

How Can I Understand?

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When we earnestly, heartily, firmly, and sincerely seek to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach it to one another, these teachings may transform hearts.

My dear brothers and sisters, what a great joy it is to be here together again in this general conference for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints under the direction of our beloved prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. I testify to you that we will have the privilege of hearing the voice of our Savior, Jesus Christ, through the teachings of those who pray, sing, and speak to the needs of our day in this conference.

As recorded in the book of Acts, Philip the evangelist taught the gospel to a certain Ethiopian who was a eunuch in charge of all the treasures belonging to the queen of Ethiopia.¹ While returning from worshipping in Jerusalem, he read the book of Isaiah. Compelled by the Spirit, Philip came closer to him and said, “Understandest thou what thou readest?”

“And [the eunuch] said, How can I, except some man should guide me? ...

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”²

The question asked by this Ethiopian man is a reminder of the divine mandate we all have to seek to learn and to teach one another the gospel of Jesus Christ.³ In fact, in the context of learning and teaching the gospel, we are sometimes like the Ethiopian—we need the help of a faithful and inspired teacher; and we are sometimes like Philip—we need to teach and strengthen others in their conversion.

Our purpose as we seek to learn and to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ must be to increase faith in God and in His divine plan of happiness and in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice and to achieve lasting conversion. Such increased faith and conversion will help us make and keep covenants with God, thus strengthening our desire to follow Jesus and producing a genuine spiritual transformation in us—in other words, transforming us into a new creature, as taught by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians.⁴ This transformation will bring us a more happy, productive, and healthy life and help us to maintain an eternal perspective. Isn't this exactly what happened to the Ethiopian eunuch after he learned about the Savior and was converted to His gospel? The scripture says that “he went on his way rejoicing.”⁵

The commandment to learn the gospel and teach it to one another is not new; it has been constantly repeated from the beginning of human history.⁶ On one particular occasion, while Moses and his people were in the plains of Moab before entering the promised land, the Lord inspired him to admonish his people concerning their responsibility to learn the statutes and covenants they had received from the Lord and to teach them to their posterity,⁷ many of whom had not personally experienced the crossing of the Red Sea or the revelation given on Mount Sinai.

Moses admonished his people:

“Hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. ...

“... Teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons.”⁸

Then Moses concluded, saying, “Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever.”⁹

God’s prophets have consistently instructed that we need to raise our families “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”¹⁰ and “in light and truth.”¹¹ President Nelson recently said, “In this day of rampant immorality and addictive pornography, parents have a sacred responsibility to teach their children the importance of God [and Jesus Christ] in their lives.”¹²

Brothers and sisters, the warning of our beloved prophet is a further reminder of our individual responsibility to seek to learn and to teach our families that there is a Father in Heaven who loves us and who has developed a divine plan of happiness for His children; that Jesus Christ, His Son, is the Redeemer of the world; and that salvation comes from faith in His name.¹³ Our lives need to be rooted upon the rock of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, which might help us individually and as families to have our own spiritual impressions engraved in our hearts, helping us to endure in our faith.¹⁴

You may recall that two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus Christ after hearing John witness that Jesus was the Lamb of God, the Messiah. These good men accepted Jesus’s invitation to “come and see”¹⁵ and abode with Him that day. They came to know that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and followed Him for the rest of their lives.

Likewise, when we accept the Savior’s invitation to “come and see,” we need to abide in Him, immersing ourselves in the scriptures, rejoicing in them, learning His doctrine, and striving to live the way He lived. Only then will we come to know Him, Jesus Christ, and recognize His voice, knowing that as we come unto Him and believe in Him, we shall never hunger nor thirst.¹⁶ We will be able to discern the truth at all times, as occurred to those two disciples who abode with Jesus that day.

