



“We Are Responsible for Our Own Learning”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Friday and Saturday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions:

Part 1:

How much personal effort is required to become a disciple? Dr. Steven C. Harper explores how to become a seeker by study and faith and how this strengthens each disciple of Jesus Christ.

Part 2:

Dr. Steven C. Harper examines the importance of scripture study, pondering, acting in faith, recording spiritual experiences, asking questions, and seeking answers.

Timecodes:

Part 1

- 00:00 Part 1–Dr. Steven C. Harper
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- 02:32 Becoming a Seeker
- 04:13 Seeking requires study and faith
- 08:45 Gospel learning requires our best efforts
- 09:45 Return to teaching repentance
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Part 2

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- 33:29 Hank shares a personal experience with testimony

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Biographical Information:



Steven C. Harper is a professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University. In 2012 Steve was appointed as the managing historian and a general editor of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*. He was named editor in chief of *BYU Studies Quarterly* in September 2018. He served in the Canada Winnipeg Mission (1990-1991) and married Jennifer Sebring (1992). They graduated from BYU (1994). He earned an MA in American history from Utah State University, where his thesis analyzed determinants of conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1830s. Chapters were published in the *Journal of Mormon History and Religion* and *American Culture* and awarded by the Mormon History Association with the T. Edgar Lyon Award for best article of the year and the Juanita Brooks Award for the best graduate student paper. Steve earned a PhD in early American history from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He began teaching courses in religion and history at BYU Hawaii in 2000 and joined the Religious Education faculty at BYU in 2002. That year he also became a volume editor of *The Joseph Smith Papers* and the document editor for *BYU Studies*. He taught at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in 2011–2012. His first book

was *Promised Land* (Lehigh University Press, 2006), a study of Lenape or Delaware Indians' responses to a fraudulent 1737 land deal in colonial Pennsylvania. He also authored *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Deseret Book, 2008), *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Deseret Book, 2012), and *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins* (Oxford University Press, 2019), and *Let's Talk About the Law of Consecration* (Deseret, 2022), along with dozens of articles.

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Hank Smith:	00:00:00	Welcome to followHIM, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:00:09	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:00:11	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	00:00:15	As together we followHIM.
Hank Smith:	00:00:20	Hello my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. It is a new season here at followHIM. We are studying the New Testament. My name is Hank Smith. I am here with my responsible co-host John Bytheway.
John Bytheway:	00:00:35	I've never been called that before.
Hank Smith:	00:00:37	You are very responsible. I've read the heading for this week's lesson. We are responsible for our own learning and I thought, "John's very responsible." You are. You're a responsible guy.
John Bytheway:	00:00:48	Well, I like what Stephen Covey says. Responsibility means able to respond. We have agency, we can respond. I like that.
Hank Smith:	00:00:55	I like that. You're a good responder. You've been a good responder for the last two years. Can you believe we've been doing this for two years now? Here we are, starting a new book of scripture. Pretty exciting.
John Bytheway:	00:01:06	So happy to be here. It's just a blessing. So fun.
Hank Smith:	00:01:10	I was looking at the lesson today, John. I wanted to get someone who is not only a good educator but also a good learner. So I found both a scholar and a seeker to join us today. Can you tell everyone who's with us?

John Bytheway:	00:01:23	The listeners who have tuned in before will remember Dr. Steven Harper. He's been here before, especially in our Doctrine and Covenants here. We're thrilled to have him back. One of the books I used a lot a couple years ago was Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants and it was so helpful in giving a backstory for every section. It was super helpful and he's been involved with the Saints books and Joseph Smith Papers and Revelations in Context, all of those. So let me just read a short bio because many of our listeners will remember Steve.
	00:01:53	Steven C. Harper is an associate professor of church history and doctrine at Brigham University and one of the editors of the Joseph Smith Papers. After serving a mission in Canada and graduating from BYU, he earned a PhD in Early American history from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, taught for two years on the faculty of BYU Hawaii. Brother Harper has received several fellowships and awards for his scholarship in writing, including the T Edgar Lyon and the Juanita Brooks Awards from the Mormon History Association. He and his wife Jennifer Sebring Harper are the parents of five children. We're so glad to have you. Welcome to followHIM.
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:02:30	Thanks very much. Glad to be with you.
Hank Smith:	00:02:32	We're excited to have you. Where did you first hear the idea of a seeker? That's something that I learned from you was be a seeker. Can you remember where you first heard that idea?
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:02:42	That's in Doctrine and Covenants Section 88.
Hank Smith:	00:02:44	That shows you what kind of reader I am if the first I heard it was from you.
Dr. Steven Harper:	00:02:48	Yeah, you know the same scripture I'm talking about. Seek out the best books, seek learning by studying and also by faith. Three times in the hundred words or so, the Lord commands us to seek and he tells us how to seek, where to seek, why to seek, what to seek. So I first wrote about that or put that in words a long time ago in a book for saints about the first vision, learning to seek the truth of the first vision and stop assuming things about it. So I contrasted hundreds of times or well over 100 times, the scripture's command is to seek in one way or another. They never command us to assume. Assume, out of the best books. There's just no place in gospel yearning and learning for a lazy intellectual approach to it or a lazy spiritual approach.

00:03:43 We sometimes pick an either/or. Learning the gospel is spiritual, not intellectual, but all of the things that the gospel actually says make it an alliance between your God-given intellect and your God-given spiritual capacities. Think of Moroni 10. We sometimes boil that down to just pray about it, but that's not what it says at all. It says read, remember, ponder, these brain work things along with sincere heart, faith in Christ, real intent.

Hank Smith: 00:04:12 Real intent.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:04:13 And if we don't combine the spiritual and the intellectual work, then we don't have the guarantee of coming to know. Some people think you only know by your rational processes or you only know by the spirit. The gospel teaches us that we know by a combination of those ways of knowing. I think that's really important. As we study the gospel or anything else.

Hank Smith: 00:04:37 The Lord says, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart."

John Bytheway: 00:04:40 "And seek learning by study and also by faith." And Steve, tell us the title of that book. I was turning around because I know I have it. It was wonderful. I think it was one of your last chapters was about becoming a seeker. What was the Joseph Smith first vision book called?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:04:55 I think it's just called Joseph Smith's First Vision, A Guide to the Historical Accounts. It's sold 14 copies.

John Bytheway: 00:05:01 We're going to raise that to 15 today. But I think that it was wonderful. People know yeah, there are different accounts and we can learn things from all of them. And you did a great job in there explaining here they are and let's look at them and see what we can learn. And I really enjoyed that. Some of the things that he said about, "I thought the forest would be consumed." And I think my favorite thought was, "My soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice," which tells you maybe what other prophets have felt when they saw God. That same enveloped with love like that.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:05:35 I like to think about that too, John. I was thinking just this morning that the first revealed words of the Restoration were, "Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven." The Restoration begins with repentance and culminates in redemption, ends in redemption for us and our whole human family who's interested in redemption. That's good news. Beautiful.

John Bytheway: 00:05:59 Yeah, that is the good news.

Hank Smith: 00:06:02 In his book Seekers Wanted, Tony Sweat, our good friend actually quotes you, Steve Harper. He says, "Church history and doctrine scholar Steven Harper gave a BYU women's conference address called Seekers Wanted, in which he said seeking is a long patient persistent process. Seeking is hard work. It is not for the weak willed or faint of heart, nor for the intellectually or spiritually lazy, but it will sustain faith in a world intent on destroying it. Seekers are wanted in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The first converts were all seekers. Today's converts are seekers. We are all commanded to be seekers."

00:06:37 And then Tony adds, "Let us seek. Seekers don't run away. Seekers don't put their head in the sand. Seekers face the reality that is in front of them and desire to be fully aligned with God. Honest seekers are wanted, expected and in the end always rewarded." Great book and a great friend there in Tony. Anybody who knows me knows I love that book and I think he was inspired by you there Steve. Steve, how do you want to take on this week's lesson? We don't really have a text for the lesson. The title is called We Are Responsible for our Own Learning. And in the heading it says, "The purpose of the scriptures is help you come unto Christ to become more deeply converted to his gospel." And then let me read the first paragraph. "'What seek ye?' Jesus asked the disciples of John the Baptist. You might ask yourself the same question for what you will find in the New Testament this year will greatly depend on what you seek. 'Seek and ye shall find,' is the Savior's promise." So Steve, how do you want to go about this lesson today?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:07:32 One way to think about it is we've already been discussing the texts for this. These aren't ideas that we're imposing on the scriptures. These things we're talking about are principles of the scriptures. These are the ways the Lord has revealed to us to seek and come to learn the most important things there are to learn. There are lots of kinds of knowledge and they're not all equally valuable. Here we're talking about how should we seek the most important kinds of knowledge or truth. There are things about when your flight's going to leave and so forth. That's a piece of truth. It's knowledge, but it's not important beyond a simple means to an end. But whether there's a God, whether God is loving, or whether God has a son, Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, crucified for the sins of the world, risen from the dead, a plan of redemption. Those are things that are absolutely vital and we can only come to know them by seeking diligently out of the best books by study and by faith. We want to give our best efforts and our most sustained learning to the most important truths.

Hank Smith: 00:08:45 I've always loved the title of the program that we are modeling here, Come Follow Me. And the idea is move, seek. That he doesn't say, "Sit where you are and listen to me." He said, "Come follow me." It takes, like you said, our best efforts.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:09:00 We might think about that question Jesus asked John's followers, "What seek ye?" And then the very best answer to it is the Book of Mormon command, "Seek this Jesus." So what are we seeking? We're seeking Christ. I was impressed a few weeks ago, I got a shipment of the new booklets for gospel teachers for the coming year and just cracked it open, glanced at it for a few minutes and one of the first headings in it was something like, "Whatever else you're teaching, teach Jesus Christ." And I thought that was a really great idea.

Hank Smith: 00:09:41 I think it's nice in our house sometimes when I don't have a lesson ready, I usually just teach repentance. Something about repentance. My kids are like, "Really, again? We're going to talk about repentance again?" I'm like, "Yeah, yeah." But it's my go-to move. If I don't have something, we teach a lesson on repentance.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:09:57 Can't go wrong.

