

“FEAST UPON THE WORDS OF CHRIST”
Spring 2006 Primary Open House President’s Message
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It is wonderful to look upon your beautiful faces today. I feel your strength and your faithfulness. I feel your love for the children and for the Lord. And today I particularly feel the love of the Lord for you. I pray that His Spirit will be with us in abundance, that we might be taught those things that will bless His children. You will receive a copy of this message as you leave today, so I would invite you to focus your hearts and minds on the things that the Spirit will teach you.

Six months ago, as we met, we spoke of anchoring the children in the scriptures, of taking them directly to the word of the Lord. We spoke of responding to the request of the prophet to read the Book of Mormon. We spoke of how this would help us realize our Primary theme found in 3 Nephi 22:13, “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”

Since that time we have felt and seen an overwhelming response, throughout the Church and particularly in the Primary, to turn our hearts and the hearts of our children to the scriptures. Everywhere we go we see wonderful Primary leaders working through the Spirit to make this happen. Lives are being blessed. Scriptures are in the hands of the children. They are bringing them to Primary, and they are opening the pages of these wonderful books and reading for themselves the words of the Lord. We hear of children desiring to have their own scriptures, and we even see very small children wanting to participate in learning from the scriptures. We see a great deal of enthusiasm building about the scriptures in children’s lives. Let me share.

One little three-year-old asked his mother if they could read the scriptures. When she went to get the scripture readers off of the shelf, he said, as he held up his missionary edition of the Book of Mormon, “No, not those scriptures. I want the real ones. I want the ones with the ‘power.’ ”

Another child was reading her scriptures on an airplane trip. The lady sitting next to her was so impressed—first, that she could read that well, and second, with the content of what she was reading—that she asked her about it. The child told her about the scriptures and their message. She bore her testimony that they were true. The woman was so amazed that she determined to find the Book of Mormon she had once been given and read it. She said, “If this child can read it, so can I.”

The children love the scriptures!

My oldest son spoke about the experience of reading the Book of Mormon with his five young children: “All we have to do is get the children into the scriptures. It’s the Lord’s job to teach them once they are there. The Lord will take care of the anchoring part.” When we take the children into the scriptures, we are making it possible for the Lord to speak to them with His own words through the Spirit.

I am sure that you are seeing much of the same in your own families, wards, and stakes. So many of you have expressed joy in reading the scriptures with your children. It is as though there has

been a mighty wave building, and everyone has been caught up in the power and strength of it. Let us look to the scriptures for further direction. In 2 Nephi 25:23, 26 we read:

“For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ. . . .

“And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.”

Scriptures are a means to an end. They testify of Jesus Christ. Our purpose is to bring children to them, so that we can bring them to Him.

Helaman 3:29 tells us of the blessings that will come as we “lay hold upon the word of God,” which words are the scriptures. And in John 5:39, Jesus Christ testifies of eternal truths that are contained in the scriptures: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”

Finally, in 2 Nephi 32:3 is the scripture I would like to focus on today: “Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.”

First, consider the word *feast*. In the dictionary, we find these definitions of the word *feast*: “to enjoy a rich and elaborate meal; to feel pleasure because of richness and abundance; to have a special treat; to feel delight or gratification” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 2nd concise ed. [1975], “feast,” 275). Let me emphasize some of those words: *to enjoy, feel pleasure, have a special treat, feel delight or gratification*. These words seem to indicate something that is very desirable—something that is worth some effort.

Let us personalize this scripture. For instance, I could read it to say, “[Sister Lant], feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what [you] should do.”

As I think of this scripture in a personal way, I realize that for me to casually nibble at the scriptures hardly fits the description of feasting. Instead, I must do as we are taught in 3 Nephi 12:6: “And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.”

Hunger and thirst—that means that I must feel deeply in my heart the desire to search the words of the Lord to fill my soul. There must be some urgency in my actions. And so it is with all of us. It must become as important in sustaining our daily lives as is food and drink.

When we prepare our hearts and minds by immersing ourselves in the scriptures, by feasting upon the words of Christ, the way opens before us. We know all things we are to do to accomplish His work. As we go to the scriptures, the Holy Ghost is able to speak to us. Ideas flow into our minds, we see more clearly the will of the Lord, and we are strengthened. Our testimony of the scriptures is increased, and our testimony of the importance of taking the children to the scriptures increases as well.

