

# For Our Spiritual Development and Learning

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Of the Seventy

The mysteries of God are unfolded unto us only according to His will and by the power of the Holy Ghost.

When I was a young boy, my parents received a gift that became fascinating to my younger brother David and me. The gift was a miniature model of the golden plates the Prophet Joseph Smith received from the angel Moroni. As I recall, the model plates had 10 or so metal pages with words written on them. However, those pages weren't what caught our attention.

We had been raised hearing the stories of the Restoration. We knew of and had sung in Primary about golden plates hidden deep in a mountainside and delivered by the angel Moroni to Joseph Smith.<sup>1</sup> As the curiosity of our young minds stirred, there was one thing we really wanted to see: what was written on the small section of the model plates securely sealed with two small metal bands?

The plates sat on an end table for several days before our curiosity got the best of us. Although we clearly understood that these were not the actual plates Moroni had delivered, we wanted to view the sealed portion. So on several occasions, my brother and I tried using butter knives, old spoons, and anything else we could imagine to pry apart the sealed portion of the plates just enough to see what they contained—but not enough to break the small bands. We were at least smart enough not to leave a trace of our mischievous boyhood curiosity. To our disappointment and frustration, these attempts to “pry at the plates” were always unsuccessful.

I still don't know what—if anything—was hidden under that sealed portion. But the embarrassing part of our story is that to this day, I have no idea what was written on the portion of the metal pages that was meant to be read. I can only imagine that these pages contained stories of the Restoration and testimonies of Joseph Smith and the Three and Eight Witnesses, who saw the actual plates Moroni delivered.

Since the Creation of this earth, our loving Father in Heaven has provided direction, leadership, and instruction to His children through prophets. His words have been passed down through these prophets and are saved as scripture for our development and learning. Nephi described it this way:

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

“Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition, during past dispensations and in this last dispensation of the fulness of times, worthy members of the Lord’s Church have been blessed with the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, who aids in our spiritual development and learning.

Knowing the diligent nature of my younger brother, I imagine it very likely that he read all the words written on the model plates in our parents’ home. I, however, ignored those plain and precious truths and instead exerted my effort searching for those things that were not meant to be revealed.

Sadly, our development and learning can at times be slowed or even halted by an ill-conceived desire to “pry at the plates.” These actions can lead us to seek after things that are not necessarily meant to be understood at this time, all the while ignoring the beautiful truths that are meant for us and our circumstances—the truths that Nephi described as written for our learning and profit.

Nephi’s brother Jacob taught: “Behold, great and marvelous are the works of the Lord. How unsearchable are the depths of the mysteries of him; and it is impossible that man should find out all his ways.”<sup>3</sup>

Jacob’s words teach us that we cannot successfully “pry at the plates” or force the mysteries of God to be revealed unto us. Instead, the mysteries of God are unfolded unto us only according to His will and by the power of the Holy Ghost.<sup>4</sup>

Jacob continues:

“And no man knoweth of his ways save it be revealed unto him; wherefore, brethren, despise not the revelations of God.

“For behold, by the power of his word man came upon the face of the earth. ... O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of his hands upon the face of it, according to his will and pleasure?

“Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand.”<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand the mysteries of God, or those things that can be understood only through revelation, we must follow the example of Nephi, who said, “Being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father.”<sup>6</sup> The Lord Himself further explained that Nephi had exercised faith, sought diligently with lowliness of heart, and kept His commandments.<sup>7</sup>

Nephi's example of seeking knowledge included (1) a sincere desire, (2) humility, (3) prayer, (4) trust in the prophet, and an exercise of (5) faith, (6) diligence, and (7) obedience. This method of seeking is in great contrast to my "prying at the plates," or trying to force an understanding of things meant to be revealed according to the Lord's timetable and through the power of the Holy Ghost.

In this modern age, we have come to expect that knowledge can and should be obtained immediately; when information is not easily known or accessible, it is often dismissed or mistrusted. Because of the abundance of information, some unwittingly give more credibility to available sources with an unknown origin rather than relying on the Lord's established pattern for receiving personal revelation. Jacob could have been describing our time when he said: "But behold, [they] were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness ... and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it."<sup>8</sup>

In contrast is President Dieter F. Uchtdorf's counsel. He spoke of missionaries, but his words are equally applicable to all seekers of spiritual truth. "When ... missionaries have faith in Jesus Christ," he said, "they will trust the Lord enough to follow His commandments—even when they do not completely understand the reasons for them. Their faith will be manifest through diligence and through work."<sup>9</sup>

During last April's general conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained: "The Church is making great efforts to be transparent with the records we have, but after all we can publish, our members are sometimes left with basic questions that cannot be resolved by study. ... Some things can be learned only by faith."<sup>10</sup>

Ancient prophets taught this same principle, demonstrating that over time human nature has not changed and that the Lord's pattern for learning is timeless. Consider this Old Testament proverb: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."<sup>11</sup>

Isaiah explained, speaking for the Lord, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."<sup>12</sup>

Nephi added another witness when he proclaimed, "O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever."<sup>13</sup>

Faith and trust in the Lord require us to acknowledge that His wisdom is superior to our own. We must also acknowledge that His plan provides the greatest potential for spiritual development and learning.

We were never expected "to have a perfect knowledge of things" during this mortal existence. Instead, we are expected to "hope for things which are not seen, which are true."<sup>14</sup>

Even with Nephi's great faith, he acknowledged his limited understanding when he responded to the angel who asked him, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" Nephi replied, "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, *I do not know the meaning of all things.*"<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Alma expressed to his son Helaman, "Now these mysteries are not yet fully made known unto me; therefore I shall forbear."<sup>16</sup>

I express my witness that our Father in Heaven loves His children, and yet, like Nephi and Alma, I do not know the meaning of all things. Nor do I need to know all things; I *too* shall forbear and wait patiently upon the Lord, knowing "I have all things as a testimony that these things are true; and ye also have all things as a testimony unto you that they are true. ...

"... The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator."<sup>17</sup>

As we acknowledge that we are the workmanship of a wise and devoted Father in Heaven, "O then," why not allow Him to guide our spiritual development and learning "according to his will and pleasure" rather than our own?<sup>18</sup>

He lives. Jesus Christ is His Only Begotten Son and the Redeemer of mankind. Because of Christ's infinite Atonement, He has the wisdom and foresight to guide us in these latter days. Joseph Smith is His prophet, chosen to restore His kingdom on earth to its fulness. Thomas S. Monson is His living prophet and spokesman today. Of this I bear my sincere witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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