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KnoWhy #368 - Why Should We Read the Book of Mormon Daily?

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Abstract: Elder Robert D. Hales has taught that the “greatest blessings of general conference come to us after the conference is over” when we “return home to live” according to the messages we have heard. This counsel is especially important in regard to the teachings of the living prophet, who is the president of the church. In his Saturday morning address of the April 2017 general conference, President Monson taught that we should “prayerfully study and ponder the Book of Mormon each day.” By faithfully following this counsel, President Monson promised that “we will be in a position to hear the voice of the Spirit, to resist temptation, to overcome doubt and fear, and to receive heaven’s help in our lives.”



WHY SHOULD WE READ THE BOOK OF MORMON DAILY?

KnoWhy #368
September 28, 2017



Man Studying the Scriptures via lds.org

“For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children.”

2 Nephi 4:15

THE KNOW

Elder Robert D. Hales has taught, “The greatest blessings of general conference come to us after the conference is over. Remember the pattern recorded frequently in scripture: we gather to hear the words of the Lord, and we return to our homes to live them.”¹ This counsel is especially important in regard to the teachings of the living prophet, who is the president of the church.

In his Saturday morning address of the April 2017 session of general conference, President Thomas S. Monson declared, “If you are not *reading* the Book of Mormon each day, please do so.” Towards the end of his talk, he echoed this same plea, encouraging us not only to read but also to “*prayerfully study* and *ponder* the Book of Mormon each day.”² Praying, reading, studying, pondering—each one can be seen as an essential ingredient needed to truly “feast upon the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3).³

Praying

The prophet Nephi taught that “ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall

pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee” (2 Nephi 32:9). Just like wiping away a film of dust and grime from reading glasses, praying before reading the scriptures helps us to remove worldly concerns from our minds and to see spiritual truths more clearly.

As we pray, we can tell the Lord what it is that we desire to learn or gain from the scriptures, as well as *why* we desire it. For instance, in his vision of the Tree of Life, Nephi’s angelic guide asked, “what desirest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:2). We can also explain to the Lord what we are willing to do to obtain our requested blessings. With righteous desires and a committed heart, we will be in a better position to understand and receive the word of the Lord.

Reading

Anciently, few people had their own copies of sacred scriptural texts, and thus few had the privilege of reading them daily. For this reason, those who cherished the scriptures often took great effort to memorize the sacred words of the Lord.⁴ For them, the scriptures were “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living

God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3).⁵ Today, many of us can easily fit the Book of Mormon, and even the entire LDS scriptural canon, on the electronic device in our pocket. Our scriptures are more often written in binary computer code than in ink. And instead of tables of stone, we have tablets with digital displays.

Unfortunately, despite our nearly unlimited access to sacred texts, some of us still may not be regularly reading the word of the Lord. As Alma counseled his Son Helaman, “O my son, do not let us be slothful because of the easiness of the way; for so was it with our fathers; for so was it prepared for them, that if they would look they might live; even so it is with us.” (Alma 37:46).⁶ The first step to gaining spiritual power from the Book of Mormon—a book which embodies the words of Christ and which was especially prepared for us⁷—is to actually *look* at its words.

Studying

While viewing sacred words can be a powerful experience, it can also be ineffective. How many of us have read sentences, paragraphs, or even entire chapters of scriptural text while on mental autopilot? When we finally come to ourselves, we realize that we may have unwittingly fulfilled one of Isaiah’s prophecies: “It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite” (Isaiah 29:8).

Even if we read the Book of Mormon daily, if we do so without seriously focusing on its content, we can quickly become spiritually malnourished. To combat such day-dreamy reading habits, we can develop patterns of active reading, such as (1) carefully searching for connections, patterns, and themes,⁸ (2) placing ourselves in the situation of scriptural characters or seeing how our own lives might be similar to theirs,⁹ (3) memorizing key words or phrases, and (4) asking questions,¹⁰ such as how, when, where, who, and especially why.¹¹

Pondering

While studying the scriptures can be seen as a mental process of understanding their content, pondering involves the heart. The prophet Nephi declared, “For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pon-

dereth them” (2 Nephi 4:15). When pondering, we reverently and reflectively seek to spiritually discern the answers to our study questions—especially our *why* questions. This process helps us penetrate the surface layers of mere information and mine the depths of life’s ultimate purpose and meaning—the *why* of it all. As Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught, “We must ponder [the scriptures] and reach into the very essence of what we are and what we may become.”¹²

