

To Be Edified and Rejoice Together

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We access the power of the word of God in overcoming our challenges by learning how to receive and teach by the Spirit.

Please consider the following questions and scriptural answers:

What destroyed the Gadianton robbers?

“And it came to pass that the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; and they did preach the word of God among the more wicked part of them, insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites” ([Helaman 6:37](#)).

What can protect us from temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary?

“Whoso would hearken unto the word of God, and would hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 [Nephi 15:24](#)).

What influences our minds more powerfully than threats of death or war?

“And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened to them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” ([Alma 31:5](#)).

What will cause us to rejoice together?

“Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” ([D&C 50:22](#)).

Interestingly, the answer to all of these questions is the same: it is the power of the word of God. This is what will enable us to protect our children and to overcome the great challenges of the last days—in our personal lives, in our families, and in the world.

So how do we obtain the blessings that are available to us through the power of the word of God? Certainly personal study is fundamental. But great power also comes to us as we learn to teach and receive the word by the Spirit. This is how we “are edified and rejoice together.”

Receiving by the Spirit

While much focus is appropriately placed on the role of the teacher in a gospel setting, we need to look carefully also at our own role as learners

One Sunday a few years ago, when I was serving as an Area Seventy, the local mission president and I traveled together to conduct meetings with several different groups. As we approached the final meeting, we were both tired. We had already driven more than 300 miles (480 km) and had spoken several times. We began the meeting and started down the same list we had covered in the other meetings.

But as we spoke, something wonderful happened. The Spirit intensified, and the teaching and learning moved to a new level that continued through the entire meeting. We later remarked to each other, “That was wonderful. That was the best meeting of the day!”

What made the difference? It wasn’t anything we did. We hadn’t suddenly become more brilliant or eloquent or spiritual. In fact, if anything, we were somewhat worn by the activities of the day. The topics we covered were the same topics covered in the other meetings.

As we talked about it, we came to realize that the people who attended that last meeting were more humble and spiritually prepared. As a result, they were more open and hungry for the word, and the Lord was able to use us more effectively as a conduit to bless their lives. The success of that meeting was much more about them than about us.

Since then, I have found numerous examples of this principle in action. Nowhere is it more dramatically taught than in the mortal ministry of the Lord Himself. In the book of Matthew, we read that when the Savior “was come into his own country ... he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” ([Matthew 13:54, 58](#)). We can almost hear Moroni in the background declaring, “I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, *according to the faith of the children of men*, the same today and tomorrow, and forever” ([Moroni 10:7](#); emphasis added).

Now I would ask you to think about the implications of this principle in terms of your own ability to have great spiritual experiences as you attend a class or a sacrament meeting on

Sunday. What is your role in creating the environment in which the Spirit can teach you the things you need to know? If you find a Church class or a sacrament meeting boring, does that say more about the teacher—or about you?

Consider the response of President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) when someone once asked him, “What do you do if you find yourself caught in a boring sacrament meeting?” President Kimball thought a moment, then replied, “I don’t know; I’ve never been in one.”¹ With his long years of Church experience, President Kimball had undoubtedly been to many meetings where people had read their talks, spoken in a monotone, or given travelogues instead of teaching doctrine. But most likely, President Kimball was teaching that he did not go to sacrament meeting to be entertained; he went to worship the Lord, renew his covenants, and be taught from on high. If he attended with an open heart, a desire to be “nourished by the good word of God” ([Moroni 6:4](#)), and a prayer—rather than judgment—for the speakers, the Spirit would teach him what he needed to do to be a more effective and faithful disciple. President Kimball was teaching the principle of learning by the Spirit.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord teaches us about both teaching and learning by the Spirit:

“Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

“And if it be by some other way it is not of God.

“And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

“And if it be by some other way it is not of God.

“And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

“If it be some other way it is not of God.

“Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?

“Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” ([D&C 50:17–22](#)).

Notice He says that if we teach or receive in any way other than by the Spirit, it is not of God. Only the Spirit knows our every thought, our every feeling, our every need. Only He can communicate specifically and individually to each of us what we need to know, based on God's perfect wisdom.

As learners, we should not expect to be constantly entertained, emotionally stimulated, or spoon-fed; we should actively, prayerfully prepare for and seek specific inspiration from the Spirit to help us face the unique challenges in our own lives. Whether a class instructor is a 20-year veteran institute teacher or a new convert plumber who has never taught a class before should make little difference in the quality of our learning. Peter was a fisherman; [Joseph Smith](#) had no more than a third-grade education. But the Spirit spoke powerfully through them to those who had "ears to hear" ([Matthew 11:15](#)).

Seeking and Asking

So how do we go about receiving by the Spirit? I would suggest two ideas: accept responsibility for our learning and ask faithful questions.

