



Gaining Knowledge of Eternal Truths

“A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

The Prophet Joseph Smith “loved learning,” wrote George Q. Cannon. “He loved knowledge for its righteous power. Through the tribulations which had surrounded him from the day when first he made known to a skeptical world his communion with the heavens, he had been ever advancing in the acquisition of intelligence. The Lord had commanded him to study, and he was obeying. . . . His mind, quickened by the Holy Spirit, grasped with readiness all true principles, and one by one he mastered these branches and became in them a teacher.”¹

In 1833, the Prophet and a group of Kirtland Saints had a unique opportunity to study the gospel. In January of that year, in accordance with the Lord’s command (see D&C 88:127–41), the Prophet organized the School of the Prophets to train priesthood holders for their work in the ministry and to prepare them to preach the gospel. The school was held in a second-floor room in the Newel K. Whitney store, where the Prophet lived. About 25 brethren attended, some traveling hundreds of miles for the privilege of studying the gospel in a room no larger than 11 by 14 feet. Many of these men would later become Apostles, Seventies, and other Church leaders. Though the Prophet and the other brethren occasionally studied language, they focused primarily on learning the doctrines of the gospel, diligently pursuing their studies from early morning until late afternoon. This school lasted for four months, and similar schools were later held in Kirtland and also in Missouri, which hundreds of people attended.



At a meeting of the School of the Prophets on February 27, 1833, the Prophet received the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom in the presence of several brethren. He then walked into the main room and read the revelation to the assembled brethren.

At the meeting of the school held on February 27, 1833, the Prophet received an important revelation. In the early days of the Church, the use of alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea was common in society and among Church members. As the Prophet saw the brethren using tobacco at the school, he became concerned. Brigham Young recalled: “When they assembled together in this room after breakfast, the first they did was to light their pipes, and, while smoking, talk about the great things of the kingdom. . . . Often when the Prophet entered the room to give the school instructions he would find himself in a cloud of tobacco smoke. This, and the complaints of his wife at having to clean so filthy a floor [from chewing tobacco], made the Prophet think upon the matter, and he inquired of the Lord relating to the conduct of the elders in using tobacco, and the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom was the result of his inquiry.”²

Millions of people have followed the counsel in this revelation and have received temporal and spiritual blessings, including the “wisdom and great treasures of knowledge” promised to those who walk in obedience to God’s commandments (D&C 89:19).

Treasures of spiritual knowledge were poured out upon the brethren attending the School of the Prophets, and they made great advances in their understanding of the gospel. At the meeting of the school held on March 18, 1833, Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were set apart as the Prophet’s counselors in the First Presidency. Afterward, the Prophet “exhorted the brethren to faithfulness and diligence in keeping the commandments of God, and gave much instruction for the benefit of the Saints, with a promise that the pure in heart should see a heavenly vision; and after remaining a short time in secret prayer, the promise was verified; for many present had the eyes of their understanding opened by the Spirit of God, so as to behold many things. . . . Many of the brethren saw a heavenly vision of the Savior, and concourses of angels, and many other things.”³

The Prophet explained, “Great joy and satisfaction continually beamed in the countenances of the School of the Prophets, and the Saints, on account of the things revealed, and our progress in the knowledge of God.”⁴

Teachings of Joseph Smith

**The gospel of Jesus Christ embraces all truth;
the faithful accept the truths God has revealed and
put aside false traditions.**

“Mormonism is truth; and every man who embraces it feels himself at liberty to embrace every truth: consequently the shackles of superstition, bigotry, ignorance, and priestcraft, fall at once from his neck; and his eyes are opened to see the truth, and truth greatly prevails over priestcraft. . . .

