

## Elder Merrill J. Bateman

### “Search the scriptures”

On numerous occasions the Lord has commanded his disciples to search the scriptures in order to learn and live the doctrines of salvation. During his mortal ministry, the Savior stated, “Search the scriptures; . . . they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). During his appearance on the Western Hemisphere following his resurrection, Christ quoted from the scriptures and then said to the Nephites: “Ye ought to search these things. Yea, a commandment I give unto you that ye search these things diligently” (3 Nephi 23:1). In our day the Lord enjoins his followers to “search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and . . . shall all be fulfilled” (D&C 1:37).

The Savior revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that it is possible to hear his voice and know his words through the scriptures. He said:

“These words are not of men nor of man, but of me; . . .

“For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit . . . , and by my power you can read them one to another; . . .

“Wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words” (D&C 18:34–36).

In order to come unto Christ and be perfected in him, each person needs to receive a testimony of the Lord’s words. Some individuals falter because they fail to open the books, others because they read casually. As one would expect, there is a difference between diligent searching or pondering over the scriptures and casual reading. A Church history story illustrates the difference.

### The search for a lost pioneer child

A small six-year-old boy wandered away from his handcart company during a storm and was lost. When the

storm subsided, Robert and Ann Parker realized their boy was missing and began searching. For two days an organized search was unsuccessful. The decision was made that the company must move on because of the approaching winter.

A pioneer journal records the following:

“Ann Parker pinned a bright [red] shawl about the thin shoulders of her husband and sent him back alone on the trail to search again for their child. If he found him dead he was to wrap him in the shawl; if alive, the shawl would be a flag to signal her. Ann and her children took up their load and struggled on with the company, while Robert retraced the miles of . . . trail, calling, and searching and praying for his helpless little son.”

One suspects that he did not just casually look behind a few trees or leisurely walk along the trail, but that he vigorously investigated every thicket, every clump of trees and gully or wash.

“At last he reached a . . . trading station where he learned that his child had been found and cared for by a woodsman and his wife. [The boy] had been ill from exposure and fright. [But] God had heard the prayers of his people.

“Out on the trail each night Ann and her children kept watch and, when, on the third night the rays of the setting sun caught the glimmer of a bright red shawl [above her husband’s head], the brave little mother sank in a pitiful heap in the sand. . . . [She] slept for the first time in six . . . days.”<sup>1</sup>

### Search diligently, not casually

The story illustrates the difference between just looking and searching diligently. A casual, infrequent exposure to the scriptures will generally not open the door to the whisperings of the

Spirit or provide insights into the Savior's life and character. We need to search the scriptures with the same vigor of Robert hunting for his son and with the consistency of the mother searching the horizon if we expect to hear his voice and know his words. President Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve stated the following in a general conference address:

"Those who delve into the scriptural library . . . find that to understand requires more than casual reading or perusal—there must be concentrated study. . . . 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."<sup>2</sup>

### **Importance of the scriptures to Lehi**

The importance of possessing and searching the Lord's words is illustrated in the Book of Mormon. The prophet Lehi and his family had traveled from Jerusalem to the borders of the Red Sea and then a further three days' journey into the wilderness when the Lord reminded Lehi that he was spiritually unarmed. The family, in their haste to leave Jerusalem, had not taken the scriptures with them. They did not have the words of the Lord to earlier prophets.

Lehi was commanded in a dream to send his sons back to Jerusalem for a set of brass plates which contained the writings of the prophets and the genealogy of his forefathers. After considerable difficulty and time, the sons returned to the father's tent with the plates. After the family gave thanks to the Lord for the safe return of the sons, the Book of Mormon states that they "searched [the plates] and found that they were desirable; yea, even of great worth unto us, insomuch that we could preserve the commandments of the Lord unto our children" (1 Nephi 5:21).

The plates of brass coupled with their own records allowed the family to pass the words of the Lord from one generation to the next. Scriptures and prayer became the primary means by which each succeeding generation developed faith in Christ.

### **Blessings of searching the scriptures**

There are certain blessings obtained when one searches the scriptures. As a person studies the words of the Lord and obeys them, he or she draws closer to the Savior and obtains a greater desire to live a righteous life. The power to resist temptation increases, and spiritual weaknesses are overcome. Spiritual wounds are healed.

### **Hold fast to the iron rod**

Lehi's great visionary dream came soon after he had searched the brass plates (see 1 Nephi 8). In the dream Lehi saw a tree which produced a fruit which was exceedingly white, very sweet to the taste, and desirable above all other fruit. He saw a path leading to the tree and a rod of iron along the path. He saw mists of darkness on the path, which caused some to lose their way and wander off. Others reached the tree by holding to the rod, but then became ashamed, let go of the rod of iron, and fell away. According to the vision, the only way to reach the tree and become a permanent partaker of the fruit was to "continually [hold] fast" to the iron rod (1 Nephi 8:30).

What was the rod of iron? Nephi defined it as the "word of God"—the words of the living prophets and the scriptures, which point people to Christ. Nephi further stated that those who hearkened and held fast to the word of God would never perish. (See 1 Nephi 15:24.)

The tree in the dream is the tree of life, which represents God's love for us as expressed in the condescension of

the Father and the Son (see 1 Nephi 11). Holding fast to the iron rod builds faith in Christ and his work.

### Nourish the seed

The prophet Alma, living five hundred years after Lehi, was strongly impacted by Lehi's vision of the tree of life. Alma, however, changes the imagery in an interesting way. He likens the word of God to a seed which is planted in the heart and then nourished. He states that if people will no more than desire to believe in Christ, the seed will sprout and grow, and they will feel a swelling inside as the seed enlarges the soul. The desire to believe, coupled with obedience, eventually turns to faith in Jesus Christ.

Alma states that continued nourishment will cause the seed to grow into the tree of life with fruit that is exceedingly white, sweet, and pure—"a tree springing up unto everlasting life" (Alma 32:41; see also 32:26-42). In Alma's example, the tree of life grows within each person to change his or her heart and soul. Holding fast to the iron rod in Lehi's dream is the equivalent.

Alma's explanation of the tree growing within and changing people's hearts gives light to an earlier set of questions that he asked Church members. The questions were: "Have ye

spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?" (Alma 5:14). Changes in the heart and soul occur as a result of planting and nourishing the seed. Scripture study, prayer, obedience, and service are key elements in building faith in Christ.

President Benson, in the April 1986 general conference, expressed these thoughts: "However diligent we may be in other areas, certain blessings are to be found only in the scriptures, only in coming to the word of the Lord and holding fast to it as we make our way through the mists of darkness to the tree of life."<sup>3</sup> Brothers and sisters, I testify that President Benson is the Lord's prophet, that Jesus is the Christ, and I pray that we may hear his voice by searching the scriptures, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### NOTES

1. Camilla W. Judd, in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1952-57), 5:240-41; see also Allan K. Burgess, *How to Understand and Enjoy the Scriptures* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1986), pp. 6-7.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1979, p. 91; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, p. 64.
3. "The Power of the Word," *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 82.

## Elder C. Max Caldwell

### The meaning of charity

I have come to know something of the value of the Book of Mormon as a witness for Christ, and I treasure the teachings contained in its sacred pages. Today I would like to discuss one of its unique precepts.

As a young man on a mission, I recall reading Paul's words to the Corinthian Saints and pondering what he meant by the phrase "faith, hope,

charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13). I wondered why charity should be the greatest. *Charity* was a word I did not understand. Part of the reason for my dilemma was that the common use of the term *charity* did not seem to be consistent with the doctrinal or scriptural use.

As I searched the pages of the Book of Mormon, I gained a new view.