

## Elder Howard W. Hunter

When we follow the counsel of our leaders to read and study the scriptures, benefits and blessings of many kinds come to us. This is the most profitable of all study in which we could engage. The portion of scripture known as the Old and New Testaments is often referred to as the great literature of the world. These books have been regarded as scientific treatises, as philosophic dissertations, and also as historical records; but if we understand the true purpose of these and other scriptures, we realize that they are really the fundamental literature of religion.

### Scriptural library

The scriptural library contains the basic declarations concerning God and his children and the inter-relationship between them. Throughout each of the books there is an appeal to believe and have faith in God the Eternal Father and in his son, Jesus Christ; and from the first to the last of these books of scripture is the call to do the will of God and keep his commandments.

Scriptures contain the record of the self-revelation of God, and through them God speaks to man. Where could there be more profitable use of time than reading from the scriptural library the literature that teaches us to know God and understand our relationship to him? Time is always precious to busy people, and we are robbed of its worth when hours are wasted in reading or viewing that which is frivolous and of little value.

Reading habits vary widely. There are rapid readers and slow readers, some who read only small snatches at a time and others who persist without stopping until the book is finished. Those who delve into the scriptural library, however, find that to understand requires more

than casual reading or perusal—there must be concentrated study. It is certain that one who studies the scriptures every day accomplishes far more than one who devotes considerable time one day and then lets days go by before continuing. Not only should we study each day, but there should be a regular time set aside when we can concentrate without interference.

### Prayer

There is nothing more helpful than prayer to open our understanding of the scriptures. Through prayer we can attune our minds to seek the answers to our searchings. The Lord said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). Herein is Christ's reassurance that if we will ask, seek, and knock, the Holy Spirit will guide our understanding if we are ready and eager to receive.

### Systematic study plan

Many find that the best time to study is in the morning after a night's rest has cleared the mind of the many cares that interrupt thought. Others prefer to study in the quiet hours after the work and worries of the day are over and brushed aside, thus ending the day with a peace and tranquillity that comes by communion with the scriptures.

Perhaps what is more important than the hour of the day is that a regular time be set aside for study. It would be ideal if an hour could be spent each day; but if that much cannot be had, a half hour on a regular basis would result in substantial accomplishment. A quarter of an hour is little time, but it is surprising how much enlightenment and knowledge can be acquired in a subject so

meaningful. The important thing is to allow nothing else to ever interfere with our study.

Some prefer to study alone, but companions can study together profitably. Families are greatly blessed when wise fathers and mothers bring their children about them, read from the pages of the scriptural library together, and then discuss freely the beautiful stories and thoughts according to the understanding of all. Often youth and little ones have amazing insight into and appreciation for the basic literature of religion.

We should not be haphazard in our reading but rather develop a systematic plan for study. There are some who read to a schedule of a number of pages or a set number of chapters each day or week. This may be perfectly justifiable and may be enjoyable if one is reading for pleasure, but it does not constitute meaningful study. It is better to have a set amount of time to give scriptural study each day than to have a set amount of chapters to read. Sometimes we find that the study of a single verse will occupy the whole time.

### Contemplation

The life, acts, and teachings of Jesus can be read rapidly. The stories are simple in most instances and the stories are simply told. The Master used few words in his teachings, but each one is so concise in meaning that together they portray a clear image to the reader. Sometimes, however, many hours might be spent in contemplation of profound thoughts expressed in a few simple words.

There was an incident in the life of the Savior that was mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. A significant part of the story is told by Mark in only two short verses and five words of the following verse. Let me read them to you.

### Story of Jairus

"And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him [that is, when he saw Jesus], he fell at his feet,

"And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.

"And Jesus went with him" (Mark 5:22-24).

The reading time of that portion of the story is about thirty seconds. It is short and uncomplicated. The visual picture is clear and even a child could repeat it without difficulty. But as we spend time in thought and contemplation, a great depth of understanding and meaning comes to us. We conclude that this is more than a simple story about a little girl who was sick and Jesus went to lay his hands on her. Let me read these words to you again:

"And, behold." The word *behold* is used frequently in scripture with a wide variety of meanings. Its use in this instance designates suddenness or unexpectedness. Jesus and those who were with him had just recrossed the Sea of Galilee, and a multitude of people who had been waiting met him on the shore near Capernaum. "And, behold [suddenly and unexpectedly], there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue." The larger synagogues of that day were presided over by a college of elders under the direction of a chief or a ruler. This was a man of rank and prestige whom the Jews looked upon with great respect.

Matthew doesn't give the name of this chief elder, but Mark identifies him by adding to his title the words, "Jairus by name." Nowhere else in the scriptures does this man or his name appear except on this occasion, yet his memory lives in

history because of a brief contact with Jesus. Many, many lives have become memorable that otherwise would have been lost in obscurity had it not been for the touch of the Master's hand that made a significant change of thought and action and a new and better life.

"And when he saw him [that is, when Jairus saw Jesus], he fell at his feet."

This was an unusual circumstance for a man of rank and prestige, a ruler of the synagogue, to kneel at Jesus' feet—at the feet of one considered to be an itinerant teacher with the gift of healing. Many others of learning and prestige saw Jesus also but ignored him. Their minds were closed. Today is no different; obstacles stand in the way of many to accept him.

"And [Jairus] besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death." This is typical of what happens frequently when a man comes to Christ, not so much for his own need, but because of the desperate need of a loved one. The tremor we hear in Jairus's voice as he speaks of "My little daughter" stirs our souls with sympathy as we think of this man of high position in the synagogue on his knees before the Savior.

Then comes a great acknowledgement of faith: "I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live." These are not only the words of faith of a father torn with grief but are also a reminder to us that whatever Jesus lays his hands upon lives. If Jesus lays his hands upon a marriage, it lives. If he is allowed to lay his hands on the family, it lives.

The words, "and Jesus went with him" follow. We would not suppose that this event had been within the plans for the day. The Master had come back across the sea where the multitude was waiting on

the shore for him to teach them. "And behold"—suddenly and unexpectedly—he was interrupted by the plea of a father. He could have ignored the request because many others were waiting. He could have said to Jairus that he would come to see his daughter tomorrow, but "Jesus went with him." If we follow in the footsteps of the Master, would we ever be too busy to ignore the needs of our fellowmen?

It is not necessary to read the remainder of the story. When they got to the home of the ruler of the synagogue, Jesus took the little girl by the hand and raised her from the dead. In like manner, he will lift and raise every man to a new and better life who will permit the Savior to take him by the hand.

### Scriptures give greater knowledge of Christ

I am grateful for the library of scripture through which a greater knowledge of Jesus Christ can be learned by devoted study. I am grateful that in addition to the Old and New Testaments, the Lord, through prophets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has added other revealed scripture as additional witnesses for Christ—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—all of which I know to be the word of God. These bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

May the Lord bless us in our study and righteous quest to seek him, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Following Elder Hunter's address, the Choir sang "Break Forth into Joy" without announcement.

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