“. . . Mormonism is truth, in other words the doctrine of the Latter-day Saints, is truth. . . . The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same.”⁵

In January 1843, Joseph Smith had a conversation with some people who were not members of the Church: “I stated that the most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints . . . are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.”⁶

“I cannot believe in any of the creeds of the different denominations, because they all have some things in them I cannot subscribe to, though all of them have some truth. I want to come up into the presence of God, and learn all things; but the creeds set up stakes [limits], and say, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further’ [Job 38:11]; which I cannot subscribe to.”⁷

“I say to all those who are disposed to set up stakes for the Almighty, You will come short of the glory of God. To become a joint heir of the heirship of the Son, one must put away all his false traditions.”⁸

“The great thing for us to know is to comprehend what God did institute before the foundation of the world. Who knows it? It is the constitutional disposition of mankind to set up stakes and set bounds to the works and ways of the Almighty. . . . That which hath been hid from before the foundation of the world is revealed to babes and sucklings in the last days [see D&C 128:18].”⁹

“When men open their lips against [the truth] they do not injure me, but injure themselves. . . . When things that are of the greatest importance are passed over by weak-minded men without even a thought, I want to see truth in all its bearings and hug it to my bosom. I believe all that God ever revealed, and I never hear of a man being damned for believing too much; but they are damned for unbelief.”¹⁰

“When God offers a blessing or knowledge to a man, and he refuses to receive it, he will be damned. The Israelites prayed that God would speak to Moses and not to them; in consequence of which he cursed them with a carnal law.”¹¹

“I have always had the satisfaction of seeing the truth triumph over error, and darkness give way before light.”¹²

Gaining knowledge of eternal truths is essential to obtaining salvation.

“Knowledge is necessary to life and godliness. Woe unto you priests and divines who preach that knowledge is not necessary unto life and salvation. Take away Apostles, etc., take away knowledge, and you will find yourselves worthy of the damnation of hell. Knowledge is revelation. Hear, all ye brethren, this grand key: knowledge is the power of God unto salvation.”¹³

“Knowledge does away with darkness, suspense and doubt; for these cannot exist where knowledge is. . . . In knowledge there is power. God has more power than all other beings, because He has greater knowledge; and hence He knows how to subject all other beings to Him. He has power over all.”¹⁴

“As far as we degenerate from God, we descend to the devil and lose knowledge, and without knowledge we cannot be saved, and while our hearts are filled with evil, and we are studying evil,

there is no room in our hearts for good, or studying good. Is not God good? Then you be good; if He is faithful, then you be faithful. Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, and seek for every good thing [see 2 Peter 1:5].

“. . . A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. Hence it needs revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God.”¹⁵

Joseph Smith taught the following in April 1843, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 130:18–19: “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.”¹⁶

Joseph Smith taught the following in May 1843, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 131:6: “It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.”¹⁷

**We obtain knowledge of eternal truths through
diligent study and prayer.**

George A. Smith, while serving in the First Presidency, reported: “Joseph Smith taught that every man and woman should seek the Lord for wisdom, that they might get knowledge from Him who is the fountain of knowledge; and the promises of the gospel, as revealed, were such as to authorize us to believe, that by taking this course we should gain the object of our pursuit.”¹⁸

The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote the following to a man who had recently joined the Church: “You remember the testimony which I bore in the name of the Lord Jesus, concerning the great work which He has brought forth in the last days. You know my manner of communication, how that in weakness and simplicity, I declared to you what the Lord had brought forth by the ministering of His holy angels to me for this generation. I pray that the Lord may enable you to treasure these things in your mind, for I



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*The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote the following to a man who wanted to learn more about the Church: “Study the Bible, and as many of our books as you can get; pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, have faith in the promises made to the fathers, and your mind will be guided to the truth.”*²⁰

“The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart! . . .

“. . . Let honesty, and sobriety, and candor, and solemnity, and virtue, and pureness, and meekness, and simplicity crown our

heads in every place; and in fine, become as little children, without malice, guile or hypocrisy. And now, brethren, after your tribulations, if you do these things, and exercise fervent prayer and faith in the sight of God always, He shall give unto you knowledge by His Holy Spirit, yea by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost [see D&C 121:26].”²¹

We gain knowledge of eternal truths a little at a time; we can learn all things as fast as we are able to bear them.