John Bytheway: 00:09:59 I love that focus. And the new children and youth program, they've tied Luke 2:52 to it a little bit. But I've heard Brother Brad Wilcox say that if you don't know what the program is, it's to become like the Savior in every area of your life. Which is a new way of restating the, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." But the focus is on Christ like you just said, Steve. So that's the new Teaching in the Savior's Way, that's the revised and updated one, right?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:10:29 Yeah, it's a little booklet.

Hank Smith: 00:10:31 Steve, what do you think that looks like as a teacher? We have a lot of teachers who listen to our podcast. What do you think that looks like for them? What came to your mind?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:10:39 That's a great question. I've been thinking about it. I don't necessarily have the definitive answer, but I'm inspired by it. I've been thinking about even for the last couple of weeks of this semester, how if I'm teaching about the new and everlasting covenant of marriage or blacks and priesthood and so forth, how could I be teaching about Jesus Christ? So I'll give you an example of that. We spent a couple lessons in class on priesthood, race, temple and we started with Second Nephi 26

and noted that from the very beginning, Jesus invites all to come to him. He denies none who do. Black, white, bond, free, male, female, Jew and Gentile, all are alike unto God.

00:11:21 So we started with a Christ-centered focus and we kept it the whole way through and I was really moved by it and it made everything better, made the teaching more powerful, made the learning more relevant. And I could tell it and the students could tell it. That is by keeping it Christ-centered all the way through, it made a big difference. We were focused on the truth, the way, the life and it was the key to a successful learning experience.

John Bytheway: 00:11:53 Right after those verses in Second Nephi 26, "He doeth not anything, save it be for the benefit of the world." And he gives example after example. "Has he commanded any to leave the synagogue? Has he commanded any not to partake of his salvation?" And then right after that he gives this idea, he has commanded that there shall be no priestcrafts and priestcrafts are that men set themselves up for a light. And I had a wonderful professor, you guys remember Joseph Fielding McConkie. He one time showed us a picture of an eclipse and he said, "What's happening?" We all said, "The moon is in front of the sun." And he said, "Okay, what happens then when someone or something gets in front of the sun, S-O-N?" And we all went, "Oh." And he said, "Don't ever become a spiritual eclipse." That was a good day. Don't eclipse the light and get in the way. And I think that's what you're saying.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:12:50 That's an occupational hazard, isn't it? Whether you're a professional gospel teacher or a Sunday school teacher, it's so tempting and intoxicating to be impressed with your own self and forget that you're a meager means to the end of pointing people to Christ. So it's a dangerous thing.

John Bytheway: 00:13:11 And I love John the Baptist. "He must increase, I must decrease." Put that with that spiritual eclipse idea of John the Baptist, just knowing exactly that he needed to point people to Christ. And that can be a challenge when you're teaching some topics to tie those to Christ. But there's such rewards in trying to do that and what does the law of tithing have to do with Christ? And finding a way to bring those together is really helpful for the learner I think, for all of us.

Hank Smith: 00:13:42 I like what you said on your discussion about race and the priesthood. You centered it on Christ's love and stayed there. I think there's great power in any lesson if we begin and end with the Lord's love.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:13:54 I sure do too. My mind's drawn to passages of scripture where the Savior himself models this for us, where he teaches of himself. And I love especially one in Doctrine and Covenants Section 18, where he does this in an understated way. Jesus does all kinds of ways of teaching and testifying about himself. But one of the ones that is most memorable is where he says, "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God." It's about 18:10 or so. And then in the next few verses, he does what I think of as an extremely understated way of making a point. As one of the ways you can emphasize a point is to dramatically understate it. So here he's going to teach us what the Atonement is all about and he says, "Behold, the Lord, your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh. He suffered the pain of all that all might repent and come onto Him. And great is His joy in the soul that repents."

00:15:00 He switches to a third-person voice. He doesn't pound his chest and say, "I did this for you." Now sometimes he does that and that's powerful too. But in this particular passage he says, "The Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh, he suffered the pain of all so that all might repent and come onto him. And great is his joy in the soul that repents." He's here teaching us what verse 10 means. Well, what is the worth of a soul? And it turns out that the worth of a soul is one infinite Atonement of the Only Begotten Son of God. And that price is willingly, joyfully paid in fact because it enables repentance and repentance brings joy. Repentance brings joy to the repenter and it brings joy to the Savior.

00:15:48 And the next lesson of course then is so we ought to help people repent. We ought to repent ourselves and we ought to help people repent. That's one example of a Christ centered lesson by Christ himself and of course the scriptures are full of those. And we could look toward the New Testament that we're going to study. We could find all kinds of examples of that kind of thing both in word and in deed we could think about how the gospels are constructed in ways that emphasize Christ. Each of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John of course is Christ-centered. They are the stories of his life, but each of the gospel writers has their own version of his life. That's not a problem. That's a wonderful thing to do. It's like being able to turn a spectacular diamond four different ways and see the beauty and power and truth of it in different ways or facets. So we might think about how a Matthew and Mark and Luke and John feature Christ, how they give Him to us.

Hank Smith: 00:16:58 What we've been talking about reminds me of a story told by Elsie Talmage Brandley. She says, "A party of geologists crossing

a loose shale deposit on a steep incline realized that the shale was slipping. Most of the party reached the opposite side of the hills in safety, but one bringing up the rear saw that the sliding rock was carrying him in its glacier-like grip toward a declivity which might mean death. Looking ahead, he saw that in his path, a trunk of an old tree and recognized there's a chance for safety. Reaching the stump, grasping it, and clinging grimly, he was able to hold on while the entire deposit of loose shale passed. His knowledge of the stability of a tree to remain firmly rooted in spite of shifting surface rock gave him assurance he could face apparent disaster clinging to that which was thus rooted." I think our lessons can be rooted like that, Steve. As we center our lessons on the Savior, our lessons can be more rooted when the loose shale of our lessons are passing by.

- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:18:00 Yeah, well said.
- Hank Smith: 00:18:01 Tell us more about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. How do you see them focusing in on Christ differently?
- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:18:07 Well, this is a cool subject to talk about. Let me preface it by saying I am no expert at this, but of course that's the point here. We've got a Church of Lay Latter-day Saints who are all going to study the New Testament together, seek it together and we don't have to be experts. One thing we could talk about here is how Joseph Smith learned to read the Bible. Well, let's lay out a few things about the gospels and the New Testament and then talk about how Joseph Smith learned to read them and the rest of the scriptures. Matthew is a book, it's the first one of the gospels to appear. Scholars think it's probably not the first one to be written. Probably Mark is the first of the gospels to be written. But Matthew seems to be focused on helping readers understand that carpenter from Nazareth is indeed the Messiah that they've been waiting for.
- 00:19:05 So you might think about writing a gospel as a project with a purpose to it, and you might even think about it as a problem solver. What problem is it that the Gospel of Matthew has to solve? And one way to think about that is you have the problem of helping a Jewish audience who's anticipating a capital M Messiah to deliver them from oppression and now you're trying to convince them that that person is a carpenter from a backwater place. It's not what they had expected. Matthew builds his case for Jesus being that Messiah. And one way he does it as you know, is to feature prominent prophecies from the Jewish scriptures, from the Hebrew Bible of the coming Messiah and then show how Jesus fulfills those. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of Emmanuel. He's the

fulfillment of various prophecies from the Old Testament. He even in the genealogy that he gives us for Jesus has this way of signaling that Jesus is the fulfillment of the king that will sit on David's throne forever. He's the descendant of Abraham. And that's different from what Luke's up to.

00:20:25 Luke has a project that looks like it might be to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ. Gentiles. Luke seems to pay a lot more attention to a gentile audience and what their expectations and needs are. His Jesus is the son of Adam and fulfills a wider scope of a son of God. Luke's the one who features the birth story, the nativity story for us. Luke pays a lot more attention to women and how women fit in the ministry of Jesus and how Jesus ministers to women, that begins with Mary herself.

00:21:09 Mark's gospel is fast moving and it seems designed to personify or illustrate how we can be blind at the very same moment that we're walking with Jesus. We can be his disciples and not get it. In Mark's gospel, Jesus has to tell them in flat out terms what to anticipate, but in the first half of it's like he's veiling who he is. He doesn't want anybody to know. And then at the point where he's physically farthest from Jerusalem, he starts a journey to Jerusalem and to the cross and it's like readers go on that with him. Readers become his disciples and as they make that geographical move toward the cross, they also become more and more aware of what the cross means. Halfway through the book, the disciples are scratching their head and not getting who Jesus is or understanding what he's about. And then the mark and secret as it's sometimes called, the person and work of Christ, becomes clear as he goes to the cross and performs the sacrifice.

00:22:23 John's gospel is to unabashedly declare that Jesus is the Son of God, right? He tells us that in the end, but he tells us that right from the beginning. "Jesus was with God. Jesus is God. That I am." You remember the God of Israel and declares to Moses, "I am." That is the God we meet in the Gospel of John. Think of how many times in the Gospel of John you hear that declaration, "I am the bread of life, I'm the light of the world. I am the resurrection and the life." Over and over and we learn what he is, where we might in some other gospels find a Jesus who is human or at least partly. In John's gospel, the emphasis is on the divinity of Jesus from the first words to the last.

Hank Smith: 00:23:14 Yeah, in the beginning.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:23:16 Yeah. Sometimes we harmonize the gospels, we talk about the seven things Jesus said on the cross and so forth and there's some value to that, but I would like to invite folks this coming year as they study the New Testament to try also to appreciate what each gospel has to teach me about Jesus on its own terms. What is Mark doing and what can I learn from him? What is Matthew, Luke, what is John doing? Why did John think, "We need another version of this?" He's probably the last one to write. He probably knows what the others have written and he may very well think, "I have a unique perspective on this. I can tell a story that has not been told before."

Hank Smith: 00:23:59 Show you a side of the diamond you haven't seen, right?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:24:02 Yeah. And we can profit from approaching the scriptures. We might think, "Oh, this is the same old story I've read before," but it is not. There's value to studying all of them on their own terms. And the point about studying the Bible like Joseph Smith did is to say every member of the church today almost is as well educated in their beginning of their approach to the Bible as Joseph Smith was.

