Scripture Study©

Oaks Ward Sacrament Meeting
February 2022

Good morning. I feel badly that you have to listen to me again since I bore my testimony last week. Had I any idea that I would be speaking this week, I would have remained seated last week.

The bishop probably wouldn't have put it quite this way, but he more or less asked me to give a motivational speech today. So, that being the case, let me give you four principles that I think are important to success:

1. My son and I were talking about exercise the other day. He reminded me that the best exercise program is the one you will actually do. None of the others matter. Whether it's exercise or any other endeavor, do the one you will do!
2. I heard a motivational speaker who had been successful in business explain his formula. He said he set goals each week, month, and year. He would do really well for a couple of weeks, then struggle for a week, then maybe do well for a week, and struggle for two weeks, and then really do well for three weeks and struggle for a few more. He mentioned the inconsistency and concluded: Whatever you do, don't stop being inconsistent!
3. One year I took the family skiing after several years of not being able to go. In some ways the trip was a disaster. One daughter had an allergic reaction to medicine and ended up in the emergency room. My other daughter fell and twisted her hip; the paramedics cut off all her brand new ski parka and ski pants and then sent her straight to the emergency room. The next day, my daughter-in-law fell and hit her head on an icy spot. She blacked out and probably had a concussion, but she didn't want to go to the

emergency room; she had quite the headache and sore neck. We called the three of them rash, crash, and whiplash. As for me, I learned a valuable lesson about muscle memory. I started skiing when I was five and skied as much as possible through high school and college. I learned that despite several years away, skiing was much like riding a bicycle. The muscle memory kicked in after a few runs and it was almost like I had not missed a season. In fact, the muscle memory was so complete that I even had the same tendencies and weaknesses in form that I had previously. The third principle is that muscle memory develops from long-term repetition of an activity. As you practice and repeat an activity over time, the movement and reactions become automatic. A new axiom I learned last year: Don't practice until you get it right, practice until you can't get it wrong!

4. I heard the daughter of a President of a major company talk about her dad. She said he always had lots of yellow pads of paper with lists on them, both at home and work. He also asked lots of questions. So, the fourth principle is, ask questions and make lists!

So, those are my motivational principles for today. I could end there, but I still have a few more minutes of time to fill. So, let's apply them to our spiritual lives.

First, to develop and maintain our spirituality, we need to come to know God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and feel the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Personal scripture study is a key element in coming to that knowledge and remaining sensitive to the Spirit. What is the best way to study? Come Follow Me makes it easy, but at the end of the day, it's like exercise, whatever scripture study you will actually do is the best way for you to do it! Although I will make some suggestions.

- As mentioned, CFM is an excellent study guide. Rhonda and I, however, do not use it for our personal study but for our family study.

- For me, I learned in the mission field that in order to maintain spirituality to meet the challenges each day, I needed to read from the Book of Mormon regardless of what other scripture study I may be doing. If it was that important as a missionary, maybe it is even more important as a parent, grandparent, teacher, Bishop, or anybody in these trying times.
- President Marion G. Romney said that when he went to law school, his family was afraid he would lose his testimony. To ensure that he did not, he read from the Book of Mormon every day for thirty minutes before studying Law. I did the same in Law School. I recall sitting at a table in the in stacks of the law library or the graduate student library and quietly reading from the Book of Mormon before beginning by studies. I was grateful for his advice.

The second issue is consistency. That is one of the hardest things to develop in any aspect of life because it requires self-discipline. As humans it's so easy to get distracted by the comfort of a warm bed on a chilly morning, the beep on a smart phone announcing another like of your latest post or a text from your best friend, the busyness of life with children and all their really fun and interesting activities, or the allure of down time at the end of a hard day. There are so many reasons to skip studying scriptures every day. For Rhonda and I as empty nesters, it's easier than it has ever been to keep up with scriptures. In my case, I read some from the from the Book of Mormon, a conference talk, and whatever other scriptures I'm interested in. But there were times with a house full of children, a busy career, and church callings, that the available time was a quick verse before running out the door in the morning or falling asleep at night. I still read most days, but it wasn't easy. I was inconsistent. But I never stopped being inconsistent. If you miss a day or only have time for a quick verse some days, no need to beat yourself up; just start again

the next day. Just do it! Keep going. It's like the old country western song: If you're going through [hades, we'll call it hades], keep on going. You might get through before the devil even knows you're there!" And it's amazing how often you get through the Book of Mormon in a lifetime if you read it consistently. I used to keep count, but sometime before 2001 I lost count at 75, who knows what it is now.

Third, we come to muscle memory. Scriptures help us develop our spiritual muscles, and through constant practice and repetition, we develop spiritual muscle memory, just like athletes develop physical muscle memory. I remember in high school football practicing a play over and over dozens of times until the coach thought we had the timing down. I now realize he didn't drill us until we got it right, he drilled us until we couldn't get it wrong. The spiritual muscles that are developed through scripture study, prayer, church and temple attendance, fulfilling callings, and serving others become reflexive over time. When crisis hits or responsibilities loom large or the Lord asks us to do hard things, people who have developed these spiritual muscles can expect a quiet calm in the midst of the spiritual storm. They will be trained to respond with faith in Jesus Christ and not with fear, uncertainty, or distress. That doesn't mean the trials will be easy, it just means their spiritual muscles will cause them to fall to their knees to call upon the Savior rather than falling apart.