That takes us to the second application of 2 Nephi 32:3, which is to help our Primary children feast upon the words of Christ. This, of course, sounds very much like our request to anchor the children in the scriptures. It is the same. Throughout the scriptures the same principles of truth are taught again and again. The principles are simple and direct. They are given to us to bless our lives. It is the Spirit that directs us to those things that will help and bless us at any given time. It is the Spirit that helps us know how to apply them to our lives.

Truly, as we and the children in the Primary “feast upon the words of Christ,” our lives become nourished with the fullness of the gospel, and we know “all things what [we] should do.”

Now, as we think about this second part of our scripture today, we realize that to “do” refers to applying the principles learned in the scriptures to our lives. In 1 Nephi 19:23, Nephi called this “likening”: “For I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.”

In one Primary, the leaders made sure all of the children had their own copies of the Book of Mormon and then gave each of them a marking pencil. As the children read their scriptures, they mark what they are to do and the promised blessings of the Lord. Let’s practice this with 1 Nephi 19. If we read verse 24, not only do we receive the commandment, or what we are to do, but we are also told of the blessings that are promised when we obey: “Hear ye the words of the prophet, . . . and liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope.”

We could have the children underline the words “hear” and “liken.” Then they can better understand a discussion about what it means to really “hear,” or listen to, the words of the prophet, what it means to “liken,” or apply, those words to their lives. Next, we could have the children underline the words “that ye may have hope” and continue the discussion by talking about what blessings of “hope” can mean to them.

“Likening” scriptures also helps us understand them better. A good example of this is 2 Nephi 33:1: “For when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.”

As we “liken” this scripture, we could underline the words “speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost” and “carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.” We might talk about the importance of speaking by the power of the Holy Ghost and what makes it possible for us to do that. Next we could talk about the great blessing it would be to have the Holy Ghost witness to our hearts the truth of what we have heard. It would be a great time to talk about testimonies—how to give them and how to build them. We could talk about what we have to do to have the Holy Ghost as our constant companion.

As you teach the children from the scriptures, ask them questions that engage their minds and spirits. Ask them questions that will lead them to discover eternal truths. One question you might ask is how a particular scripture passage makes them feel. Then let them ask you questions. If you do not know all of the answers to their questions, look up the answers in the Topical Guide—together. Teach them how to use the Topical Guide and how to find their own answers.

If you cannot find the answers there, tell them you will find out, and then discuss the question again the next Sunday. Respect their questions and listen to their answers.

Now, of course, discussions about the scriptures will be different with the older children in Primary than they will be with the younger children, but we can still talk about, explain, and experience the scriptures.

Even very young children love to hold the books in their hands as they are told the sacred stories. Then they can all put their finger on one word of a scripture being read by the teacher. They can feel the Spirit that comes from the scriptures. They love the feeling it gives them. It is a beginning place for them.

“Feasting upon the words of Christ” and learning about all the things He would have us do will be even more effective as we testify. When we bear our testimonies, we stand as an additional witness to the Spirit of the truthfulness of the scriptures we are sharing. The first witness is in the scriptures themselves.

As mentioned before, the response to teach the children from the scriptures has been very positive—everyone who has accepted it has loved the spirit it has brought into their Primaries. However, there have been some questions and there will continue to be questions as we grow in understanding and in the ability to do: Are the children capable of reading and learning directly from the scriptures? How can we encourage the children to bring their scriptures to Primary? How can we keep the children’s attention as we read from the scriptures? How do we help the children “feast upon the words of Christ”?

First let me say that I know that to accept the challenge to teach children directly from the scriptures may not be particularly easy. Not long ago, my husband and I were talking to a man who has served faithfully as a stake president for the past nine years. Upon being released, he was called to be the Scoutmaster in his ward. His comment was, “It sure was a lot easier as a stake president to tell people how to be a Scoutmaster than it is to do it myself!” So here I am asking you to take the children into the scriptures, and you are the ones who have to go home and do it. Let me just say that we have to look at the outcome along with the immediate effort it takes. I don’t believe that anything that is of great value is easy. But I testify that when our actions are based on true principles, being directed by the Spirit, the process is sweet and the fruits of our labor are delicious to the taste.

