we going to get it? We'll work very hard, but there is something else; I just can't believe the Lord would give us that miracle unless we have faith.<sup>3</sup>

Some thirty years later, I believe this “miracle” is no longer just happening “in a few cases,” but, as I have gone from class to class, I have seen this miracle occur many times. I have also seen that as teachers begin having these experiences with their students, they (students and teachers) desire to have them more frequently, and consistency is soon established. In one class, after a lesson where students were sharing their thoughts and feelings about the scriptures, the student saying the closing prayer thanked Heavenly Father that they could “come to seminary and be edified so that [they could] withstand the temptations of the adversary.”

### **We Are to Find Ways and Create Opportunities**

The scriptures lead to edifying classroom experiences. When students are given opportunities to interact with the scriptures in a personal and relevant way, the Spirit often comes and teaches the students directly. In speaking of this, Chad Webb, administrator of Seminaries and Institutes, shared the following: “The Spirit will bear witness of the things we are teaching if we are true to the scriptures. And as we *find ways* to allow the inspired writers of the scriptures to teach and to testify to our students, there will be an increased power in our classrooms. . . . We need to *create opportunities* for our students to interact directly with the words of these and other wonderful people of the scriptures.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland stated: “Please teach by the Holy Spirit. If we do not teach that way, then by scriptural definition we are teaching ‘some other way’ (D&C 50:17). And any other way ‘is not of God’ (20). *Give your students a spiritual experience every way you can.*”<sup>5</sup>

One day as I was teaching a class at BYU for potential seminary teachers, I wanted to see how my students had personally benefitted by interacting directly with the scriptures. I wrote the following question on the board: “What do you experience when you interact with the scriptures in a meaningful way?” As my students responded, I wrote their answers on the board. After we had filled the board, I asked one of my students to continue recording their responses on paper. Here are some of their statements about interacting with the word of God:

- “It makes you want to change/repent.”
- “The ancient prophets want us to learn from them. Similar to a father who wants his children to understand what is most important in life, the prophets want us to gain wisdom from their experiences. As we

interact with the scriptures we learn from these ancient prophets about those things that will help us the most.”<sup>6</sup>

- “It builds desire and increases my hunger and thirst for the scriptures.”
- “The scriptures come alive. They begin to speak to us in personal ways. It is as though the power comes up from the word, or the Holy Ghost reaches up to us out of the word, and touches our minds and hearts, speaking to us personally.”<sup>7</sup>
- “We grow to love the scriptures and learn to rely on them to receive answers to our prayers.”
- “Sometimes I will interact with a single verse and receive insight and power. I will read it over and over again, because it is so personal and meaningful. Special meaning comes.”
- “You savor what you have seen and felt, it was shown to you, and it is just for you. It is yours.”
- “It feels like the scriptures are connecting our life to heaven.”
- “When I am hurt or confused, I find comfort in the scriptures.”
- “The scriptures help me draw nearer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.”

Listening to my students talk about the vital role the scriptures play in their lives reaffirms in my mind the need to have the scriptures as the basis of each lesson I teach. We know we won’t always be with our student; therefore as we help them understand, feel, and find answers to life’s problems in the scriptures, our students will gain confidence in the word and be equipped to rely on them the rest of their lives. President Howard W. Hunter spoke to religious educators and gave the following counsel:

I strongly encourage you to use the scriptures in your teaching and to do all within your power to help the students use them and become comfortable with them. I would like our young people to have confidence in the scriptures. . . . We want the students to have confidence in the strength and truths of the scriptures, confidence that their Heavenly Father is really speaking to them through the scriptures, and confidence they can turn to the scriptures and find answers to their problems and their prayers. That is one kind of confidence I would hope you give your students, and you can give it to them if you show them daily, hourly, that you trust in the scriptures just that way. Show them that you yourself are confident that the scriptures hold the answers to many—indeed most—of life’s problems. So that when you teach, teach from the scriptures.<sup>8</sup>

A few years ago I read an article by James Ferrell, who is an LDS attorney-turned-author. In this article Ferrell explains how rich spiritual insights have

come to him as he has meaningfully interacted with the scriptures. Years ago, Ferrell was called to be a Gospel Doctrine teacher in his ward, and this calling “forced him to confront the Old Testament,” a text he admits he was “afraid to explore.”<sup>9</sup> As he prepared his lessons, he would wrestle with large blocks of scripture and discovered that by asking key questions<sup>10</sup> while he studied, all manner of spiritual insights were unlocked. Ferrell began to see the Savior in every story. His friends recommended he write and compile these insights into a book. Ferrell has authored several best-selling books including *The Peacegiver*, *The Holy Secret*, and *The Hidden Christ*.