Finally, constantly ask questions when you read. Write them down and find answers. I was always fascinated watching my youngest daughter read. She would read, look up, think for a couple of minutes, and then ask questions or make comments on what she was reading. Her comprehension was great. It's easy to run our eyes across the pages without the words sinking in at all. Let me give you a couple of examples.

- One day several years ago, I was reading in 2 Nephi 5, where Nephi, Sam, Zoram, and their families had broken away from the families of Laman, Lemuel, and others. As I was reading along, I saw in verse 27: "And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness." That's interesting; what did they do to be happy? So, I went back to the beginning of the chapter and found ten reasons why Nephi and his people were happy:
    - Verse 10: they kept the commandments.
    - Verse 11: they provided themselves with food.
    - Verse 12: they kept records; could that be like the journals we are asked to keep?
    - Verse 13: they multiplied in the land; they had children.
    - Verse 14: they provided for their defense in case of Lamanite attacks.
    - Verse 15: they built buildings and worked with wood and metal.
    - Verse 16: they built a temple, and presumably they used it.
    - Verse 17: they were industrious and labored with their hands.
    - Verse 18: they had no king.
    - Verse 26: they ordained priests and teachers – prophets to teach them the right way.
    - And so, they were happy.
    - Several times I have heard that scripture quoted, and the speaker then starts quoting psychologists and other good and worthy people about happiness. I always want to stand up and say: "But Nephi gave us the formula right in Chapter 5!"
- Another example is D&C 20:17. It says, "By these things we know that there is a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting the same

unchangeable God …." Well, what are these things by which we know? They are in the earlier verses of Section 20: God called Joseph Smith and ministered unto him through a holy angel, gave him commandments to inspire him [that's an interesting concept for another talk; the commandments inspired him; they did not oppress him], gave him power from on high to translate the Book of Mormon; and spoke to Joseph and other elders of the church, who bore witness of the truth. So, it's by the restoration of the Gospel through Joseph Smith and the translation and publishing of the Book of Mormon that we know there is a God in heaven, but not just any God, the true and living God.

- A final example is related to a talk President Kimball gave in 1979 talk about the blessings that come to people if they keep the sabbath day holy. If the people failed to keep the sabbath day holy, they would be removed from the land and the Lord would ensure that the land enjoyed its sabbaths. I found that talk quite striking. Then at BYU, my Isaiah professor spoke often of covenant blessings and covenant curses for Israel's obedience or disobedience. One day I asked myself: "What are these covenant blessings and curses?" So, I turned to Leviticus 26 with that question in mind and started making a list. The list is patterned in the IF/THEN paradigm: If you do this, then God will do that. The actual list is quite long, here's a sample:
    - If Israel makes no idols, keeps the sabbath day, and walks in His statutes,
    - Then God will give them
        - Rain in due season, so the earth will yield its bounty and they will have plenty to eat in safety.
        - Peace in the land; no evil beasts and no armies will pass through.

        - If they go to battle, their enemies will flee before them despite their small numbers.
        - God will respect them, make them fruitful, and establish His covenant.
        - He will be their God and they will be his people.
    - If, on the other hand, they did not hearken unto God and keep his commandments, but instead broke His covenant,
    - Then He would
        - appoint unto them "terror" Isn't it interesting in our time that *terror* is the first covenant curse….
        - And this list of terrible things that will happen – and did happen – to Israel goes on from there.
        - But God never issues a warning without a way out, a way for repentance. Near the end of chapter 26, the Lord says that if Israel confesses their sins and trespasses and they humble their hearts, the Lord will remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and restore all the lost blessings.
    - Ya'll, we are Israel – the covenant people. The blessings and curses are the same. I found in Leviticus 26 to be foundational not only to understanding the covenants, but also to understanding the scriptures generally. The Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and world history generally are testaments to the necessity of keeping God's commandments if the people are to have peace and happiness. Conversely, failure to keep the commandments leads to unhappiness of individuals and destruction of societies. I testify that the covenants we make are real. Not only do they bind us to God, they help save us.

In some difficult times in life, when I have been tempted to leave the covenant path, remembering the covenants has saved me from serious error. The blessings of keeping the covenants are phenomenal; may the curses never come our way as individuals or as a covenant people.

- Because of the covenants, I believe the Lord when he says through Jacob in 2 Nephi 6:17: "…the Mighty God shall deliver his covenant people." It is that simple.
- I firmly believe in asking questions and making lists!

In the last General Conference, Elder Arnulfo Valenzuela gave a talk about studying the scriptures and said, "When we study the gospel, we are not simply seeking new information; rather, we are seeking to become "a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17)." That new creature would be one born again in Christ, having put off the natural man and becoming meek, humble, willing to submit to the will of God, and being filled with love of God and all people.

I hope each of us can find the daily scripture study that will work for us, that we will not stop even if we are inconsistent, that we will develop spiritual muscle memory that will help us to turn to the Savior to propel us through the trials of life, and that we will ask questions and make lists to better understand the messages the Lord has for us individually and as a people in the holy scriptures. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.