Let’s address these questions for just a moment. First, are the children capable of reading from the scriptures and learning from them? Let me answer that from my heart. Yes, they are! If anything, we underestimate what they can do. Today’s children are strong and they are capable. Their spirits are mature way beyond their years. Let me share one family’s experience. Little Lauren Sutton is three years old. Her parents have been working in the scriptures with her and helped her memorize all of the Articles of Faith. She can now recite all thirteen by herself! She is amazing, isn’t she? But I wonder how many more children could do the same if they were just taught.

Yes, we see children that are capable, but even more important than what we see is what the Lord has taught us, both by precept and by example, about the value and the capability of children. 3 Nephi 11:37 reads: “And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things.” This scripture not only tells us we must become like little children but also implies the condition of a child’s spirit.

Mosiah 3:19 gives us further insight: “[Become] as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.” Children are pure, close to the Spirit, and open to His teachings. This is what makes it possible for them to understand what they learn in the scriptures.

One small child had been reading the Book of Mormon with his family. They were a bit behind in their reading, and the end of the year was looming. So the mom decided to really concentrate every moment she could on reading the scriptures. She would read to the children every chance she got—when they were in the bathtub, or in the car on the way to Grandma’s house. You might wonder if this approach would be very conducive to the child understanding what was being read. But one day, as they were reading in 4 Nephi where the Nephites once again are lifted up in pride, the child exclaimed: “Oh no! They are not going to do that again, are they?” He was listening, and he understood better than many of us exactly what the Lord is trying to teach us in the Book of Mormon.

One of our Primary General Board members, Sister Burton, traveled to Trinidad to do some training. She visited a Primary there. The only person who had scriptures was the teacher, and of course Sister Burton. She said there were five lively boys in the group who, when she pulled her scriptures out, gathered around her—by her sides and behind her with their chins on her shoulders. They were enthralled. They wanted to see them, touch them, and understand them. And understand them they did. Sister Burton said that many times the teacher did not really understand what she was reading, but the children could explain the scriptures to her.

Let’s talk about, how can we encourage the children to bring their scriptures to Primary? Inspired Primary leaders are learning that the encouragement to do so need not be external—such as rewards or recognition. In fact, it is better if it is not! These leaders are learning that as we take the children directly to the scriptures and to the words of the Lord, the children feel the Spirit and witness of them. They love it. They want more of it. They anticipate reading from the scriptures and ask for it. Their desire to read the scriptures increases the more they do it.

Next, the question is, how can we keep the children’s attention as they read from the scriptures? It is true that their daily lives are full of noise, distractions, entertainment, excitement, business, bright lights, color, and movement. We must be sure that we understand and accept that we do not need to compete with the world and all of its enticements. The Spirit is in direct contrast to the world. It is rooted in a calm, sweet place, and we can take the children to that place. We can do it in many quiet ways, ways that allow the Spirit to be heard. It will be most effective when we take the children into the pages of the scriptures. Let them hold the sacred books. Take the time needed to have the children turn to the scripture references and read them together. Simplify other plans you may have for Primary so that you will have the time to do this. The children’s spirits will respond and rejoice.

The answer to the last question—how can we help the children “feast upon the words of Christ”?—comes as we are inspired by the scriptures themselves. If we are in them, reading and studying them personally and in preparation for our assigned responsibilities, the Spirit will speak to us. The scriptures will speak to us, and we will know how to teach the children in such a way that they will be captivated by the sweet message and the sweet feelings they experience. Sister Ardeth Kapp said in a recent talk at the Missionary Training Center: “The scriptures are like letters from home. They remind you of who you are.”

Can you think of anything more important we can give the children of today? Can you think of anything that would bless their lives more than to help them truly feast upon the words of Christ so they might then do all things He would have us do?

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland related the following in a message prepared for this workshop:

Brothers and sisters, I am pleased to salute those of you working with the beautiful Primary children of this Church. I myself am the product of early Primary training. I have since seen my own children go through Primary, and now my grandchildren are having their faith strengthened and their testimonies built under your care and direction.