00:24:28 If you've been instructed merely as Joseph put it, in the ground rules of reading, writing and arithmetic, then you have as much education as he did when he began to read the Bible. And what Joseph shows us is a voracious appetite for learning, for reading the Bible. It's a complicated book. You guys might have heard me tell the story of how I dropped out of biblical studies when it got too hard, and that's not the example for people to follow. Joseph Smith is a better example because he never had a formal class in Bible study. He just decided that he was going to turn to the Bible. His parents taught him it was the repository of sacred truths and he trusted that and he read it. He famously as you know got frustrated by it. Trying to settle the question by an appeal to the Bible was difficult because the professors, the Bible aficionados, just confused him with their various readings of it and interpretations of it.

00:25:33 So he stuck to the Bible itself and he read it for himself. He let God be his main guide to the Bible. If he lacked wisdom, he asked God and God revealed the answers. But I want to emphasize as much as that's the case, that Joseph did not give up on turning to academic resources to learn the scriptures. This is what I mean by learning to read the Bible the way Joseph Smith did is really instructive. He learned to seek and receive revelation about what the scriptures meant. Lots of the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are answers to his questions about, what does this passage of the Bible mean? Including as

you know, things like the vision of the heavenly glories in Section 76. But at the same time Joseph is doing that, he is doing everything he can to get tools, intellectual academic tools, that will help him be a better Bible reader.

00:26:38 He studies Hebrew, he studies some Greek when he can and he never masters these things. He never becomes a world expert. That's not the point. He just takes so seriously the need to learn the scriptures, to take the word of God seriously, that he works hard. He works really hard. He would probably tune into stuff like this. He would want to know what the experts say about what the scriptures mean. He would devour all of the useful tools he could get access to and he wouldn't poo poo them. Sometimes we think we denigrate the scholarly tools or academic tools because it's really just a spiritual way of knowing we're after. And sometimes we do the opposite thing. We think, "Oh, you can't trust any of that Sunday school stuff. I'm just going to read commentaries by experts." And either of those extremes is not the way Joseph Smith learned to read the Bible. He sought diligently out of the best books by study and also by faith and taught us how along the way to be a real first class student of the Bible.

Hank Smith: 00:27:51 Wow, that's fantastic. I'd never thought about learning to read the Bible the way Joseph Smith read the Bible. This is from President Ballard. "Consult the works of recognized, thoughtful and faithful LDS scholars. We should ask those with appropriate academic training, experience and expertise for help." Sounds like Joseph did that of his day. "This is exactly what I do," President Ballard says, "When I need an answer to my own questions that I cannot answer myself, I seek help from my brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve and from others with expertise in fields of church history and doctrine." So don't be afraid of that scholarly side, but I like what you said. Don't go into an extreme and say that you only accept the scholarly side and the spiritual side is not for you. How was Joseph able to balance both of those? It was just a trial and error, do you think?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:28:38 Yeah, some trial and error. He first turns to the learned ministers of the day. Those are the people his culture presents to him to learn from and he tries that. He's very diligent about it, but what that leads to is just a variety of opinions. He realizes that they can't all be right about the way they're interpreting the Bible, so he gets a healthy respect early on for, "These people are sincere and they've studied the scriptures, but they can't help me solve the ultimate problems. I need revelation from God to know for sure that God is there, that he loves me,

that Jesus Christ is his Son and that salvation is in Christ. And what's the right way to access that salvation?" Joseph needs and learns that by direct revelation. But instead of abandoning then a diligent study of the sacred texts from the past and a consulting of resources that can help him understand it better, he throws himself into that work.

00:29:47 Instead of saying, "Well, I've talked to God and angels. I don't need these scriptures anymore. I don't need a book to help me understand the Hebrew anymore." He dives into that. Now notice folks, what does President Nelson do? How does he study the scriptures? It's not uncommon for him to say, "Hey, I've learned this about what the Hebrew says, and I consulted some Hebrew scholars and they taught me what the meaning of Israel is." I mean, in other words to say learn to read the Bible the way Joseph Smith did is also to say, learn to read the Bible the way President Nelson does.

John Bytheway: 00:30:20 Just yesterday I was teaching in the book of John where Jesus is asking Peter, "Lovest thou me? Feed my sheep." And there's a long quotation from President Nelson about the different words he used for sheep, meaning lambs and mature lambs and mature sheep, and they were different. And there was President Nelson saying, "Here's what this is in Greek and everything. And so yeah, it's exactly-

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:30:42 Isn't that something.

John Bytheway: 00:30:43 The whole thing about, "Let God prevail," was looking at the word Israel and the Hebrew meaning of it, a wonderful thing that was. Israel are those who are willing to let God prevail. It's just a beautiful way to think of who we're trying to be.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:30:59 That talk has changed all of our lives and the first premise of that talk is I learned what Israel means from the diligent study the scriptures including consulting experts on the language of the Old Testament. I feel strongly about this point. I started my career wanting to become a great Bible scholar. I got into biblical Hebrew. I got quite discouraged along the way because it is daunting. The Bible is a daunting book, daunting collection of complex books, and you can spend your whole life at it and not... I thought, "I'm going to devote a long weekend to this really diligently and become a great Bible expert." That's just not happening. So I've learned by sad experience that we need to stick to it.

00:31:51 You're not born a great student of the scriptures. You decide. You become responsible for your own learning and you decide,

"I'm going to learn to read the scriptures. I'm going to be diligent about it. I'm going to be persistent about it. I'm going to not give up when I don't understand a complicated text that's ancient and it's not in my culture, not my language, but I'm going to keep at it. I'm going to consult people who can help me understand it and I'm going to work hard at it until I got it." And if we'll do that prayerfully and diligently with the spirit and the intellect, it will pay big. The scriptures are inexhaustibly interesting and I sometimes think that the scriptures aren't boring. When people say the scriptures are boring, it's because they're boring or I'm boring. It's not because the scriptures are boring. In other words, we sometimes quit. We're not imaginative enough or hardworking enough at it to see what power and interest that's really there.

- Hank Smith: 00:32:53 The Come Follow Me manual says, "Perhaps you know people who never seem to lose their faith, no matter what happens in their lives. They may remind you of the five wise virgins in the Savior's parable in Matthew 25." And then this statement, "What you may not see are their diligent efforts to strengthen their testimonies of the truth." I think people are surprised to find out when they read the life of Joseph Smith how diligent he is in learning that even leading up to the first vision, this wasn't a couple of days of thought. He said he started when he was 12.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:33:26 Yeah, I meet folks as you do who say, "I had this question and I got on Google and I spent two days learning everything about it." And I think, "Man, I spent 20 years reading that stuff and I don't know everything about it." We live in a time where we are under the illusion that you can know something really deeply and powerfully by spending 15 minutes on an internet browser looking at it. It's not the case. That's not what it means to be responsible for our own learning. "I'll Google it myself."
- John Bytheway: 00:34:07 It sounds like the same spirit in President Nelson recently saying, "Be in charge of your own testimony." I'm not asking my religion teacher to give me a testimony. I'm not asking my Sunday school teacher, my bishop, my quorum leader, my relief society president. I'm not asking. I am in charge of my own testimony. I'm responsible for my own learning and President Nelson's emphasis on you need to learn to hear Him. All of that sounds like it's the same idea to me.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:34:38 Yeah, I think our obligation is to help people have the hope that they can indeed do that, like you just said, John, and also to help them get the tools they need to do it well. But we can't do it for anybody. We cannot give anybody the knowledge or the

conviction of the spirit that they're entitled to and that they can have but not for free.

Hank Smith: 00:35:03 There's a great quote from Elder David A. Bednar in the manual. It says, "We should not expect the church as an organization to teach or tell us everything we need to know and do to become devoted disciples and endure valiantly to the end. Rather, our personal responsibility is to learn what we should learn, to live as we know we should live and to become who the master would have us become. And our homes are the ultimate setting for learning, living, and becoming." Let's talk about both of those. How can I take more personal responsibility for my own learning? And then how do I move that into my home?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:35:35 Well, it's a difference between being an active learner and a passive learner. This is some of the jargon we use as you know on campus. But an active learner is one who takes responsibility for their own learning. They say, "I'm going to learn everything about this." I don't mean to hold myself up here as a particularly great example of this. There's a lot of ways I've failed at it, but I'll tell you one way that I was inspired to do it and has shaped my life. And that is I took Religion 341, that's the Joseph Smith and the Restoration class. This has got to be in the early nineties on campus at BYU. Took it from Susan-

Hank Smith: 00:36:12 Okay. Back in the 1900s.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:36:12 Easton Black. Yes, exactly. I was absolutely intoxicated with the history of the church and I thought, "I have got to know everything she knows and I have got to know how she knows it." I was not content to just let her tell it to me. I thought, "I have to know the sources of her knowledge. I have to read everything she's read." And you could not have kept me from doing it. I was going to do that. And now I have, I've read the 1,580 something odd pages of Joseph's journals, his letters, his revelation texts in every form we can find them as far back as we can find them. And you'd have to put on ESPN 24 hours a day in front of me to keep me from doing that. Just kidding, that wouldn't even do it. I don't know what it is that makes us inclined to seek the truth, relentlessly seek the truth, but everybody's got to come to that for themselves. And for me, it's a mystery.

00:37:17 I was thinking the other day, "What are the motivators of life? What are the things I value most? More than anything else, more than oxygen?" And for me, I can't pick between truth and love. Those are the two things that I value more than anything. The love of my family and the truth. And I don't care so much

what the truth is. Whatever it is, is the truth. I don't want to believe things that aren't true. I want to know the truth. To do that, we've got to go get it for ourselves.

00:37:57 Some people might hear this and say, "Well, you believe a lot of things that aren't true. Or what about this fact of church history? Or what about that thing of church history?" And they'd be missing my point. I'm on a quest for ultimate truths. Does God live? What's the nature of God? Is Jesus Christ the son of God? Did Jesus Christ restore the gospel to Joseph Smith? Does President Nelson, his living prophet today, does he hold the keys to the holy priesthood restored by ministering angels? Those are things of ultimate importance. And I must know whether they're true and the scriptures are my primary vehicle for that.