THE WHY

Some may wonder why the prophet of the Lord has given us this counsel. What is it about the Book of Mormon that makes it such a daily priority? President Monson promised that by prayerfully reading, studying and pondering daily, “we will be in a position to hear the voice of the Spirit, to resist temptation, to overcome doubt and fear, and to receive heaven’s help in our lives.”¹³

He also affirmed that “having a firm and sure testimony of the Book of Mormon cannot be overstated.”¹⁴ This is because if it is true then (1) Joseph Smith was a true prophet “who saw God the Father and His Son” and (2) “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s church upon the earth” and (3) “the holy priesthood of God has been restored” to the earth.¹⁵ These foundational truths are all directly supported by the Book of Mormon—the “keystone of our religion.”¹⁶

Obtaining spiritual nourishment on a daily basis is just as important for our spirits as getting enough food and water is for our physical bodies.¹⁷ And the Book of Mormon, a book that was carefully prepared by the Lord for our day, is uniquely able to provide the nourishment that is most vital to our spiritual survival. As we diligently give heed to the prophet’s counsel, we will see his promised blessings unfold in our lives.

FURTHER READING

Thomas S. Monson, “The Power of the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 86–87, online at lds.org.

Robert D. Hales, “General Conference: Strengthening Faith and Testimony,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 6–8, online at lds.org.

David A. Bednar, “A Reservoir of Living Water,” *BYU Speeches*, February 2007, online at speeches.byu.edu.

NOTES

1. Robert D. Hales, “General Conference: Strengthening Faith and Testimony,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 7, online at lds.org.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “The Power of the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 86–87, online at lds.org. Emphasis added.
3. See Book of Mormon Central, “How Can One ‘Feast upon the Words of Christ?’ (2 Nephi 32:3),” *KnoWhy* 306 (April 28, 2017).
4. For an overview of orality, literacy, and the need for memorization in ancient Israelite and early Christian cultures, see Lara Quick, “Recent Research on Ancient Israelite Education: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 13, no. 1 (2014) 9–33; Werner H. Kelber, “Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 44, no. 3 (2014): 144–155.
5. Despite our unprecedented access to scriptural texts, as well as our ability to use search engines to quickly find passages with key words and phrases, there is still great value in memorizing scriptures in our day. See Richard G. Scott, “The Power of Scripture,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 6, online at lds.org: “Great power can come from memorizing scriptures. To memorize a scripture is to forge a new friendship. It is like discovering a new individual who can help in time of need, give inspiration and comfort, and be a source of motivation for needed change.”
6. Alma’s teaching in this context refers to Lehi’s party’s need to look upon the liahona in order to find their way through the wilderness. However, its phrasing also draws upon the story of the brazen serpent from the Israelite exodus (Numbers 21:9). For Book of Mormon passages that recount the incident in Numbers 21:9 and also the phrasing from Alma 37:46, see Alma 33:19 and Helaman 8:15.
7. See Book of Mormon Central, “Why Were the Plates Present During the Translation of the Book of Mormon? (Mosiah 1:6),” *KnoWhy* 366 (September 21, 2017).
8. See David A. Bednar, “A Reservoir of Living Water,” *BYU Speeches*, February 2007, online at speeches.byu.edu.
9. See 1 Nephi 19:23.
10. See James E. Faulconer, *The Book of Mormon Made Harder: Scripture Study Questions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2014).
11. See Russell M. Ballard, “The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century,” an address to CES Religious Educators, February 26, 2016, online at lds.org.
12. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Pondering Strengthens the Spiritual Life,” *Ensign*, May 1982, online at lds.org
13. Monson, “The Power of the Book of Mormon,” 87.
14. Monson, “The Power of the Book of Mormon,” 86.
15. Monson, “The Power of the Book of Mormon,” 86–87.
16. See the Introduction to the Book of Mormon. See also, *History, 1838–1856*, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842], p. 1255, online at josephsmithpapers.org.
17. See D. Todd Christofferson, “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread,” CES Fireside for Young Adults, January 9, 2011, online at lds.org.