Ferrell summarized how these insights have been unlocked, saying, “For me, a study of the gospel happens best *when intellect and spirit are grappling together*. If I don’t engage my mind, the Spirit won’t speak. The Lord wants to have a personal conversation with us. If we are willing to dive in and have that conversation, it’s always there.”<sup>11</sup> Jim Ferrell has discovered principles that, when applied, can enhance our study of the scriptures both in and out of the classroom.

Based on Ferrell’s example and the experiences of others, I have learned that one way of interacting is to “grapple” with them, or have “a personal conversation” with the Lord through them. Additionally, asking key questions, staying engaged, searching for answers to problems, finding the relevancy to personal life, exerting mentally and spiritually while studying, can all help the scriptures come alive with spiritual power through meaningful scripture interaction. The scriptures also come alive as we gain needed insights and receive personal impressions, often by peace, comfort, and encouragement. New understandings are reached, and strength is gained as we make decisions in our lives. All of these blessings can be realized by our students as we “create opportunities for them to interact directly with the scriptures.”

### **How to Create Opportunities**

One of the most effective ways I have seen teachers create opportunities for their students to interact with the scriptures is by implementing a simple pattern. First, the teacher raises an issue or asks a question about a principle or doctrine that is highly relevant to students. Next, the teacher mentions the scripture block they are about to consider as well as some background or other context. Then the teacher invites the students to search for answers in the scripture block, thus inviting the Holy Ghost into their minds and hearts. As the students search, they are looking for answers or insights that can help

them or someone they know to understand and apply gospel truths. Finally, students share what they have seen and felt, providing a spiritual witness of the truths they have discovered.

Again, this simple pattern (addressed below in greater detail) is as follows:

- Ask a question or raise an issue.
- Clarify the context and background of the scripture you will be studying.
- Invite students to search in the scripture block.
- Invite students to share what they have learned or felt.

### *Ask a Question or Raise an Issue*

When students hear something that is relevant to their lives, their interest, attention, and engagement are heightened, and the energy and motivation in the classroom increase. It works best when, prior to class, the teacher has searched the scripture block and found the principles and doctrines that may be most important for the students. The new *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook states, “When preparing *how to teach*, teachers would be wise to reflect on the eternal truths contained in the scripture block and to consider how they may be useful and meaningful in the lives of the students. With this in mind, teachers will often begin the lesson with a relevant question, situation, or problem that will lead the students to search the scriptures for gospel principles and doctrines that give them guidance and direction.”<sup>12</sup>

I saw an example of this when a skilled teacher asked his college-age students at the beginning of a class if they had “ever waited on the Lord for certain blessings.” Almost every student acknowledged they were currently waiting on the Lord to know more about their future concerning issues such as college majors, careers, and marriage. It was evident that the students’ minds were alert and their attention was focused. The teacher had “hooked” the students into the lesson by establishing relevancy.

### *Clarify the Context and Background of the Scriptures You Will Be Studying*

To increase understanding and reduce confusion, the teacher shares meaningful context and explains content that will help the students understand what they will be studying. Going back to the previous example, the teacher provided information about Hannah of the Old Testament, who had been hoping to have a child. The teacher further explained that Hannah’s husband, Elkanah, had another wife, Peninnah, and that Peninnah had children but

Hannah had none. Furthermore, Peninnah had been unkind to Hannah and had “provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb” (1 Samuel 1:6). The teacher said how difficult it must have been for Hannah to “wait on the Lord.” Again, the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook states the following regarding context and content: “An understanding of such information as background and storyline creates a basis for discovering gospel principles and doctrines as well as providing illustration and clarification of those truths found within the scripture block.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Invite Students to Search in the Scripture Block*