00:38:36 If the scriptures are true, especially the restored scripture, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price. If those are true, then I've found my way to these other ultimate truths and I am responsible for that quest. Nobody else is responsible for my quest to know the truth. And I don't want to let anybody else be responsible for it. And I don't expect anybody else to be responsible for it. Nobody can do it for me. We can give great gifts, we can give to our children the knowledge of these things. At least that is we can tell them we know these things are true, but we cannot give them their own knowledge that these things are true. That has to be revealed to them. So we can teach them how to go do that and we can quest with them while they do it. But nobody can be responsible for anyone else's testimony ultimately or their knowledge of the truth.

John Bytheway: 00:39:36 You know what you reminded me of when you said that you developed this hunger and thirst? It reminded me the beatitude, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness." And I've always thought it was fascinating that Jesus didn't just say, "Blessed are the righteous," and maybe there's lots of reasons for that. Technically none of us are. But he said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after it." And that sounds like what you are describing and as I've thought about hunger and thirst, it's a daily thing. You're not, "I'm done being hungry for the rest of my life." You never get to that point, but it's a daily thing and you're going to thirst again tomorrow. And it becomes a way of life to keep learning instead of just, "Oh no, I studied that. I'm done." But you keep searching.

00:40:26 And another thing I wanted to mention was this talk that Elder Lawrence Corbridge gave at BYU called Stand Forever. And he called them primary questions and secondary questions and you listed beautifully those primary questions, the real questions. Does God live? Did he really talk to Joseph Smith? Are there really prophets? And when you can answer those, you can deal with all the other ones. Do you guys remember that talk?

Hank Smith: 00:40:52 Oh, absolutely. We can link that in our show notes, John. Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:40:56 It does not work to go the opposite direction. To try to get at primary questions through secondary questions does not work. If I ask the question did Joseph Smith ever make mistakes? And expect to find out whether God lives as opposed to that, it will not work. That's the wrong direction.

Hank Smith: 00:41:15 Yeah. It's like trying to stuff the goose through the beak, right?

John Bytheway: 00:41:20 Elder Holland said.

Hank Smith: 00:41:21 Elder Holland said. The manual references Alma 32 often, and I've been thinking about that. The word that comes up often in Alma 32, "If you will nourish the word, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith and with your great diligence, with your patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life. And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it that it may take root in you, behold by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof." So if you think about how long it takes to go from a seed to fruit, this is a long process of a lot of effort. And like you said, not a weekend read.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:42:08 Yeah, I've been thinking a lot about this. I was thinking quite a lot lately about my dad. My dad passed away almost two years ago and in his last several weeks of life, I sat by his bed whenever I could and sometimes would hold his hand. He had these great big thick cow-milking hands.

Hank Smith: 00:42:31 Lumberjack hands.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:42:32 Yeah, I grew up on a potato farm with a dairy herd and went to college and always suggested to me stay in school. So I'm a lot softer than he is in a lot of ways. But that work ethic is something that is precious. Every old generation worries about the kids these days and how they don't know how to work. I don't want to be that guy, but there's something to be said for

the fact that being responsible for your own learning of the gospel means putting in the work. If we're going to nourish that seed, if we're going to plant the word of God, the process of exercising faith in the word of God sounds like a lot of hard work from what you just referenced there, Hank. Nurturing a tree, planting any seed and getting it to grow, that's a lot of hard, hard work and nobody should expect to reap the fruit of a rock solid, abiding, resilient faith if they don't put in the work.

- John Bytheway: 00:43:44 And in that same metaphor that Alma uses, it's so good. He says, "Well what if it doesn't produce?" Well, that's not because the seed was not good. It's a good seed. It's because your ground is barren and you will not nourish the tree. And I ask my students, what's the difference between will not and cannot. You refuse to nourish the tree, because of that you'll never partake of the fruit.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:44:08 Yeah, right now we hear quite a bit of, "Well, it's not true, there's no tree because I've been watching here and there's no tree." And we might say, "Well, you will not nourish it. Of course there's no tree. There's not going to be a tree in that ground if it's not cultivated and watered and nourished." Well, this part of the scriptures calls it an experiment upon the word of God. Unless you follow the rules of that experiment to a T, you can't expect the results that are predicted.
- John Bytheway: 00:44:39 Results, yeah.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:44:40 You can't say, "I didn't get the results from this experiment," if you didn't do the experiment, if you didn't actually do the prescribed experiment. So that's a project that maybe we can focus on better ourselves and help others too. It just doesn't work to say, "I didn't get the result," if we didn't actually perform the experiment.
- John Bytheway: 00:45:02 I like to tell my students that if I have one worry about Gen Z, it's that you want Google speed answers to golden questions. And everything we've been talking about is seeking is a process. And the first syllable of question is quest. You can ask a question of Siri or of Google in a matter of seconds, but a quest is defined as a long arduous search and the first syllable of testimony is test. And it could take a while and don't be trained by Google to be impatient because these golden questions take longer than Google questions.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:45:41 Yeah, folks should learn to be source critical. That means I don't just ask what do you know? I ask how do you know it? And I believe, as I was saying a few minutes ago, this was part of my

own awakening to seeking the most ultimate truths. It wasn't enough to know something. I had to know how I knew it. I had to know the source of that knowledge. And I don't think of myself as knowing a thing unless I can explain how I know that thing. And being able to explain how we know a thing requires source criticism. It requires us to be metacognitive about where knowledge comes from and what knowledge is. So we have to be aware of our thought processes and aware of the nature of knowledge itself and of knowing itself. That's an important part of being responsible for our own learning.

00:46:36 You can't, in other words, just take any source at face value or treat any source of knowledge as if it's equal. Eber Howe was the newspaper editor in Painesville, Ohio. He has lots of things to say about the Restoration. About whether Joseph Smith saw angels or translated the Book of Mormon by the power of God. He has no knowledge, he doesn't know. All he has is an opinion about what he thinks about Joseph Smith and Latter-day Saints. Well, Joseph Smith tells me that he was in his bedroom praying when an angel appeared and said he was sent from the presence of God. So Joseph Smith is a source of knowledge that is vastly superior to Eber Howe. And the question for me becomes is Joseph Smith telling me the truth? Do I have to seek out of the source material that Joseph left me? By study and by faith, that process of reading that material like reading the Gospel of Mark will tell me that this person is bearing witness of God's work in these ways.

00:47:41 Once I have that knowledge, I still don't know whether that's true. I don't know whether the witness Mark gives of Christ is true or the witness Joseph Smith gives of God calling him to translate the Book of Mormon is true. I can only know that by the power of the Holy Ghost. So if I'm only willing to go so far, if I'm not willing to trust knowledge that comes from God by the Holy Ghost, then I can't ultimately know. And people who are in that boat sometimes tell others that they can't know either. "You don't know. There is no Holy Ghost. You don't know anything by the Holy Ghost." That's the same as saying, "Because I don't know a thing, you don't know a thing." Yeah, well that's a person who doesn't know telling someone who does what they don't know. That doesn't work.

John Bytheway: 00:48:31 I think the letter from, is it Ammoron writes back to Captain Moroni and says, "And we know not such a being and neither do ye." That's if I don't know it, you can't know it either. And I think some of the other anti-Christ's in the Book of Mormon use that same type thing. Anyway, it just reminded me of that.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:48:48 I love the dual between Alma and Korihor because Alma is his equal. He doesn't fall for any of that sophistry.

John Bytheway: 00:48:59 And it's about that question, isn't it?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:49:01 It's about knowing. Absolutely. Folks can go to byustudies.byu.edu and read all kinds of fantastic studies of scripture and church history and related gospel stuff. One of them is Joseph Spencer writing about what he thinks are the connections between these texts we've been talking about, Alma 30 and Alma 32. He thinks of Alma 32 as Alma's development of his conversation with Korihor. It's nice to read those together-

Hank Smith: 00:49:33 Interesting.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:49:33 And to see what connections there are.

John Bytheway: 00:49:36 Wow, I've always looked at that as so how do you talk to somebody who says there is no God, that's Alma 30. And then, well, how do you talk to somebody who says, "There is a God but he has elected us to be saved and everybody else not to be." Oh, okay. Well, that's the Zoramites in Alma 32 through 34, 35.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:49:54 If you think of Alma composing what we have in Alma 32, having been through the experience of talking to Korihor. So Alma 32 has the benefit of Alma's experience of dueling with Korihor. And so it's informed by that and has some maturity to it because of that.

John Bytheway: 00:50:15 And he talks about it is light, it's discernible. And when you have tasted this light, which is the most interesting phrase to taste light, but it's getting down to that argument of how do you know? Well, there was something that was discernible about what happened when I tried the experiment and I tasted something, I felt something. My mind was enlightened. Maybe that's the light part, but that's a good point. He's talking about how do you know something with the Zoramites, right?

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:50:48 That's right. It's epistemological to use the fancy philosophical word. It's about knowing. What do you know? How can you know? And the nature of knowing in the scriptures is not just by study but also by faith. If there's not a component of revelation in it, then you don't know it. Not in the ultimate sense of knowledge.

John Bytheway: 00:51:17 President Boyd K. Packer told of a story, he told it several times in general conference I think. And one time he told it third person and then another time he said it was him. But I think the talk is called the Candle of the Lord, a classic talk about how we feel the spirit. But he mentioned getting on a plane, I think it was from Seattle to Spokane or something, and being alone and nobody sitting next to him and being relieved because he was really tired and wanted to close his eyes for a minute. And somebody sat down next to him and then asked for his newspaper. And President Packer thought that'll keep him busy.

00:51:51 And he starts reading and he starts saying out loud things like awful and miserable and terrible. And President Packer finally said, "What's the matter?" And this fellow passenger said, "Oh, these headlines. This is typical of life and humanity in all ways. It's pointless and worthless and everything." And President Packer trying to cheer him up said, "No, life's good." And somewhere in trying to cheer him up, he said, "God lives." And this passenger said, "Well, you don't know that. Nobody knows that. You can't know that." And President Packer said, "No, I do. I know that God lives." And he said, "He introduced himself as a lawyer and an atheist," President Packer said. "He said, 'Okay, tell me how you know.' Implying, 'If you're so smart, tell me how you know.'" And President Packer said, "I said, 'The Holy Ghost has born witness to my soul.' And the man said, 'I don't know what you're talking about,' using some of our church language."