The first idea comes from Alma: "If ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words" ([Alma 32:27](#)).

We cannot treat gospel learning casually and expect to receive the power of the word in our lives. We must "awake and arouse [our] faculties." We must "experiment upon [His] words." We must exercise faith. We must desire to believe. We must "let this desire work in [us]" and "give place for a portion of [His] words." Notice that Alma is not describing a show-up-on-Sunday-and-expect-a-teacher-to-entertain-you attitude. He is teaching us that we must accept the responsibility for our own learning and reach out in faith if we expect to receive the power of the word in our lives.

The second idea comes from James—from the sacred words that inspired Joseph Smith to go into the Sacred Grove:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" ([James 1:5-6](#)).

The Lord constantly instructs us to *ask, seek, and knock* with the divine promise that we will *receive, find, and have doors of revelation opened unto us*. Asking faithful questions is the pattern established by the Lord for us to invite the guidance of the Spirit in our lives. Consider some of the many questions Joseph had on his mind when he read the words of James:

“In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?” (Joseph Smith—History 1:10).

The words of James came with “power to [Joseph’s] heart” (Joseph Smith—History 1:12) *because* he had questions in his mind.

So what kinds of questions might we appropriately ask? Suppose you are to attend a Sunday School lesson on these verses from James. As you prepare for the class—or even think about these verses during the class—you might ponder questions such as the following:

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Who was James? What questions or circumstances elicited this particular passage?

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What is wisdom?

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What does it mean to “ask in faith”?

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Is it possible to ask about things I don’t understand and still ask, “nothing wavering”? What does it mean to “waver”? When and why do I waver? What choices can I make to ensure that I don’t waver?

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In what circumstances have I felt “driven” and “tossed”? What insight can I gain from those times to help me ask in faith?

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What doctrines or principles are taught in these verses? Where else in the scriptures are these principles taught?

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How do these principles tie into the life and mission of the Savior? How can they help me draw closer to Him?

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How can these principles help me or my loved ones deal with our specific challenges and opportunities?

As we do our part to ask inspired questions and earnestly seek guidance in our lives, we invite the Spirit to teach us through the power of the word.

Teaching by the Spirit

The Lord has said that as well as receiving by the Spirit, we are also to teach by the Spirit. What does that mean?

Perhaps you have seen (or even been) someone walking down the hall to teach a class, glancing at the manual, and saying, “Oh well, I haven’t had time to prepare; I’ll just have to teach by the Spirit.” Or perhaps you have seen (or been) someone who has spent weeks preparing a lesson, complete with elaborate handouts, multiple visual aids, and a word-for-word written script from which he or she plans to “teach by the Spirit.”

I suggest that neither of these approaches is what the Lord intends.

The standard for teaching throughout the Church has been set forth in the scriptures and reinforced in the *Preach My Gospel* manual. We are instructed to “seek first to obtain [the Lord’s] word” (D&C 11:21)—in other words, to thoroughly prepare by studying, asking and seeking answers to faithful questions, and creating teaching outlines. We are then instructed to be completely open to the guidance of the Spirit in the actual teaching moment concerning what we should say and do.

In a recent worldwide leadership training broadcast, President Gordon B. Hinckley quoted the following verse from the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man” (D&C 84:85).

He then observed, “This is the counsel of the Lord. It cannot be set aside with impunity.”²

We need to “treasure up in [our] minds continually the words of life”—that is, to read, study, inquire of the Lord, and prepare—and to trust the Spirit to give us “in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man.” This is true whether we are teaching a class or giving a talk in sacrament meeting or stake conference. But there is one principal difference: a teacher would rarely give a sermon in a classroom, and a speaker would not lead a discussion in sacrament meeting or in the Sunday session of stake or district conference.

In the classroom, teaching by the Spirit is essentially creating the environment in which the Spirit can dwell and asking inspired questions so that we can “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom” (D&C 88:77).

As Elder [Richard G. Scott](#) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said concerning classroom instruction: “Never, and I mean never, give a lecture where there is no student participation. A ‘talking head’ is the weakest form of class instruction. ... Assure that there is abundant participation because that use of agency by a student authorizes the Holy Ghost to instruct. It also helps the student retain your message. As students verbalize truths, they are confirmed in their souls and strengthen their personal testimonies.”³

Teaching in the home should likewise be by the Spirit. Although we have some regular structured teaching times, such as family scripture study and family home evening, most teaching takes place in unanticipated teaching moments and by example. Here too the principle applies: parents should “treasure up ... continually the words of life” so they are prepared and open to the Spirit in teaching moments.

As we follow the Lord’s plan for us to teach and to receive by the Spirit, we truly “are edified and rejoice together”—in our individual families and also as the greater family of God.