Next the teacher encourages students to interact with the scriptures in a meaningful way that invites them to be personally taught by the Holy Ghost. A good question for teachers to consider is, “What is the inspired intent of the author?” or “What would the Lord want us to know about or learn from this particular passage, doctrine, or principle?” With the students now invested, this time turns into a collective scripture study session. Continuing with the above example, the teacher simply said, “Please study 1 Samuel 1:7–28 and think about the following question: What can you learn from Hannah that helps you as you continue to wait on the Lord?” A variation of this question could be, “What might Hannah want us to know about waiting on the Lord?”

As the students are studying the scriptures, some teachers play inspiring music.<sup>14</sup> During this time, teachers walk around the classroom answering questions and providing clarifications for their students. Oftentimes, students are writing in their scripture journals as they study. Interacting in this manner, one can see that students are studying with real intent, thinking of their own needs, and finding answers to their own challenges while being immersed in the word. Students are discovering inspired principles and doctrines that are meaningful and useful to them. The Holy Ghost is teaching them. It is exactly what Elder Eyring described when he said, “Years from now you will see more Latter-day Saint youth in our classes pondering the scriptures.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Invite Students to Share What They Have Learned or Felt*

Next, the teacher invites students to appropriately<sup>16</sup> share what they have discovered from the scripture passage. During this time, students frequently share truths, and “all [are] edified of all” (D&C 88:122). Oftentimes, spontaneous participation builds as more students want to discuss what they have learned and what they feel. When peers speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, they

often share powerful, relevant and inspiring thoughts that seem to greatly influence their classmates. During the class on 1 Samuel 1, I witnessed several students share powerful insights that would not only help them personally as they are “waiting on the Lord,” but would certainly also help others in the class. Inspiration seemed to flow into the classroom and edification took place. And where they are peers, their words can carry tremendous influence in the lives of the students in the class. When peers speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, they often share relevant truth for others in the class.

### Other Experiences

Following are additional examples of teachers I have observed who are working to “*find ways* to allow the inspired writers of the scriptures to teach and to testify” and to “*create opportunities* for our students to interact directly with the words . . . of the scriptures.”

Years ago I was observing a class that had just completed their study of the Pearl of Great Price. The teacher said to his students, “Before we leave this book of scripture, I would like to give you a test.” A few of the students groaned in displeasure, but the teacher continued, “For this test I would like to give you some time to find Christ in the Pearl of Great Price.” He added, “Look for him, find him, and then be prepared to share what you have found.” What followed was something I have seen over and over in other classes—as we teach about the Savior, the students focus and the Spirit comes. All of the students began intently studying the chapters, engaged in this “test.” The teacher played an inspiring hymn, and I could soon feel the Spirit in the classroom. Again, I could sense that the students were interacting with the word of God in a manner that was edifying. Finally, after allowing sufficient time, the teacher simply asked his students, “Where did you find him?” Student after student shared their discoveries. One young woman raised her hand and said, “I found him in Moses 6:27.” I turned to Moses 6:27 as she began to read: “And he heard a voice from heaven, saying: Enoch, my son, prophesy unto this people, and say unto them—Repent, for thus saith the Lord: I am angry with this people, and my fierce anger is kindled against them.” She then paused and said, “Here he is,” and then continued reading: “for their hearts have waxed hard, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes cannot see afar off.” She again said, “There he is in the end of the verse.” As I searched the words, I couldn’t see what she had found. The teacher wisely said, “Please tell us what you see.” She continued, “Do you see where it says, ‘their hearts

are waxed hard?’” Then she explained, “When you light a candle, the wax becomes warm and soft. However, when you extinguish the flame, the wax quickly turns cold and hard. The light is Jesus Christ and when we are near him, our hearts are warm and soft. However, when we aren’t near Jesus Christ it doesn’t take long for our hearts to become cold and hard.” The teacher paused and allowed time for this thought to settle into our minds and hearts. It was profound.