00:52:48 And he said, "I tried to explain and I found that words like inspiration and discernment were meaningless to him because they were outside of his experience." And President Packer actually said, "I felt I had borne my testimony unwisely." And the guy said, "See, you don't know. If you knew, you'd be able to tell me exactly how you know." And President Packer prayed for help and he got some. He said to the man, "All knowledge is not conveyed in words alone." And then he got this idea, he said to the man, "Have you ever tasted salt?" And he said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, when did you taste salt last?" And he said, "We had dinner a while ago. I tasted salt then." And President Packer said, "Well, you just think you know what salt tastes like." And he said, "No, I know what salt tastes like as well as I know anything."

00:53:33 And he said, "If I gave you a cup of sugar and a cup of salt, could you tell the difference?" And the man said, "Oh, now you're getting juvenile." And he said, "Okay, assuming that I have never tasted salt, would you please explain to me in words exactly what salt tastes like and just try that." And he said,

"Well, it's not sweet, it's not bitter." And he said, "No, you're telling me what it isn't, not what it is." And he said, "My new friend finally admitted defeat in this little exercise." And President Packer told him, "I told you that I know what salt tastes like. And you ridiculed that testimony and told me that if I did know, I'd be able to tell you exactly how I know. Well, spiritually speaking, I have tasted salt. And don't tell me that I haven't because I have."

00:54:22 President Packer thought he was so grateful. I think he quoted prophet Joseph Smith's statement about, "Revelation can be like pure intelligence coming into your mind," that gave him that question to ask. But there is another way of learning that we're talking about today, of learning by the Spirit.

Dr. Steven Harper: 00:54:39 There is no doubt about it in my mind. And we wish everybody could and would have that experience. For all kinds of reasons that I don't completely understand or know, a lot of people feel like they can't or haven't felt that and had that experience. And I don't feel any expertise or desire in trying to explain to them what the matter there is. But I do want to hold open that invitation to keep at it, keep seeking. Seeking is an active thing to do. It's a long, what'd you say, Hank? Persistent, patient process. And it's not for the faint of heart. It's not for the weary, it's a quest and we're all on it. I have lots more questions than I have answers. I know a few things by the power of the Holy Ghost and I cling to those things. They're the rocks of my faith and there's a lot of things I don't yet know or understand and I'm questing for. And I expect that that's how it's supposed to be and how it is.

Hank Smith: 00:55:44 Yeah. We want to get to an end result, like Jacob. Remember Jacob when he was faced by Sherem? He talked about Sherem laboring diligently, "That he might lead away the hearts of people." And he did lead away many hearts and he was learned and he knew the language. He said, "And he had hoped to shake me from the faith." But then he says, "Notwithstanding the many revelations and the many things which I had seen concerning these things, for I truly had seen angels and they administered unto me. I had heard the voice of the Lord speak unto me in very word from time to time. Therefore," and then it gets these five words, "I could not be shaken." That's where we hope to get to. That's where we want to get our children to, to the point where they can say, "I have learned for myself." That's what Joseph said to his mother. "I have learned for myself." And he said, "I knew it. I knew that God knew it and I could not deny it."

- Dr. Steven Harper: 00:56:41 Yeah. That's well said. When we sometimes think of mature Joseph Smith, a 35-year-old prophet or somebody who could deliver the sermon in the grove with all this knowledge, revelations, having read and reread the scriptures, we might miss or not remember that he starts out as a kid. He says at about age 12 when he starts to worry about ultimate questions, "The welfare of my immortal soul," and whether there is a God and whether redemption is through God in Christ. And he comes to know the answers to those questions by a combination of diligent study and yearning, seeking, receiving revelation. And he just continues on that quest for his whole life. And he comes home from the sacred grove according to his manuscript history and says, "Mom, I have learned for myself that the testimony of James is true." That's not quite the way he puts it, but that's the gist of it, right?
- 00:57:40 Anybody who lacks wisdom can ask God and receive. He learned that early and then he continued to act on that knowledge. One of the emphases that Elder Bednar has made in this instruction about taking responsibility for our own learning is that we have to act ourselves. We can. We're empowered to do so by God and we must act for ourselves. And unless we act, we're not going to come to know ultimate things. And Joseph was a good example of not getting paralyzed. He felt paralyzed for a while. "How to act, I did not know. And unless I could get more knowledge than I then had, I would never know." And he was not going to end there, not going to ring his hands forever. He was going to act. So I decided to go to the woods, and of course this kicks off the Restoration.
- 00:58:33 But Joseph comes home from the sacred grove, having seen the Father and the Son not knowing everything, not even knowing that he would be a prophet. His life is an ongoing quest for sacred knowledge. And we would misunderstand his life and example to us if we thought, "Oh, it was easy for him. He was a kid when he saw God and he never had a question after that, never had a problem after that." His problems got worse, the dilemmas he faced got worse and ultimately cost him his life. But like Nephi says, that he knew in whom he had trusted, he'd learned how to quest for truth and find his answers early, and he never forsook that gospel way of seeking.
- 00:59:20 That recipe works for me. I've never had a revelation as dramatic as Joseph's, but I've had a handful of revelations that are undeniable and for me unforgettable. But I've also learned that when I behave badly, the power of those revelations diminishes in my life. The memory of them, the influence of them diminishes, and it's not until I repent and get on track that

that sharp and keen memory, that Holy Ghost bringing all things to remembrance whatsoever I've said unto you. Just because you've had a testimony once, doesn't mean you'll keep having it if you don't act in the way that that knowledge prescribes. We have knowledge from God and that inclines us to obey God, to keep his commandments, and to live in the light. And if we choose to live in the dark, we'll have diminished capacity to access his spirit, access his love. His love for us, Section 95 says, the Doctrine and Covenants, won't end or quit, but our ability to receive it, to get it can be cut off by us. And that's a dangerous thing, but it's something that can be fixed through repentance.

John Bytheway:

01:00:43

Please join us for part two of this podcast.



- Hank Smith: 00:07 I remember when we had those presidents of the church manuals in Relief Society and Priesthood meeting. I can't remember the exact words. But somebody, I believe, had asked President Gordon B. Hinckley if he had a favorite verse of scripture. I think he said something like, "I don't know if I'd say I have a favorite. But I've always loved this one." Just what you were saying, Steve. Reminds me I love this. Section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 24, "That which is of God is light and he that receiveth light..." And I've always felt like receiving is allowing it in, like a wedding reception or a receiving line. "He that receiveth light and continueth in God..." Just what you were talking about continuing in God. "He that receiveth light and continueth in God receiveth more light and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."
- 01:05 "I say it that you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from among you." You are talking about if you're behaving badly, or whatever, that you may diminish your own previous experiences. I'm reminded of Alma when he is in Zarahemla. He says to those who are members of the church in Alma 5. He says, "Do you remember when you felt to sing the song of redeeming love? When you heard the music of the gospel? Can you feel so now?" It's like, "What happened? What has happened that you're diminishing those?" Man, that Alma 5... That is an awesome... The whole chapter is just this awesome reminder talk for, how's your trend line? Are you trending upward? But those ideas reminded me of that. I'm so glad you said that because it's so sad to hear people... "Well, I felt like at one point I had revelations. Now, I'm not so sure anymore," and who feel those have diminished or something. I love the way you put that, Steve.
- John Bytheway: 02:06 There's an old Socrates story that I don't even know if it's true or not, but it's a great story. It says-
- Hank Smith: 02:13 The attempted drowning.
- John Bytheway: 02:15 Yes, it is said that a dispassionate young man approached the Greek philosopher and casually said, "Oh great, Socrates, I come

to you for knowledge." The philosopher took the young man down to the sea, waded in with him, and then dunked him under the water. When he let the young man up for air, Socrates asked him to repeat what he wanted. "Knowledge, oh, great one," he sputtered. Socrates put him under the water again, only a little longer. After repeated dunkings and responses, the philosopher asked, "What do you want? The young man finally gasped, "I want air. Air!"

02:44 "Good," answered Socrates. "Now, when you want knowledge as much as you want air, you shall have it." Then, I thought of a talk from President Uchtdorf, who talks about "if you seek God, will he answer you?" This is what he says. He says, "The everlasting and almighty God, the creator of this vast universe will speak." Notice he doesn't say, "He might speak," or, "I hope He'll speak." He will speak to those who approach Him with a sincere heart and real intent. He will speak to them in dreams, visions, thoughts, and feelings. He will speak in a way that is unmistakable. That transcends human experience. He will give them divine direction and answer for their personal lives.

03:25 Steve, since I have you here, I want to hear a little bit more about how the Smith family... Lucy Mack, and Joseph Smith Sr, how they created a home for seekers. It says in the manual, "President Nelson has invited us to transform our homes into a sanctuary of faith to remodel our homes into centers of gospel learning." Since we have an expert here, I want to know two things from you, Steve. One, how did the Smiths do it? And two, how did the Harpers do it?

Dr. Steven Harper: 03:54 Oh, boy. We're transitioning from the responsibility to seek and be responsible for our own learning to what could we do to foster seekers to help seekers. That's a good question. An answer to the Smith question might be a little surprising. A necessary component is conflict. Does that sound strange?

04:21 If Joseph Smith never has any trouble in his life, he does not go to the sacred grove. Joseph Smith's home is loving. But it is also a place of conflict. There's just no way around it. The country is in conflict. There's a market revolution happening. The Smith family is feeling it. What that means is there's this optimism that they're going to make it go. Economically speaking, they're going to finally become in possession of the means of their own prosperity for the future. It's going to work out. Then, there's always the prospect that it'll tank.

04:59 Living on the edge of that produces tension and conflict in a person. There's no way around it. You probably have some

measure of that in your family. I don't know any family that doesn't. That's not a bad thing, necessarily. I mean, we can react to it badly. I could go home from work and take out my concerns about whether I'm going to have enough to retire on someday on the kids by being grouchy or something. That's what I mean by reacting badly to it. But the tension itself... It can be conducive.