“It is not wisdom that we should have all knowledge at once presented before us; but that we should have a little at a time; then we can comprehend it.”²²

“When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.”²³

*Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency gave the following instructions to the Saints who were gathering to Nauvoo: “To those who . . . can assist in this great work, we say, let them come to this place; by so doing they will not only assist in the rolling on of the Kingdom, but be in a situation where they can have the advantages of instruction from the Presidency and other authorities of the Church, and rise higher and higher in the scale of intelligence until they can ‘comprehend with all Saints what is the breadth and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.’ [Ephesians 3:18–19.]”*²⁴

“God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them, for the day must come when no man need say to his neighbor, Know ye the Lord; for all shall know Him . . . from the least to the greatest [see Jeremiah 31:34].”²⁵

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Read the first paragraph on page 265. Think about habits or ideas that can “set bounds to the works and ways of the Almighty” in our lives. What do you think we need to do in order to embrace all the truth the Lord will give us?
- Review the last full paragraph on page 265. When has knowledge pushed darkness and doubt out of your life? Why do you think gaining knowledge of the truth is essential to receiving salvation? (For some examples, see pages 265–66.)
- From the teachings of the Prophet Joseph, we can see that Satan wants us to lose knowledge (pages 265–66) and that the Lord wants to give us knowledge (pages 266–68). What can we learn from this contrast?
- What can we do to increase our knowledge of the truth? (For some examples, see pages 261–63, 266–68.) Review the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 267. Select a few of the characteristics listed in this paragraph. How does each of these characteristics prepare us to receive knowledge?
- Read the second full paragraph on page 268. What can we learn from comparing our learning of gospel principles to climbing a ladder? What have you done to continually increase in your knowledge of the gospel?
- What are your thoughts or feelings as you ponder the last paragraph in this chapter?

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 1:7; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; 2 Nephi 28:29–31; Alma 5:45–47; D&C 88:118

Notes

1. George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (1888), p. 189.
2. Brigham Young, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Feb. 25, 1868, p. 2; capitalization modernized.
3. *History of the Church*, 1:334–35; from the minutes of a meeting of the School of the Prophets held on Mar. 18, 1833, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by Frederick G. Williams.

4. *History of the Church*, 1:334; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, p. 281, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
5. Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, Mar. 22, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, pp. 53–54; spelling and grammar modernized.
6. *History of the Church*, 5:215; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book D-1, p. 1433, Church Archives.
7. *History of the Church*, 6:57; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 15, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:554; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 27, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton.
9. *History of the Church*, 5:529–30; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 13, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
10. *History of the Church*, 6:477; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 16, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
11. *History of the Church*, 5:555; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 27, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton.
12. Letter from Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery, Sept. 24, 1834, Kirtland, Ohio, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Sept. 1834, p. 192.
13. Quoted by Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 21, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, Notebook, Church Archives.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:340; capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 8, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton.
15. *History of the Church*, 4:588; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 10, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 130:18–19; instructions given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 2, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 131:6; instructions given by Joseph Smith on May 16 and 17, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois.
18. George A. Smith, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Nov. 29, 1870, p. 2.
19. *History of the Church*, 1:442; from a letter from Joseph Smith to Moses Nickerson, Nov. 19, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio.
20. *History of the Church*, 6:459; from a letter from Joseph Smith to Washington Tucker, June 12, 1844, Nauvoo, Illinois.
21. *History of the Church*, 3:295–96; paragraph divisions altered; from a letter from Joseph Smith and others to Edward Partridge and the Church, Mar. 20, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri; parts of this letter were later included in the Doctrine and Covenants as sections 121, 122, and 123.
22. *History of the Church*, 5:387; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 14, 1843, in Yelrome, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
23. *History of the Church*, 6:306–7; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
24. *History of the Church*, 4:186; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the Saints, Sept. 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, p. 179.
25. *History of the Church*, 3:380; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 27, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.