Another young woman raised her hand and said, “I found him in Moses 4:23–24.” I turned there and began reading about the effects of the Fall: “Cursed shall be the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also, and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.” The young woman pointed out the words *thorns* and *thistles*, and then she asked the class, “Do you think Christ knew that one day he would physically wear, in a crown of thorns, the effects of the Fall?” No one answered. The students just sat silently looking at the verse. Many other inspiring insights were shared and class ended too soon that day, but minds had been opened and hearts had been touched.

I have learned that people seem to treasure those truths they have found on their own, and we all love to share scriptural insights that we have discovered. These experiences, and the passages that prompt them, take on special meaning in our lives.

I once heard an analogy that teachers are like tour guides and students are like tourists. A good tour guide directs a bus full of people as they drive past various sites, providing appropriate context and content that will help the tourists really understand and feel the importance of the historical or natural sites they are seeing. And yet there are times when the tour guide invites everyone off the bus so they can experience a site more closely. I think most tourists wouldn’t want to see Adam-ondi-Ahman from a bus window. After hearing about the site, most tourists would want to get off the bus so they can walk around to ponder and experience it for themselves. The *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook states, “Sometimes in class, doctrines and principles will be pointed out by the teacher. Other times the teacher will guide, encourage, and allow students to discover them for themselves. Teachers should diligently help students acquire the ability to identify doctrines and principles on their own.”<sup>17</sup>

On another occasion I watched as a teacher asked his large afternoon class to write down in their scripture journals a personal concern—something

that had been troubling them. Then he asked, “Where are you seeking peace?” He then explained the background of Doctrine and Covenants 88 and read from the heading, which states that this revelation “was designated by the Prophet as the olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Paradise, the Lord’s message of peace to us.” To help students understand the scriptures better, the teacher had some words defined on the marker board (such as *alms*, *Sabaoth*, and so forth). The teacher then invited his students to read verses 1–17 and to find principles “that bring you peace.” The students began searching and writing in their study journals the truths they had found. The students were totally immersed in the word of God.

After a while, the teacher asked, “What principles of peace did you find?” One student raised his hand and then read the beginning of verse 3, in which the Lord says, “Wherefore, I now send upon you another Comforter, even upon you my friends, that it may abide in your hearts, even the Holy Spirit of promise.” He then explained how the Lord had comforted him during his parents’ divorce. Then another student raised her hand and told of how the Lord had been comforting her through her father’s kidney failure. She said that it was difficult to see him suffer, and that she was afraid he would die. The Lord was helping her through this difficult time. Next, a student shared how hard it was to move to a new school, not knowing anyone and feeling so lonely. The Lord had helped him through the adjustment. Another student said he didn’t have anything big in his life like divorce, kidney failure, or moving, but he said that even in small things, the Lord had comforted him. Yet another student pointed out that in verse 4 the Lord gives a promise of eternal life, and commented, “I think the greatest message of peace is that if we are faithful, one day we can return to our Heavenly Father.”

During the lesson the teacher skillfully weaved the historical context into the lesson, adding richness to the discussion as he asked, “Why might these teachings bring peace to the Saints in 1832? What had they been experiencing?” As students responded, he also asked, “Why is the gift of the Holy Ghost such a powerful evidence of Heavenly Father’s love for you?” As I have observed this teacher repeatedly, I have seen that he consistently helps his young students to discover insights and to share meaningful thoughts, feelings, and experiences, based on their increased ability to study the word of God.

I have also seen examples of institute teachers taking the time in class for their students to interact with the word of God. During one such lesson,

the teacher invited his students to search their scriptures for their favorite reference about dealing with adversity. He said that because we all pass through adversity in life, it is important to know truths that can help us during difficult times. The institute teacher then added they would be making a scripture chain on adversity where they would link several scriptural references together. He said that they would discuss each reference to see where it might best fit in the chain. He then turned his students loose to study. I watched as the students began studying with real intent.

After a few minutes, the teacher asked them to share their scriptures and why they were important to them, there was power in the classroom. In fact, the teacher later told me that during this entire experience he kept asking himself, “Why haven’t I been doing this more?” He also mentioned that he hadn’t felt the Spirit in his class that powerfully for quite some time. At the end of class as his students were leaving, they commented on how they loved studying the scriptures “that way” and expressed gratitude for feeling the Spirit so strongly.