05:31 The economic tension in the Smith home is just one of many. The most important one to them by far and the one that's proving most difficult to resolve is the spiritual tension. We've summed this up sometimes in the past by saying Joseph Sr. is the son of people who were committed Congregationalists but who have migrated almost quite radically in some ways to universalism. They have changed.

06:03 Think of the challenge that change presents. Think of changing the way you think about the nature of God and the nature of salvation quite completely. For Joseph Smith Sr., this means that, in his own religious quest, he has not found a spiritual home. He's the first person in his family history for several generations to not have a church. He's also inherited a dose of skepticism from his culture from his father. He's of the opinion that it would be better to have no church at all than one of these wrong ones. He's quite disgusted with what they called formalism, which they take from the very passage of scripture that the Lord gives to Joseph Smith that says, "People have a form of godliness. But they deny the power thereof."

06:56 Joseph Smith Sr. felt that about the ministers. Yeah, they have a form of godliness. But nobody around is really exercising the power of God. "Better to not. I can stay home and get more religion than that." Lucy, though, as you know, Joseph's mother... She has a different set of life experiences. They're full of anxieties and tensions. They incline her to be on a diligent quest for the true church. She has survived tuberculosis when her sisters did not. She has promised God, when her own daughter nearly dies from a typhoid infection, that she will seek the true church if God will intervene. Lucy has been questing for the true church almost her whole life. To her, some church is better than not going to church at all. There's no way you can be Joseph Smith Jr. and not be caught up in that tension, in that conflict.

John Bytheway: 08:00 All the children were, right?

Dr. Steven Harper: 08:02 Yes, absolutely. It's productive tension because Joseph then is asking, "Well, which of my parents is right? Not only which of all

the churches is right, but which one of my parents is right? How will I know it?"

08:17 Lucy is the one who tells us in her memoir that when she has a problem, a dilemma, a tension, including a conflict with her husband over whether to go to the Methodist church or not, she goes to the woods and prays about it. She has revelations when she does that. Her memoir just really beautifully tells about these kinds of experiences. It seems very, very likely to me that Joseph Smith Jr. grows up knowing there are these conflicts. When we have them, what we do is ask God. We seek and strive and quest for truth. We look everywhere for it. We bring a dose of skepticism to it. We don't just go with the first person to give us a silver tongue speech. All these attributes of his parents... You can see vying for competition, for a place in Joseph's attention. That inclines him to be a seeker.

Hank Smith: 09:15 Now, Steve, did they sit and read the text together? Is that something they did often?

Dr. Steven Harper: 09:21 They read the Bible together. They prayed together. Lucy says in her memoir that Joseph has never read the Bible through. When he's a teenager, he's not a particularly bookish person. But Lucy says he's much more inclined to meditation and deep study than my other kids. There you go. There's a seeker for you. You guys know the term "thinking slowly." Do you know the work of Israeli psychologists who spent their life studying human biases? This is a fantastic book, a culmination of their life's work called, it's called Thinking Fast and Slow. Thinking fast simply means the normal way we go about everyday life. You don't think about how to drive to work or how to groom yourself in the morning. These are just things you do. You think through these things. There's lots of ways in which we use heuristics. That's a fancy word for mental shortcuts, fast thinking, in other words. An example they use in the book is if you ask a hundred people if they're an above-average driver, guess how many of them are above-average drivers?

Hank Smith: 10:33 I don't know.

John Bytheway: 10:35 100.

Dr. Steven Harper: 10:36 90% of people. Yeah.

Dr. Steven Harper: 10:37 90% of people believe they're above-average drivers. This is because when you ask that question, people don't stop and think about it. They don't think, "Well, what would I need to

know in order to determine if I'm an above-average driver or not?" You just default. You think fast. Thinking fast is a way to function through day-to-day life. But it's a terrible way to come to know ultimate truths.

- 11:06 Thinking fast is based on mental shortcuts that are informed by biases. We want to do what Joseph Smith did. We want to be more inclined to deep study and to meditation. We want to think slowly. Thinking slowly simply means asking, what do we know and how do we know? What do I really know? If I Googled something about First Vision accounts and found out some facts, maybe mixed with some nonsense, would I really know anything about it? All I would know is that on this particular website, it reports these things. But I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know anything really about the First Vision unless I thought slow enough to find out, "Well, what are the sources of knowledge about the Gospel of Matthew? What does the Gospel of Matthew say?" Until I digest it for myself, and Joseph's words, "Until I have learned for myself, then we really don't know anything."
- 12:09 "Thinking slow" means that we go about it so deliberately. We get on our quest for the knowledge of the restored gospel so deliberately. We ask inspired questions. We identify assumptions that we might be making. We start to interrogate them rather than just take them at face value. We come to knowledge in this slow, painstaking, persistent process that is much, much better.
- 12:41 When people think fast about it, what happens is, at some point, their conclusions get upset. They realize that because they come in contact with some new fact or something that they had been thinking badly about it before, many of them will then hopefully learn to think better about it. But many will just trade one form of fast thinking for another. That's not seeking either. Whether you're in favor of the Restoration or against it, if you're not thinking about it, like the scriptures prescribe, you're not doing it in a way that's going to sustain faith.
- 13:21 Let's contrast Lucy and Joseph Smith Sr. with the minister who shuts Joseph Smith down. We don't know as much as we'd like to about this. But it's clear that Joseph and Lucy Smith are raising seekers. They cultivate inquiry and even debate discussion of these things in their home. Joseph Sr. doesn't shut Lucy down. The one time he tries to... And she says in her memoir she gets pretty upset about that. That's when she goes to the woods and prays. He says, "Lucy, just please don't keep going shopping for churches. All right? It's just making my dad

upset." This really hurts Lucy. It's painful to her to have her husband pick his dad over her. Sounds like a typical marriage conflict.

14:13 But for Joseph and Lucy... This sends her to the woods where she prays. The revelation she receives, in answer, is she sees this dream or vision of a beautiful meadow, a stream running through it, these two trees on either side of the stream. One of them just moves beautifully in the breeze. One of them just doesn't move, no matter how stiff the breeze is. Lucy realizes that the pliant tree is her husband and the other one is his more stubborn brother. What Lucy takes away from this is you can quit being so upset at your husband's insensitivity because the restored gospel is coming. He will receive it when it comes.

Hank Smith: 15:00 He'll be flexible.

Dr. Steven Harper: 15:02 Lucy is a seeker, and Joseph Sr. is a seeker. That means that they incline their children to be seekers. Their children, Joseph Jr. most famously, are open to what the scriptures mean. They're open to asking questions, even tough questions, and seeking answers by study and by faith. Notice that Lucy's a Bible reader. She's a church visitor. She also goes to the woods to pray and seeks and receives revelation. Joseph Jr. learns how to do these things from his parents and even to love each other and support each other through disagreement and conflict. He becomes, of course, maybe the world's greatest example of seeking truth from the scriptures and from God directly and relying on any good resources from scholars or sanction texts. He learns how to read Hebrew as best he can for that.

16:04 The contrast point then is the minister, the Methodist minister that Joseph relies on. This is nothing against Methodism. I have studied Methodism and have great respect and admiration for what one scholar friend calls the unrestored gospel. I don't hate the unrestored gospel. I just find the restored gospel has in it the restored parts, the things that are missing.

Hank Smith: 16:31 It's compelling.

Dr. Steven Harper: 16:32 I don't want hearers to misunderstand that I'm trying to bash on Methodism. Far from it. But Joseph tells us that, in his quest is seeking to be responsible for his own learning, he tells the minister about his first vision. This minister had been fostering Joseph as a seeker. He'd been encouraging him to seek and find answers to his hard questions. But when Joseph's told what the answer was, this minister really landed on him, really shut him down in a harsh way. That impacted Joseph very much.

17:10 What I'm suggesting here is it would not be a good idea for any of us to react to our children or other students in the way that the minister did to Joseph Smith, no matter what they say, no matter what they come home with. It's not good for relationships and, therefore, for fostering trust and good gospel conversations for us to say, "Shut up. That never happened to you. It never will. Those experiences are over." We can learn what to do from Lucy and Joseph Smith Sr. We can learn what not to do from the Methodist minister. I've done plenty of what not to do things myself.

Hank Smith: 17:53 Me, too. I want to ask both of you. Now, I realize that neither of you are perfect parents and that nobody listening is a perfect parent. We can foster what President Nelson called... We can remodel our homes into centers of gospel learning. What advice would you give to parents on how to do that, knowing full well that neither of you are perfect?

John Bytheway: 18:13 I love the idea of being in a place where it's safe to ask questions and to own your questions. I have a friend who was a mission president, and he told his missionaries, if you have tough questions, I want you not only to own those questions, I want you to begin your own search for those answers from trustworthy sources. Everything we've been talking about. It wasn't that you're wrong to have that question. It was like, "Wow! Own that, and go figure it out. You know how to seek the light to figure that out." I thought that was a really good, safe... making-them-feel-safe approach too. If you have a question, great, where are you going to go for that? How are you going to figure that out? What would be the most trustworthy sources you could look to find answers to that?

Hank Smith: 18:59 Excellent.

Dr. Steven Harper: 19:00 That seems inspired to me. That's our inheritance as Latter-day Saints. That's how we got started. That's how we roll. That's what we do.

John Bytheway: 19:09 Going back to that section 50 phrase, some people have a tough question, and instead of continuing in God, they discontinue God, which is so strange. You just unplugged from the source of the light. Instead of going to Google and leading TikTok influencers, we stay in the light, continuing God. Seek your answer in the light. You'll get a better answer. You'll get an inspired answer. That's why I just love that phrase "continuing God." That's very appropriate these days, I think.

Hank Smith: 19:38 Yeah. One thing I'm learning from the Smith family is "read together." Just sit and read the text together. This is an excellent chance this year with the New Testament to say, "Hey, let's read the entire New Testament as a family together, especially the four gospels." Just that simple act alone might transform your home into a sanctuary of faith. At least take a step towards that.

Dr. Steven Harper: 20:03 Yeah, I believe that too. At my house, it always goes badly when I try to orchestrate it, like every component. If I try to make it formal and official, it just is a disaster. I feel like I've got to control how this goes and exactly when people will start weeping because they're overcome.

Hank Smith: 20:28 They're overcome by your lecture that you've been giving.