Brothers and sisters, that doesn’t happen by chance. Attuning ourselves to the highest influences of godliness is not a simple matter; it requires calling upon God and learning how to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the center of our lives. If we do so, I promise that the influence of the Holy Ghost will bring truth to our heart and mind and will bear witness of it,¹⁷ teaching all things.¹⁸

The Ethiopian’s question, “How can I [understand], except some man should guide me?” also has a special meaning in the context of our individual responsibility to put the principles of the gospel we have learned into practice in our lives. In the Ethiopian’s case, for example, he acted upon the truth he learned from Philip. He asked to be baptized. He came to know that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.¹⁹

Brothers and sisters, our actions must reflect what we learn and teach. We need to show our beliefs through the way we live. The best teacher is a good role model. Teaching something that we truly live can make a difference in the hearts of those we teach. If we desire people, whether that be family or not, to joyfully treasure up the scriptures and the teachings of living apostles and prophets of our day, they need to see our souls delighting in them. Likewise, if we want them to know that President Russell M. Nelson is the prophet, seer, and revelator in our day, they need to see us raise our hands

to sustain him and realize that we follow his inspired teachings. As the well-known American saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words."

Maybe some of you are at this exact moment asking yourselves, "Elder Soares, I have been doing all these things and have been following this model both individually and as a family, but unfortunately, some of my friends or dear ones have distanced themselves from the Lord. What should I do?" For those of you who are right now experiencing these feelings of sadness, agony, and maybe regret, please know that they are not totally lost because the Lord knows where they are and is watching over them. Remember, they are His children too!

It is hard to understand all the reasons why some people take another path. The best we can do in these circumstances is just to love and embrace them, pray for their well-being, and seek for the Lord's help to know what to do and say. Sincerely rejoice with them in their successes; be their friends and look for the good in them. We should never give up on them but preserve our relationships. Never reject or misjudge them. Just love them! The parable of the prodigal son teaches us that when children come to themselves, they often desire to come home. If that happens with your dear ones, fill your hearts with compassion, run to them, fall on their neck, and kiss them, like the father of the prodigal son did.²⁰

Ultimately, keep living a worthy life, be a good example to them of what you believe, and draw closer to our Savior, Jesus Christ. He knows and understands our deep sorrows and pains, and He will bless your efforts and dedication to your dear ones if not in this life, in the next life. Remember, brothers and sisters, always that hope is an important part of the gospel plan.

Throughout many years of service in the Church, I have seen faithful members who have consistently applied these principles in their lives. This is the case of a single mother whom I will refer to as "Mary." Sadly, Mary went through a tragic divorce. At that point in time, Mary recognized that her most critical decisions relating to her family would be spiritual. Would praying, scripture study, fasting, and church and temple attendance continue to be important to her?

Mary had always been faithful, and at that critical juncture, she decided to cling to what she already knew to be true. She found strength in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," which, among many wonderful principles, teaches that "parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness" and to teach them to always observe God's commandments.²¹ She continually searched for answers from the Lord and shared them with her four children in every family setting. They frequently discussed the gospel and shared their experiences and testimonies with one another.

Despite the sorrows they went through, her children developed a love for Christ's gospel and a desire to serve and share it with others. Three of them faithfully served full-time missions, and the youngest is now serving in South America. Her oldest daughter, whom I know pretty well, who is now married and strong in her faith, shared, "I never felt like my mom raised us alone because the Lord was always in our home. As she bore her witness of Him to us, we each began to turn to Him with our own questions. I am so grateful she brought the gospel to life."

Brothers and sisters, this good mother was able to make her home a center of spiritual learning. Similar to the Ethiopian's question, Mary asked herself several times, "How can my children learn except a mother should guide them?"

My dear companions in the gospel, I testify to you that when we earnestly, heartily, firmly, and sincerely seek to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ and teach it to one another with real purpose and under the influence of the Spirit, these teachings may transform hearts and inspire a desire to live according to the truths of God.

I testify that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He is the Redeemer, and He lives. I know He directs His Church through His prophets, seers, and revelators. I also testify to you that God lives, that He loves us. He wants us back in His presence—all of us. He listens to our prayers. I bear my testimony of these truths in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.