

Heart to Heart: Engaging the Scriptures in the Service of the Lord

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Early one morning in the fall of 1968 I knelt in prayer in a small basement apartment in Boeblingen, Germany. I had been a missionary in southern Germany for less than two months, and I was confused, worried, and discouraged. The work was hard; few people wanted to talk to us; and some heaped on us anger, scorn, and ridicule. I felt under attack on all sides, and I did not have all the answers. I had searched and pondered and had tried to find understanding and greater faith, but I had made little progress. And so, there I was on my knees pleading with the Lord for help. As I prayed, I heard in my mind, as though someone had spoken to me, these three words: believe in God. I looked up and looked around. My companion was fixing breakfast. I asked him if there was a scripture that said, "Believe in God." He said, matter-of-factly, "Yeah, Mosiah 4:9." I opened the Book of Mormon and read these words:

"Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend."

As I read those words, the message from the Lord—have faith and trust in me—sank deep into my heart. Hearing those words and reading that scripture was a defining experience. I learned to trust the Lord, to hear His voice, and to see the scriptures as a source of inspiration and power. I have here in my hand one of the greatest of all the blessings the Lord has given us. I love the scriptures. Each of us has the opportunity to read and search them and to *engage* them in our service in the kingdom. I know the scriptures are important to you, and I pray that the Holy Ghost will teach us how the scriptures might become an even greater source of truth, knowledge, and power in our lives.

There is no better statement of that power, and how one obtains it, than Mormon's description of the sons of Mosiah in Alma 17:2–3:

"Now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they

were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

“But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.”

The sons of Mosiah engaged the scriptures through the observance of four principles:

- Make and keep sacred covenants with the Lord.
- Search diligently to know the truth.
- Fast and pray to have the guidance of the Spirit.
- Teach with power and authority.

I call these principles the “framework of engagement.” As we consider them, please pay close attention to the way each principle deals with our hearts. Engaging the scriptures is not primarily a matter of cognition or intellect. It is primarily about our hearts. The framework, therefore, is an engagement of the heart.

Principle 1: Make and Keep Sacred Covenants with the Lord

The connection between making covenants and engaging the scriptures lies in our hearts. Throughout the scriptures the prophets have used the image of the heart to capture what is at the very core of our emotional and spiritual life—our innermost desires, our central drives, our deepest emotional commitments, and our capacity for love. This is what we give to the Lord when we make and keep sacred covenants with Him. Our hearts become His, and He writes the promises in our hearts. The promises of the covenant shape our desires and become our defining commitments. Through the power of the Atonement He gives us a new heart, with desires and commitments that are pure before Him.

This is not something that happens all at once. But if we are true and faithful, if we “[yield] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit,”¹ the Lord works a mighty change in our hearts. Hearts that are turned to the Lord with desires and commitments defined by sacred covenants are open to His word and His light. Here is the promise:

“And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.”²

Principle 2: Search Diligently to Know the Truth

To engage the scriptures, we must read them and search them. Since the days of my mission I have read the scriptures every day. But there came a time a few years ago when I realized that I needed to do much more than I was doing. I made a commitment to the Lord that I would get up earlier and really dig into the scriptures with intensity and focus. It has been a wonderful experience. Let me share with you what I have learned.

First, if you do not have a copy of *Preach My Gospel*, please go and get one and use it. It is inspired and powerful. You might also find Elder Gene Cook's wonderful book, *Searching the Scriptures*, useful in your search.

Second, here are my practical ideas for searching the scriptures:

- Set aside time—the same time—*every* day.
- Begin with prayer.
- Use whatever approach feels best—read, cross-reference, mark.
- Listen for the Lord's voice, His message to you.
- Write down impressions and ideas.
- Pray about the impressions that come.
- Act on the impressions you receive.

I have had some wonderful experiences searching the scriptures. But of all that I have learned, the one thing that has deeply changed how I think about and use the scriptures is this: when I am really searching, no matter what the topic, the search leads me to Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."³ When we search the scriptures to find the truth, we are searching for the Savior. In that search we use our minds, but we will only find the Savior and His truth if we also listen and feel with our hearts. Nephi taught Laman and Lemuel this principle when he said, "Ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words. . . . Why is it, that ye can be so hard in your hearts?"⁴

With a heart and mind open to the Spirit, we search to understand and feel His words and hear His voice. I know the Savior speaks to us through the scriptures. When we read and ponder under the direction of the Spirit, we receive very personal guidance and instruction from the Lord. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, our hearts may "burn within us" as He speaks to us and "[opens] to us the scriptures."⁵

Herein lies the power of writing down what we learn in our searching and pondering. Indeed, the Lord has commanded us to obtain His word and to treasure it up in our hearts.⁶ When we write down what we receive and review it and pray about it, we make it our own. When we truly hear and feel the voice of the Lord and treasure it in our hearts, we reinforce our covenants, deepen our desire to do His will, and strengthen our commitment to serve Him.