Dr. Steven Harper: 20:34 What works, though, is lots of informality. I'm not saying this is one size fits all. Folks will be different. But in our family, it's when one of the kids will come into the bedroom at night and say, "Hey, I've been thinking about this," or, more often, they'll come in and linger. You'll think, "Okay, something's on their mind." You'll try to prime that. It might take 15 minutes or half an hour before they're willing to say, "Well, what about this?"

21:10 At least for my family, it's so much more about having relationships where people feel safe. Like you said, John, owning their questions, coming forward with them. Am I going to get hurt if I ask this question? Am I going to get yelled at? Am I going to get-

John Bytheway: 21:27 Scolded.

Dr. Steven Harper: 21:28 Yeah. Joseph had a vivid memory of what that minister said to him, four things, specifically, that shut him down. That means that Joseph processed that deeply and with a lot of emotion. That hurt. That rejection hurt. We will teach our children to never come to us with hard things if we respond to them like that. It will signal to them we're not to be trusted. We can't be talked to.

John Bytheway: 21:59 It's not safe.

Dr. Steven Harper: 22:01 Whatever we can do to let them come forward when they're ready... Part of what I meant by over-formality is I'll schedule half an hour on Monday night or maybe 15 minutes during the halftime of the football game when we're going to squeeze this Come Follow Me in. That's not conducive to letting the kids seek

on their own terms when they are ready to articulate a question or come forth with their own insight. One of the best things I've learned as my kids have grown up now is that I have a lot to learn from them, a lot to learn from them. I thought I was the professor who they would take their lectures from. It's turned out that I've learned a lot more about the gospel and how to apply the gospel from my children and from my wife.

22:53 I'll give you an example of this. My patriarchal blessing says it's very important for you to teach your children to pray and the purpose of prayer. I've been reflecting on that, wondering if I've done that or how I could do that. Certainly, we taught our kids that you kneel down and pray together twice a day, at least as a family. We taught them how to pray. In other words, okay, I've checked that box. But I've got this regret that I'm not sure I taught them what the Bible Dictionary says about the purpose of prayer. You guys might remember that it says, "You don't try to convince God to see things from your point of view and give you what you want. You try to become one with God. You try to do what Christ did in the garden."

Hank Smith: 23:42 Align wills, right?

Dr. Steven Harper: 23:44 That's right. I've been thinking back on my life. I learned that lesson unexpectedly and somewhat painfully in my first months of being married because I started to notice that when my wife and I prayed together, my prayers sounded like a sales pitch like I was trying to talk God in... If He just could see things from my point of view, He would give me the job I was looking for and really wanted. I didn't realize how it sounded until I listened to her pray. Her prayers were way more like the Savior's in the garden. Help us be what you want us to be. Do what she needs to do. Teach us what you want. Help us do your will. I thought, "Oh, I've got a long way to go here in learning to pray and the purpose of prayer." I've learned that from my family.

24:38 In other words, one thing we can do to help our families and our homes become centers of gospel learning is be a little less... I'm speaking primarily to fathers here, be a little less inclined to think of ourselves as the know-it-alls and the bosses of this process and think of ourselves as just fellow participants with our family members in this process. We can learn a lot from our families, no matter how young they are and how old they are. We can learn a lot.

25:11 I'll tell you another example about... My dear mother is 89 years old. It's a privilege for me to live close to her and be able to visit her regularly. I looked in on her the other night. I found her in

her bed. She can't kneel down anymore; found her in her bed praying, asking blessings on her family, on her nurse. It was one of the tenderest, most beautiful things I've ever seen. We can learn a lot about gospel centers by listening to our family members and not presuming we know it all.

- Hank Smith: 25:46 That's excellent. Steve.
- John Bytheway: 25:48 I think, too. I've said this before on the podcast. But I sometimes have to repent to my children before the prayer. "Sorry, I did this today, you guys." I find that brings a better spirit if they can know I'm trying to do all this too, and I'm failing sometimes.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 26:10 You're right on time, John. The appendix to this lesson... One of the things it says is, "Teach your children the joy of repentance. Help them to understand and associate repentance with joy." It says one of the ways to do that is to repent, to show them the joy that comes from repenting. I think our children need to see us repent authentically. Not some pretentious or feigned experience, but if they watch us really repent, then they'll understand what that's all about. Associate it with the joy that comes from true repentance.
- John Bytheway: 26:54 Elder David A. Bednar gave a talk called Act in Faith years ago. I just thought, "Wow! That's really true." Speaking of Joseph Smith as a seeker, he said, "Joseph's question was not which church is right. His question was, which church should I join?" There was an implied action there. Which church do I join? He went to ask in faith, Elder Bednar said, intending to act. I think that when we quoted Elder Bednar about... What did he say? "Know, live and become," the action implied there was not just, "I need to know this. But then, what am I going to do with what I know?" I love that the outcome is, what are we becoming? Not just what we know. But what people are we becoming? I think today we've talked about becoming seekers and to continue to learn because I think we'll all go to our death with unanswered questions. But we can become hopefully more what the Lord wants us to become by keep seeking.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 27:55 Like that, we're all mindful of, and maybe we have been, at times in our lives, the person who says or feels, "Look, I've tried this. Everything you guys are saying sounds lovely. But it doesn't work for me. I've read the Book of Mormon. I've prayed about it. I haven't got an answer." I don't know the answer for everyone in that boat. I don't doubt their sincerity. I don't have any reason to think there's some sort of defect in them. I hope they won't think that there's some defect in them, something

wrong. But what we could do, all of us, is check before following the recipe.

28:39 We can't expect... like we said about the experiment on the Word of God in Alma 32. We can't expect to get a souffle if we make a can of Campbell soup. It just won't work. That's speaking there from my own culinary expertise. No way I could make a souffle. I can execute a grilled cheese sandwich on a good day. I can't expect to end up with an exquisite recipe if I don't put in the right ingredients, in the right proportions, and cook it for the right amount of time in the right way. What we want to draw attention to here, then, is to notice that the scriptures prescribe quite specific recipes for coming to know. We can't shortchange those recipes or cheat them and expect to get the product that we want. Let's review the recipes. We've talked about one of them. That is "seek diligently." The adverb is vital.

29:38 Imagine "seek half-heartedly." It's not the same recipe. Then, we've also noticed the recipe is the right sources. Seek out of the best books. Today, it's perfectly fine to add websites into that. But not all websites are created equal. We're podcasts. Yeah, podcasts. If you're seeking out of the worst sources or even just less than the best sources, well, then you can't expect the best knowledge. Seek diligently by study and by faith. Notice the "and" is very important. It's got to be both at the same time. It's not one or the other. It's both. They're both God-given gifts and capacities. They've got to be cultivated together, simultaneously in harmony with each other if we expect to get the recipe right. When we do those things, seek diligently, study in faith out of the best books, then we can come to know things. We can get the recipe right.

30:41 Another one, as you know, is in Moroni 10. Here the intellectual components are read, remember, ponder. There's a lot of brain work involved here. It indicates that we need to remember a lot. We need to remember back to Adam and everything God has done all the way forward. At least for me, this recipe has worked without me knowing every single fact about every person who's ever lived since Adam. I don't think that's what it means. But it does mean to have a mindset that is remembering how merciful God has been from the beginning until now. It's to remember that the nature of God is to be merciful. I've got to bring that to the recipe, or the recipe will not turn out. If I remember that, I read diligently, and I ponder what I've read. These are hard things to do. They're not cheap. Hard work! I bring those intellectual components. But at the very same time, I've got to add a sincere heart, real intent, and faith in Christ.

- 31:55 I'm not even positive I know what all those things mean. But if we have any listeners who are thinking, "Well, this recipe's never worked for me, what they might do is go back and check all those ingredients and say, "Well, maybe what I thought was a sincere heart isn't yet. Maybe what I thought was faith in Christ is undeveloped or lacking in some way. Maybe what I thought was real intent is actually not as real as I thought, not as authentic as I thought."
- 32:26 There are all kinds of reasons, psychological reasons or whatever else, where we might be hedging. There might be some part of us that doesn't want to know these things are true. When we know they're true, then our life is obligated. There are ways to live and things to do and consecrated futures for people who know. There might be all kinds of reasons that we are not even conscious of that. We might be sabotaging our own recipe. If we can work on that, patiently and persistently and diligently with asking for God's help, I think there's nobody who can't execute this recipe if that's what they really, really want. I believe the Lord will help them to do so.
- John Bytheway: 33:15 That's awesome. I love the Moroni 10:3: the read, remember, ponder how merciful the Lord has been since Adam. I've always felt like one of the fruits of that is gratitude. Maybe gratitude is one of the gateways to revelation. But that's excellent. That idea of "check the recipe and then check each ingredient."
- Hank Smith: 33:39 The very first time this recipe worked for me, I was just a young teenager, a ninth grader. My dad used to have this funny way of... If I'd call him for a ride, he always used to say, "Well, start walking." I don't know why. Maybe he wanted to save on gas. I don't know. The quarter mile I could walk. But one time, I asked him for a ride. I was over to friends. I said, "Can you come get me?" He said, "Sure. Start walking." I started walking. It was a 20-minute drive. I was going to have 20 minutes to walk by myself. That was one of the times where all the recipe... I can look back now. Not at the time. I wouldn't have said I have every piece in place. But I can look back and go, "I was sincere because I wasn't just curious." I was really pondering some things. Really wanted to know. My intentions were correct. If God gives you this answer, what do you intend to do with it? What is the word Moroni uses? Intentions? Sincere?
- John Bytheway: 34:33 Your real intent.
- Hank Smith: 34:35 Real intent. Yeah. What are your intentions if you get this answer? My intentions were right on. I intend to do everything that comes with my answer because, oftentimes, we want the

answer without the responsibility that comes with the answer. I still remember that day. I've had thousands of experiences like it since then. But that was like a lightning out of a summer storm. It came from heaven and really jolted my soul in a way that was powerful and beautiful and electrifying and something I did not create on my own because I remember going home that night saying, "Let's do that again. I really like that experience. Let's do that again." It didn't happen again. I couldn't force it. I couldn't make it happen. But there was a time where almost like the stars aligned, planets aligned. The recipe was there. The recipe works.