The institute teacher later commented: “I’m amazed that I get so distracted with my traditional teaching and forget how powerful these classes are to hungry students. I relearned to trust the scriptures more and to have more confidence in the Spirit’s power to bring those scriptures to life and light. After all my years of teaching, the Lord is patient in helping me to relearn the power of the scriptures and the witness that the Spirit gives them.”<sup>18</sup> This teacher had truly given time for his students to interact with them in an edifying way.

In my own classes, I too have experienced the power that comes when students are invited to read (or watch) a general conference talk in or out of class and are prepared to share what they loved, or what was meaningful or helpful to them. Almost always this experience turns into an insightful and inspiring discussion. I have experienced this in my BYU religion classes as well as my institute classes. The Holy Ghost truly teaches our students as they interact with the words of the living prophets and the scriptures.

One challenge that institute teachers often talk about is the need to cover large blocks of scripture in a short amount of time. This may cause some teachers to shy away from allowing time for students to interact with the word and then share what they have seen or found, thinking there won’t be time for this. However, teachers usually find that as they get students more involved in this way, they will gain more from their lesson, and they better retain what they

have learned. Elder Holland offered the following counsel on trying to teach too much. He stated:

May I also encourage you to avoid a temptation that faces almost every teacher in the Church; at least it has certainly been my experience. That is the temptation to cover too much material, the temptation to stuff more into the hour—or more into the students—than they can possibly hold! Remember two things in this regard: first of all, we are teaching people, not subject matter per se; and second, every lesson outline that I have ever seen will inevitably have more in it than we can possibly cover in the allotted time.

So stop worrying about that. It's better to take just a few good ideas and get good discussion—and good learning—than to be frenzied, trying to teach every word in the manual. . . .

An unrushed atmosphere is absolutely essential if you are to have the Spirit of the Lord present in your class. Please don't ever forget that. Too many of us rush. We rush right past the Spirit of the Lord trying to beat the clock in some absolutely unnecessary footrace.<sup>19</sup>

## Cautions

Any teaching method, including student discovery, should be carefully prepared and implemented. If a method is overused it can become tedious for students. If all we did as teachers was to turn our class over to student discovery all day every day, we would be denying our students the opportunity to understand those truths we have paid the price to learn. However, if all we did was to impart our knowledge to our students, without allowing or providing them opportunities to discover truths on their own, we would deny students opportunities to find and internalize truth on their own.

I have also found that when I use a teaching idea in a perfunctory or superficial way, it doesn't usually work very well. However, when I have humbly and prayerfully prepared and feel impressed to use a certain method or to teach specific principles, the lesson always goes better. If all we do is to superficially review a scripture block and then send our students into the passage, hoping they will come up with something, we will likely fail. However, if we have paid a personal price in the scriptures, and we feel impressed to have our students interact with the words of Christ in a certain way, the scriptures can come alive in class, and our students will be blessed.

When lessons don't seem to go well, the problem is often found in the lack of preparation in the scriptures. When the scriptures are under-prepared, we tend to simply touch on some of the words of the scriptures, or we resort to something we have previously taught, without helping our students with

what they really need. The *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook states, “The clarity and the depth of understanding . . . is often diminished or lost when only a verse or two of a scripture block is taught.”<sup>20</sup> Preparation, guided by the Spirit, translates into power in the classroom.

In speaking on the importance of gaining the Spirit through scripture study, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “However talented men may be . . . however eloquent they may be . . . however learned they may be in worldly things, they will be denied the sweet whisperings of the Spirit that might have been theirs unless they pay the price of studying, pondering, and praying about the scriptures.”<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, a quote in *Preach My Gospel* illustrates the importance of immersing ourselves in the scriptures: “Your ability to teach with power from the scriptures comes in large measure from *the time* you personally spend studying them. As you daily feast upon the word, your ability to teach from the scriptures will improve. In addition, your invitations to study and ponder the scriptures will be more powerful because you are doing the same thing in your life.”<sup>22</sup>

### Questions that Invite Students to Interact Directly with the Scriptures

Following are a few sample questions and other teaching ideas that teachers could adopt or modify, which will “allow the inspired writers of the scriptures to teach and to testify” and “create opportunities for our students to interact directly with the word.”