Principle 3: Fast and Pray to Have the Guidance of the Spirit

Fasting is an ancient practice in which we humble ourselves, set our face to the Lord,⁷ and yield our hearts to God.⁸ In Joel 2:12–13, the Lord powerfully underscores this connection between fasting and our hearts:

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

"And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness."

Fasting, with prayer, is thus much more than going without food. It is a small sacrifice; but if it comes with purpose and commitment, it is acceptable of the Lord. When we fast with a purpose in Him—or turn our faces to the Lord, and yield our hearts to Him—there is a cleansing power in that sacrifice that engages and shapes the desires and commitments of the heart.

Here is an analogy: Imagine an automatic garage door that will not open. You look and find that the infrared light receptor is dirty and misaligned. The light signal, and thus the circuit, has been interrupted so the door will not open. You clean the receptor, align it with the source of light, and the door works. Fasting and prayer are like cleaning and aligning our spiritual light receptors. Through fasting and prayer we open ourselves more fully to the ministry of the Holy Ghost, and, thus, to receive light and truth in our search of the scriptures. If we keep those receptors clean and aligned, we may then say of our search for the things of heaven, as Alma said, “for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.”⁹

As we fast and pray and invite the Holy Ghost into our search for truth, the Spirit will teach us what we need to know and do. We will receive guidance for our families and our callings in the work of the Lord. If we are consistent in our fasting and prayer, and if we always remember Him, the Holy Ghost may be our constant companion.

Principle 4: Teach with Power and Authority

Every call in the Church is a call to teach. When we serve in the Lord’s kingdom, we teach. It is true in our families, in the Relief Society, in every part of the Church. This is the sacred purpose for engaging the scriptures: we search to know the truth so that we might serve and teach more effectively in the kingdom. And it is our privilege to teach with power and authority of God.

Listen to these words of the Lord to Hyrum Smith in Doctrine and Covenants 11:20–21:

“Behold, this is your work, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength.

“Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men.”

Here the Lord teaches us that there are two sources of “the power of God unto the convincing of men.” The first is the Spirit. The Lord promised Hyrum, and promises us, that if we are obedient and work hard to obtain the words of Christ, “then shall your tongue be loosed; [and] then . . . you shall have my Spirit.” With the power of the Holy Ghost, we may speak the words of Christ “with the tongue of angels.”¹⁰ Indeed, the Spirit carries those words unto the hearts of those who hear¹¹ and bears witness that the words are true.¹² What is taught is powerful because it is taught by the Spirit.

The second source of power is the word itself. Paul taught in Hebrews:

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”¹³

The words of Christ penetrate into the mind and heart with force and depth. Paul describes them as sharp, powerful, and quick—or living. When the Lord speaks, His words are perfectly adapted to the needs of those who hear. They strike at the very heart of the issues and concerns and hopes and dreams that people have. Thus, the word of God discerns the thoughts and intents of the hearts of those who hear.

Teaching with power and authority of God is all about the heart. If there is a desire in our hearts and if we have treasured the word in our hearts, the Lord will give us “in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what [we] shall say.”¹⁴ Thus, what we teach touches the hearts of those who are prepared because we speak His words with His power. We teach with power and authority when we teach heart to heart.

The Framework of Engagement: Two Stories

Engaging the scriptures with these four principles brings marvelous promises: hearts that are His; hearts that know and treasure His voice; pure hearts, filled with the Spirit; the capacity to serve and teach heart to heart. This is the framework of engagement. But it is also the cycle of engagement. As we search and teach, we learn. When we receive “in the very hour” what we should say, we gain insights that reinforce our desires and commitments and that send us back to the scriptures to seek deeper understanding.

I know these principles and promises are true. I have seen them in action in the lives of people close to me, and I have experienced them in my life. In the last nine months, Sue and I have had the great privilege of serving at BYU–Idaho. On that campus we have many opportunities to teach, and we have put the framework of engagement into practice. I would like to close today with two stories from our experience.

