

First Presidency Message

“Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith”

By President Spencer W. Kimball

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1. Latter-day revelation declares, “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36), and “Pure knowledge ... shall greatly enlarge the soul.” (D&C 121:42.)
2. What is this knowledge, intelligence, and light and truth that our Heavenly Father would have us receive? Does it consist solely of the truths God has revealed through his prophets? What place does knowledge gleaned from secular sources and with secular means have in the scheme of eternal progression?
3. In considering these questions, we must recognize that secular knowledge alone can never save a soul nor open the celestial kingdom to anyone.
4. The Apostles Peter and John, for example, had little secular learning—being termed ignorant, in fact. But Peter and John knew the vital things of life, that God lives and that the crucified, resurrected Lord is the Son of God. They knew the path to eternal life. They learned that mortality is the time to learn first of God and his gospel and to receive the saving priesthood ordinances.
5. Yet secular knowledge can be most helpful to the children of our Father in Heaven who, having placed first things first, have found and are living those truths which lead one to eternal life. These are they who have the balance and perspective to seek all knowledge—revealed and secular—as a tool and servant for the blessing of themselves and others. They know that preeminent among all activities in this life is preparing themselves for eternal life by subjugating the flesh, subjecting the body to the spirit, overcoming weaknesses, and so governing themselves that they may give leadership to others. Important, but of second priority, comes the knowledge associated with life in mortality.
6. I have often contemplated the marvelous age in which we live with its developments far beyond our expectations of years ago. We have probed space by astronauts and great cameras. But though astronomers have developed powerful telescopes through which they see much, prophets and seers have had through faith clearer vision at greater distances on some things with their precision instruments of faith and the Urim and Thummim.
7. To the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord revealed, “And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom. ... And unto every kingdom is given a law.” (D&C 88:37–38.) The Prophet Abraham wrote, “And I, Abraham, had the Urim and Thummim, which the Lord my God had given me. ...
8. “And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; ...
9. “And the name of the great one is Kolob, because it is near unto me ... ; I have set this one to govern all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.” (Abr. 3:1–3.)

10. Is it not thrilling to know that the prophets knew long ago that the earth is but one of numerous planets created and controlled by God! That knowledge came because faith and righteousness opened the door to revelation. It is from this perspective that we teach the truth that the Church is the greatest institution of learning in the world. The Church is designed to enlarge and develop the powers of our spirits, to educate us for eternity and to help us live intelligently and joyfully in mortality. The gospel and its teachings lead us to Christlike living, which in turn leads us not only toward exaltation but toward knowledge.

11. Of all the treasures of knowledge, the most truly vital is the knowledge of God, of his existence, his powers, his love, and his promises. Through this knowledge, we learn that our great objective in life is to build character. In fact, we learn that the building of faith and character is paramount, for character is higher than intellect, and perfect character will be continually rewarded with increased intellect.

12. Thus, our real business on earth is to master self. And as we master ourselves, we will learn to master the earth and its elements. Most important, we will learn how to help others overcome and perfect themselves in all ways of living.

13. President John Taylor prophesied clearly how it shall be: “You mark my words, and write them down and see if they do not come to pass. You will see the day that Zion will be far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters.” (Sermon, 20 Sept. 1857.)

14. To the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord revealed much about the learning Latter-day Saints should seek. Note that in the following verses the first two counsel us to obtain an understanding in matters of the “law of the gospel” that are “expedient” for us to understand:

15. “And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

16. “Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;

17. “Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—

18. “That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.” (D&C 88:77–80.)

19. It is clear that the Lord expects his people to have a wide variety of information so that we might have breadth and depth in our lives.

20. “Things . . . in heaven” might be the study of astronomy and related subjects. To know and appreciate the wonders of the heavens cannot but increase our appreciation of God and his great wisdom and power. Parents may wish to learn about these wonders and teach their children by putting into their hands materials suited to their age and development.

21. The counsel to learn of things “in the earth” echoes the commandment given to Adam and Eve to replenish the earth and subdue it. The Lord has also said in these last days, “The fulness

of the earth is yours, ... Yea, all things which come of the earth ... are made for the benefit and the use of man. ... And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man.” (D&C 59:16, 18, 20.) To understand the soil and the seasons is a fascinating study for all families as well as for scientists. A garden for every home, even if only a window box, can furnish beginning knowledge for all ages.

22. Subduing the earth also involves the engineering sciences as well as biology, geology, and other sciences that study the earth’s land, air, and water. The study of land and water must also consider that which is “under the earth” and all the potentials of nature and its elements.