Every member of the Church is important to us. Indeed, every person, member or not, is important to us, but surely among the most significant of all our responsibilities is to protect and nurture the children of the Church. When the Savior gathered the Nephite children together, He said, “Behold your little ones,” and He wept over them (see 3 Nephi 17:21–23). We feel the same way today, particularly as we consider the evils in the world and the challenges that our Primary children—your sons and daughters and mine, your grandchildren and mine—will grow up to face in the world. We are trying to save individuals, to save families, and to build faith and testimonies in all of our members. Primary is a crucial, early, foundational element of that work. Fortunate indeed is the child who is raised up through the irreplaceable preparation of the Primary.

We care so much about you and about the children you are teaching. Prepare well to bless these little ones. Give it your best effort. Your influence will, quite literally, affect these children for eternity. Enjoy the assignment that you have and discharge it faithfully. The children are capable of learning. You know that and so do I. It is thrilling to see them sing the Primary songs and respond to the lessons that are given. It is wonderful to watch them in sharing time, and, of course, once a year it is a thrill for the entire ward to have them provide the sacrament meeting program. I think that is everyone’s favorite sacrament meeting in the year. All of these activities show us how responsive the children are, how well they can learn the gospel, and how well they can remember what they have been taught and repeat it.

May I particularly encourage you to use the scriptures in teaching the children. Let the children see you with the scriptures in your hands, referring to them and drawing verses and lessons from them whenever possible. I think one of the great developments in recent years is that we see younger and younger children owning their own scriptures and bringing them to Primary. These might be just the inexpensive paperback missionary editions of the scriptures,

but what a tradition, what a heritage for them to have, growing up knowing and using the scriptures. The Psalmist once said that the word of the Lord was “a lamp unto [their] feet, and a light unto [their] path” (Psalm 119:105). I hope you can teach these children early and often that they will need the light of the scriptures to guide them through some of the darkness that swirls around them, even now in their youth and in their innocence.

May I conclude with this story that I once shared in general conference. At the time, four-year-old Katie Lewis was my neighbor. Her mother, Sister Lewis, recounted for me the unspeakable fear and grief that came to their family when Katie’s older brother, Jimmie, was diagnosed with leukemia. They fasted and prayed, prayed and fasted. And they went again and again to the temple.

One day Sister Lewis came home from a temple session weary and worried, and as she entered her home, four-year-old Katie ran up to her with love in her eyes and a crumpled sheaf of papers in her hand. Holding the papers out to her mother, she said enthusiastically, “Mommy, do you know what these are?”

Sister Lewis said frankly her first impulse was to deflect Katie’s zeal and say she didn’t feel like playing just then. But she thought of her children—all her children—and the possible regret of missed opportunities and little lives that pass too swiftly. So she smiled through her sorrow and said, “No, Katie. I don’t know what they are. Please tell me.”

“They are the scriptures,” Katie beamed back, “and do you know what they say?”

Sister Lewis knelt down to her level and said, “Tell me, Katie. What do the scriptures say?”

“They say, ‘Trust Jesus.’ ” And then she was gone.

Sister Lewis said that as she stood back up, holding a fistful of her four-year-old’s scribbling, she felt near-tangible arms of peace encircle her weary soul and a divine stillness calm her troubled heart.

“And it came to pass that he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken, and he did loose their tongues, and they did speak unto their fathers [and mothers!] great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter. . . .

“. . . The multitude gathered themselves together, and they both saw and heard these children; yea, even babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them” (3 Nephi 26:14, 16).

However much we love and admire them, I am certain we underestimate who and what a child is and what in the hands of God he or she may become.

May God bless you always in your sacred opportunity to help save the children of the Church, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

How grateful we are for our priesthood leaders who guide and support us. Our dear prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has led the way. He teaches us from the scriptures. He teaches us to read the scriptures. By precept and by example he takes us into the scriptures. I know that he is a true prophet, sent for this day to direct this Church and to lead us back to the Savior. I know that this is the true Church of Jesus Christ. I know that God lives and Jesus Christ is our Savior. We can teach these things to our children as we take them to the scriptures.

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20).

This would be my prayer for us and for our children—that we might have eternal life with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.