Dr. Steven Harper: 35:24

The recipe works.

John Bytheway: 35:25

I just really like what Steve has said here. There's maybe so many out there that are expecting a testimony in a way. I just think we don't know how the Lord's going to tell us. I feel like I've expected feelings sometimes. Instead, I've had experiences that took months. Then, I could look back and say, "Wow! I was being guided back then. I didn't even know it at the time." I wanted the feeling. But I got an experience or maybe I wanted an experience, and I got a feeling. We're responsible for putting in our place where we can learn, and then sometimes we leave it to the Lord how he's going to answer us, I think. It may be a fourth-watch type of thing, which I'm sure we'll cover. It won't come when we expect, or maybe even in the way we expect. But if we follow the recipe, we put ourselves in a place that He can talk to us however He's going to do that. I just hope people will be patient in putting themselves in that good place and continuing God.

Hank Smith: 36:26

When you do have experiences, write them down. I have found that the Lord seems much more willing to grant me these experiences if I write them down and share them at appropriate times. Joseph seemed to do that, too, right, Steve? He wrote them down.

Dr. Steven Harper: 36:40

He felt the same lament. He had a dilemma. He knew these things needed to be recorded. But he felt like he was terrible at doing it and not adequate to it. Not like Moroni felt and others. But he did get them recorded, thankfully. We have them today. There are some folks who are listening to us who are struggling with depression or something. They would give anything to feel the Holy Spirit of God. For whatever reason, it's just not happening. I hope they'll hear you, John, and that they'll continue in God. That's a willful, intentional, faithful thing to do, to battle through that and say, "I don't feel anything right now. But I'm going to keep on continuing in God even so. I trust that

He will compensate that, and the day will come, and they will feel everything they've longed for and in good measure running over."

- Hank Smith: 37:33 Yeah. Joseph said the darkness that surrounded him... It seemed to him for a time that he was doomed. You get that feeling, I think, from those who struggle with not feeling like, "Am I ever going to get out of this darkness?" What did he do? He continued to call upon God. "I just continued to call upon God to deliver me. Eventually, the light came."
- Dr. Steven Harper: 37:57 That's a good example. It was an actual enemy from the unseen world. For a lot of people in our families, the people we love, sometimes ourselves, this is a real enemy. It's not imaginary. It really exists unseen as it is. The Lord will see us through that, too, if we'll keep at it.
- Hank Smith: 38:17 But hold on. Hold on.
- John Bytheway: 38:19 Steve, I love what you said at the beginning that the scriptures never command us to assume but to keep seeking and, wow, what a great insight. We can fill in the gaps with so many things of what we think it might be or what others have said it might be, but how important it is to seek for ourselves. I'm going to make a slide out of that for someone. The scriptures never tell us to assume. Well, just put your own answers in there. No.
- Hank Smith: 38:50 A little bit of we all don't line up exactly is okay.
- John Bytheway: 38:53 It makes you ask the question, "What should I do then?" Perfect.
- Hank Smith: 38:57 Sometimes I worry if my wife and I are not perfectly aligned on everything. But now, I'm like, "That's probably okay for our kids to see that we're not," as long as we don't behave badly as you said because of it.
- John Bytheway: 39:10 You still have a cat, right, Hank?
- Hank Smith: 39:12 Yeah. We still have cats, even though... Oh, goodness. Don't start. Wow! What a great day! We have had our first lesson from the New Testament year. Thank you, Dr. Harper, for being with us. It's just been a treat.
- Dr. Steven Harper: 39:29 Yeah. Thank you, gentlemen. It's good to be with you again.

Hank Smith: 39:32 We want to thank Dr. Steve Harper, as I said, for being with us. We want to thank our executive producer Shannon Sorensen. We want to thank our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen, and, of course, recognize our founder, the late Steve Sorensen. We hope all of you will join us next week as we jump into the New Testament on FollowHIM.

39:54 We have an amazing production crew we want you to know about. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Jamie Nielsen, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, and Ariel Cuadra. Thank you to our amazing production team.

HOW DO I GAIN MY OWN TESTIMONY AND THEN KEEP IT?



- Hank Smith: 00:05 Hello my friends. Welcome to FollowHIM Favorites. If you've been following FollowHIM, for the last two years, you know that we do these little side tidbits called FollowHIM Favorites. It's where we take just a small portion of each week's lesson and talk about it, so we can post this on Instagram or Facebook, or wherever you get your little tidbits of social media.
- 00:27 John, this week's lesson is called, I Am Responsible For My Own Learning, or We Are Responsible For Our Own Learning. The question is, how do I gain and keep my own testimony? What would you say to someone who's maybe coming home off a mission and saying, "I've gained a testimony. How do I keep it?"
- John Bytheway: 00:45 Wow. I wish we had more time. Lots of thoughts come to mind. One of them is the parable of the sower. But I think the parable of the sower, that's the kind of soil you have. That's if your heart's open. But then you get to Alma and he plants the word and everybody knows after you plant a seed, are you done? No.
- Hank Smith: 01:03 Right. Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 01:04 Faith, diligence, and patience. I call it FDP fertilizer; faith, diligence, and patience. Alma says, "You got to take care of it." And he says, "If it doesn't grow, that's not because the seed wasn't good. It's because your ground is barren."
- 01:14 The analogy of riding a bicycle is a good one because once you know, just know how to ride a bike. You never have to think about it again and the testimony is not like that. It's like a tree. It's, use Jesus' example, and Alma's example. It's like something that you grow and to keep it, it has to keep being nurtured and watered, and getting the nutrients out of the ground. It's an active thing that you keep growing.
- 01:39 I love to use those metaphors that the scriptures use about keeping it growing. Faith, diligence, patience. What else would you say, Hank, is part of keeping it growing?

Hank Smith: 01:49 I like what you're saying here because sometimes we say, "Oh, I lost my testimony," as if I had it and I lost it. But you can't lose a tree. No one goes outside to a tree they planted a long time ago and goes out there and says, "Wow, where'd the tree go? I lost my tree. Someone took it," as if we're not the one to blame.

02:06 No, if we lose a testimony, really what we mean is I let it die. I didn't nurture it. I didn't water it. I didn't prune it. I didn't work on it at all. And the tree slowly, all by itself, of course if it's left alone, is going to die.

02:19 I remember James Faust talking about taking a white hot coal out of a fire. If you were to take a hot coal out of a fire, it doesn't take long for that coal to cool off and become just a piece of charcoal. But he said, "If you take it and you put it right back in that fire, it actually doesn't take long for it to heat right back up again." So part of what we're saying here, I think is to stay involved and to be where you're supposed to be. Stay reading and praying and going to your meetings. These are simple answers, but they really are the truth to gaining and keeping a testimony, is staying active in that testimony.

John Bytheway: 02:57 That's the FDP that Alma talks about. Because of your faith, your diligence, and your patience, it'll grow and it'll become a tree of life. It'll be a tree in you and even says tree of life, which I think is the fourth part of the metaphor, is Lehi's dream. You'll be able to constantly enjoy the fruit of it, but you have to take care of it. And it's a wonderful process because Hank, as you and I have learned, and I'm so thankful for this, we get to taste things we have never tasted every time we get together and interview somebody and go, "Wow. I never thought of that." My testimony just whoop a little line upon line thing. It just grew a little bit.

03:34 And so you're where you're supposed to be but I think if you wanted to put all that under one heading, be where the Holy Ghost is. Be in places where the Holy Ghost is and you'll be taught. That's that fire of the coals.

Hank Smith: 03:46 If I was going to talk to anybody who said, "How do I get a testimony and keep it?" I'd say, you follow the example of Joseph Smith, in that you work hard for it. You go to your meetings. He read scripture. He prayed. He pondered. He did all these things and it wasn't just a short while. He did them for a long time. Then, when he had his experiences, he didn't deny ever having those experiences and he didn't let anybody ever take them away from him saying, "Well, that didn't really happen to you." He said, "No, it did happen. I knew it. I knew

that God knew it and I couldn't deny it." And then he stayed active in the church in the gospel. He was constantly daily, working for the Lord, doing the Lord's work and his testimony remained strong until the day he died. There's something about his example that if you want to know how to get and keep a testimony, you follow the example of the prophet.

- John Bytheway: 04:34 I think when I was a bishop, I'd have people, "Oh, I'm struggling with my faith or with this," and we would just start to write down. We'd go and write it on a chalkboard. What are some things that you feel like you do know?
- 04:45 Well, I know I feel better when I do better. Ooh, write that down. What else do you...? Tell me an example of that? What else do you know? Well, I know the scriptures are different than other books. Really? You got a favorite verse? Let's write that down. And what else do you know?
- 04:59 Well, I know that God answers prayers. How do you know that? And we'd write that to tell each other experiences and amazing how the spirit would change and it's kind of like that hymn, Count Your Blessings, it will surprise you what the Lord has done. You start talking about all the things that you do know, it'll surprise you. But you write them down like you just said and it kind of reminds you. And you're saying, "Wait a minute, I do know this." I think that's why we keep a journal.
- 05:25 President Eyring says, "Document the hand of God in your life and then you've got it forever." And if you ever feel like you're not strong, go back and read that and remind yourself, "Wait a minute. I really have felt this." And that's I think what you just said Joseph said. I knew it. I knew that God knew it.
- Hank Smith: 05:44 And something else just to add is in the world of, it's someone else's fault. Just realize I love the heading of this week is, I am responsible for my own testimony. I work out my own salvation with God. It's not up to my parents. It's not up to the church. It's not up to my leaders. I shouldn't have the expectation that someone else is going to give me my testimony. I should have the expectation that I have to get it myself, that this is between me and the Lord, and he wants to talk to me personally.
- John Bytheway: 06:14 Yeah. Last general conference. Take charge of your own testimony. Elder Ballard or President Ballard, repeated President Nelson saying, "Take charge of your own testimony." So it's a good way to do it. You can't ask somebody else to give that to you. You got to take charge.

Hank Smith:

06:29

Well, we hope you'll join us for our full podcast. It's called FollowHIM. We're interviewing Dr. Steven Harper this week and you're going to love everything he has to share and then come back next week and join us for another FollowHIM Favorites.