23. To study “things which have been” is to delve into history, a lifetime challenge. In addition, current events, or history in the making, should give us concern for careful study.

24. To learn of “things which are at home” could mean a great invitation to all Latter-day Saints to become masters in the science and art of home building and homemaking; husband and wife relationships; parent and child relationships, training, leadership, teaching, and felicity; and all that is associated with family life, in order that we might become masters in loving and teaching others throughout eternity.

25. The “wars and perplexities of the nations” is a great concern to us now that the world is a large community. Perplexities afflicting one people affect the lives of others distantly removed.

26. Gaining “a knowledge of countries ... and kingdoms” will be found in a study of political and physical geography, languages, and customs.

27. But how will we obtain this knowledge? We expect the Saints to gain such knowledge naturally, as a result of righteousness and by study and faith. We must remember the great lessons taught to Oliver Cowdery, who desired a special dispensation of knowledge. Oliver Cowdery wished to be able to translate the plates of the Book of Mormon. But he wanted to do so with ease and without real effort. He was reminded that he erred in that he “took no thought save it was to ask.” (D&C 9:7.) We must do more than ask the Lord for learning. Perspiration must precede inspiration; there must be effort before there is the harvest. We must take thought, work, be [page 6] patient, acquire competence.

28. But in all our searching, we must remember that there are things which we will not fully discover or probe with accuracy before the Lord comes. These are things both spiritual and secular. But “in that day when the Lord shall come,” the Prophet tells us, “he shall reveal all things,” and then he identifies some matters on which final knowledge will remain “hidden” until he comes. (D&C 101:32.)

29. As a people, we Latter-day Saints have been encouraged by the Lord to progress in the learning of God as well as in the sound learning of the earth. Too many of us spend far too much time watching the television or in habits and activities that do not enlarge ourselves or bless others. Would that we might lift ourselves to higher visions of what we could do with our lives! There should be no people who have a higher desire to obtain truth, revealed and secular, than Latter-day Saints.

30. There should also be no people who are in a better position to obtain truth and apply it in their lives. For we have the gift of the Holy Ghost, that wondrous gift of our Heavenly Father given to all who take upon themselves worthily the ordinances of salvation. Jesus taught, “The Spirit of truth ... will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:13.) And the prophet Moroni, speaking

to our day, advised us that “by the power of the Holy Ghost [we] may know the truth of all things.” (Moro. 10:5.)

31. Having considered all this, let us finally remember that if we desire to advance, as a people or individually, we must heed the counsel of the prophets. “To be learned is good,” Nephi taught, “if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God.” (2 Ne. 9:29.)

32. We must remember that neither God nor his gospel can be found and understood through research alone. The skeptic will some day learn to his sorrow that his egotism robbed him of much joy and growth. The things of God—and often the things of his earth—cannot be understood by the spirit of man, but are understood only through the Spirit of God. (See 1 Cor. 2:11.)

33. The Savior could have taken highly trained minds from the temple porches for the builders of his kingdom. But he went to the seashore to get humble fishermen. He wanted followers who would not depend upon their own intellects alone to ferret out truths. He wanted unbiased followers who were trusting, sincere, and willing to serve. There were many trained and educated Jews in Jerusalem who rationalized themselves completely out of a testimony and a rich spiritual life. Though Jesus was among them and they could see his miracles and hear his words, those scribes and Pharisees failed to recognize him as the Redeemer because they relied only on their mental processes.

34. When the Lord asked Peter who Peter thought him to be, the chief Apostle said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Matt. 16:16.) To which the Master replied, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 16:17.) Peter and his associates, receptive in heart and mind as they were, knew the road to true learning. They lived the truth, and they knew the truth.

35. In the same way, let us seek the truth. Let us first seek the truths of God, and then let us live them. Then let us seek after the truths of his earth. Let us seek learning “by study and also by faith.” (D&C 88:118.)

36. And let us remember that it is not so much what we know that is important, as what we do and what we are. The Master’s plan is a program of doing, of living, not merely knowing. Knowledge itself is not the end. It is how we righteously live and apply that knowledge in our own lives and how we apply it to help others that describes our character.

37. If we seek true happiness, we must expend our energies for purposes larger than our own self-interests. Let us ponder prayerfully how we may effectively and lovingly give service to our families, neighbors, and fellow Saints. And let us know that when we learn to do this we have learned one of the great truths of eternity.

38. Spencer W. Kimball, “Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith,” *Ensign*, Sept. 1983