The first story is about the talk Sue gave last January in the first devotional of the winter semester. As she always does, she poured her heart and soul into that talk. She felt impressed to talk about the Christmas star. She fasted and prayed and searched the scriptures. In that search she connected the star to the Savior through a verse in 2 Peter and one in Revelation:

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”¹⁵

“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things. . . . I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”¹⁶

These passages connect the dawn with the morning and the Savior with the daystar, the bright and morning star, that can arise in our hearts. These are beautiful passages, but the Lord had something more for Sue. Early one morning she woke up with two phrases going through her mind. I know this because she woke me up to tell me about them. Here are the phrases she received: “The daystar will only rise in hearts that are pure,” and “Our hearts are purified only through the Atonement of the Savior.” Those were the insights that completed the talk the Lord wanted her to give about the star, the Savior, and our hearts.

On the day of the devotional, just before she stood to speak, one of the members of the faculty sang a special musical number. Without any consultation with us, he chose to sing *The Light*

Divine. As he sang so beautifully, Sue and I looked at each other. We knew the Lord had blessed her with one of His tender mercies. She had a witness that He was aware of her talk and wanted her to know of His love and His blessing upon her words. She stood and taught heart to heart.

The second story is about an experience I had in a memorial service in February for a young student from Albania who was killed in a terrible car accident. As I prepared for the service, I read the fifty-seventh verse of section 138 in the Doctrine and Covenants in which the prophet says that faithful elders who depart this life continue to preach the gospel in the spirit world. I knew that scripture described that young man. He had returned from his mission just a few weeks before he died, and he was a great missionary. I decided to talk about that scripture in my remarks.

I was the last speaker. Each of the four speakers before me talked about what I had planned to say. We had all had the same spiritual impression. I leaned over to Sue and whispered, “What am I going to talk about?” Meanwhile, a young sister in the front of the chapel had been overcome with a great spirit of sadness and wept almost uncontrollably. She was one of the last people to see this young man alive. There was a strong sense of sadness and grief in the chapel.

Just before I stood to speak, two thoughts came into my mind: Doctrine and Covenants, section 42, and the early part of section 138 where the spirits of the just rejoice together in the hope of the Savior’s resurrection. So I stood and read these verses in section 42:

“Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die, and more especially for those that have not hope of a glorious resurrection.

“And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them.”¹⁷

As I read those words, I saw for the first time that we are commanded to weep—but not for those who die; death is sweet to them. We are commanded to grieve so that we may learn to live together in love, so that we may learn to support and comfort one another in the loss of those we love.

I then read these words from section 138:

“All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

“I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand.”¹⁸

In that very moment, the Lord taught me this principle: we have the same hope on this side of the veil as they had then on their side. The glorious message to all who grieve, to all who weep for the loss of a loved one, is that He lives! And because of Him, we, too, may look forward and rejoice in the hope of a glorious resurrection—just as they did.

The young woman who wept so sadly grew quiet just a few seconds after I began to speak. As the Holy Ghost taught us that evening, there came into that chapel a sweet spirit of peace and

hope. It was a wonderful experience, a gift from a loving Heavenly Father. I know that in those moments the Spirit taught heart to heart.

I would like to close today with my testimony about you and about the promises the Lord has given us if we will engage the scriptures in our lives.

One day not long ago I sat in the Idaho Falls Temple pondering this talk. There came into my mind a clear impression of the power in the sisters who would be sitting here today. I know that power. I have seen it in Sue, the love of my life; in my daughters; in the wives of my sons; in my sister, my grandmothers, my sweet mother. I have known them and seen them, and I have seen you.

I have seen you in your homes nurturing and teaching children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. I have seen you in Relief Society, Primary, and Young Women—teaching, serving, saving lives. I have seen you share the gospel in word and deed in your neighborhoods and at work. I have seen you visiting sisters and families, healing body and soul. I have seen you in the temple, serving in the presence of the Lord. I have seen you nurture and love, teach and inspire, organize and lead. I have seen you do all these things clothed in power and glory, filled with the Spirit.

There is a marvelous work before you. It is His work. This is His Church and kingdom. I bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior and Redeemer. His light and His voice are in the scriptures. His invitation is to all: “Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”¹⁹

May God bless us all to engage the scriptures with full purpose of heart that, like the sons of Mosiah, we might serve and teach in the kingdom of God with power and authority, heart to heart.

References

1. Mosiah 3:19.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 88:67.
3. John 14:6.
4. 1 Nephi 17:45-46.
5. See Luke 24:32.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 11:21, 26.
7. See Daniel 9:3.
8. See Helaman 3:35.
9. Alma 5:46.

10. 2 Nephi 31:13.
11. See 2 Nephi 33:1.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 100:7–8.
13. Hebrews 4:12.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 100:6.
15. 2 Peter 1:19.
16. Revelation 22:16.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 42:45–46.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 138:14–15.
19. Revelation 22:17.