- As we study these verses, what do you think Moses would want us to know about receiving revelation?
- As you study these verses, what can you learn from Joseph of Egypt that would help you to overcome temptation?
- What do you think Hannah would want us to learn about this particular principle or doctrine?
- What can we learn from Hannah’s example that would help us while we are waiting on the Lord?
- If David were here, what would he say to us about battling the “Goliaths” in our lives?
- As you read this account, list the most important lessons you think you can take from Lehi’s vision.
- Put yourself in Mormon’s position and tell me what you would do.

- As you search these verses, find something that Jesus taught that would help you overcome fear.
- As you study, look for something that resonates with you, that is meaningful to you, or that would help you to be more obedient.
- Find something in these verses that helps you feel peace.
- What are the truths in this passage that will help you make righteous choices, even in the face of peer pressure?
- Find principles learned from Doctrine and Covenants 122 that will guide you as you pass through trials and adversity.
- What do you think Joseph Smith would testify to us regarding trials?
- What circumstances and situations in your lives are like the circumstances and situations in this passage of scripture?<sup>23</sup>
- Ask yourselves, “How am I like the characters we are studying in these scriptures?”<sup>24</sup>
- What do you think the Lord wants us to learn from this account?
- What can we learn about the Lord from this passage?
- What did you learn from the Lord in these verses?
- Will you look for Christ today as you study these verses?
- What lessons can you learn from this?
- What do you learn about yourself from these verses?
- How does this affect you?
- What will you take away and implement into your life as a result of what you learned?

## Conclusion

I invited a former student-teacher (now a colleague) to write what he had learned about creating opportunities for students to interact with the scriptures in a meaningful way. When he began his student teaching, we could see he had a natural ability to teach, as well as the ability to strongly connect with his students. However, he also had a tendency to “get in the way” of his students’ spiritual learning. Mostly, he was highly entertaining, and his delivery brought a great amount of attention to himself. He didn’t know it, but he was “eclipsing” the Holy Ghost. We knew he had a keen mind and a good heart, but he wasn’t doing those things that would invite the Spirit into the classroom more frequently and with more power. We had a few talks with him, and he quickly learned. Then he had an experience when he knew the Spirit was teaching his students. Here is what he wrote:

I had been wrestling with the Lord to help me understand how to get out of the way of my students' discovery. More than anything, I desired to help them become spiritually self-sufficient enough to withstand the challenges of the last days, and the Lord kept letting me know that that meant helping them to feel the Spirit bring the power of the scriptures into their hearts and minds. It wasn't about me as a teacher. It had been *good* for them to hear about *my stories* about the scriptures changing *my life*, but it would be infinitely *better* for them to gain *their* own stories about the scriptures changing *their lives*. I felt as if a vision had opened up before me of what the Lord wanted my class to look like.

And so, on this day, I offered some guiding questions, turned on some quiet piano music, and let the students let the Spirit serve them a feast. The Spirit and the scriptures met their individual needs, and I didn't get in the way. After a good, long drink from God's pure wells of inspiration, they let me know that they were ready to share. And I was in the background, both literally and figuratively. The room was filled with the inimitable spirit of revelation. It flowed from their tongues as they spoke about what the Spirit had taught them, about the individual applications they had discovered, and about the personal witnesses that they had gained—that day and in that class—about God's power in their lives.

The Spirit witnessed to me that I had finally done it; I had finally gotten out of the way enough so that I was no longer their teacher. Christ, through the power of the Spirit and the scriptures, was teaching them.

It is important to provide opportunities for students to interact with the scriptures in a way that invites the Holy Ghost to instruct and to edify them. By so doing, the Holy Ghost will show students insights into the scriptures, help them recall past inspiring experiences, assist them in making connections from the scriptures to their personal lives, expand their understanding, and help to internalize truth more deeply and move understanding from the mind to the heart. Additionally, students' faith and hope can be renewed, conversion can be deepened, and a desire to act on truth and to become more like our Savior may be increased. And most important, by pondering the Lord's words in these ways, our students can come to know the Savior better and draw nearer to him. As noted before, although we don't live during the time of the mortal ministry of the Lord, we can experience similar outcomes, just as the people of his day experienced as we interact in sacred ways with his holy words.

As we "find ways" and "create opportunities" for our student to interact with the word of God, they can experience all these outcomes. The miracle that Elder Eyring described can take place, and we can help our students learn and grow through Jesus Christ and his words. **RE**

## Notes

1. There are many ways to invite and experience the Holy Ghost in our classrooms. The experiences described in this paper have often been the most powerful I have observed because (a) the teacher as well as the students can receive revelation from the scriptures that can be helpful to themselves and others; (b) when those insights, feelings and witnesses are appropriately shared they are often validated by the Holy Ghost; (c) the power of peer-to-peer sharing can lead to greater relevancy in the lesson; (d) the Lord personalizes the scriptures to meet the needs of each person who studies them, resulting in thoughts and insights that are deeply personal, meaningful and edifying; (e) the power of multiple witnesses expressing feelings of inspiration about principles and doctrines; (f) students minds and hearts are often more alert, active and engaged in the learning process as they participate, which invites the Holy Ghost to instruct and to testify; (g) the Lord's goodness and mercy in desiring that all, both young and old discover insights in the scriptures and feel the Holy Ghost; (h) valuable insights are gained from each other; (i) students are learning how to share spiritual thoughts and experiences with others—sometimes receiving a testimony of the doctrine as they share. I'm sure there are other possible explanations as well.

2. Robert D. Hales, "Teaching by Faith," Evening with a General Authority, February 1, 2002, 4.

3. Henry B. Eyring, "We Need a Miracle," unpublished address to CES area directors, April 6, 1981, 5.

4. Chad H. Webb, "Deepening Conversion," CES satellite broadcast, August 7, 2007; emphasis added.

5. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Therefore What?," address to religious educators at a symposium on the New Testament, BYU, August 8, 2000; emphasis added.

6. This comment made me think of Mormon 9:31 which says, "Give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been."

7. This comment reminds me of Elder Richard G. Scott's quote on edification. He said, "To me, the word *edified* means that the Lord will personalize our understanding of truth to meet our individual needs and as we strive for that guidance." "Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led," address to religious educators at a symposium on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history, Brigham Young University, August 11, 1998, 11.

8. Howard W. Hunter, "Eternal Investments," address to CES religious educators at an Evening with President Howard W. Hunter, February 10, 1989.

9. Trent Toone, "James Ferrell Left Law Career to Become a Bestselling Author," *Deseret News*, June 24, 2010.

10. The five questions Ferrell asks while studying the scriptures are (1) What is the context? (2) Why is this happening? (3) Is there a pattern, such as repeating words, themes, echoes and shadows? (4) How is this about the Savior? And (5) How does this apply to me?

11. Trent Toone, "James Ferrell Left Law Career"; emphasis added.

12. *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes*, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Utah, 2012) 56–57.

13. *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, 39.

14. *Gospel Teaching and Learning* states, "Music, especially the hymns of the Church, can play a significant role in helping students feel the influence of the Holy Ghost in their gospel learning experience" (74).

15. Henry B. Eyring, “We Need a Miracle.”

16. Elder Richard G. Scott counseled, “We can create an appropriate environment for the Holy Ghost to instruct us. Spiritual communication cannot be forced.” “Helping Others to be Spiritually Led,” 11. Additionally, teachers can help students understand there are some things that are too sacred or personal to share. See D&C 63:64.

17. *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, 27.

18. Keith Longmore to the author, e-mail, Orem University Institute.

19. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” worldwide leadership training meeting, February 10, 2007.

20. *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, 39.

21. Richard G. Scott, “To Learn and to Teach More Effectively,” devotional address at BYU Education Week, August 21, 2007.

22. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 180.

23. This is a question from *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, 22.

24. This is a question from *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, 22.