

Anchored in the Scriptures

Fall 2005 Open House

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Primary General President

I am so grateful to be here today with all of you wonderful Primary leaders. I am so grateful for the work you are doing to bless the lives of our Heavenly Father's children. I am grateful for your faithfulness and commitment. We are all on the Lord's errand. I pray that as we visit together today the Spirit will be here to teach us, each of us individually, deep in our hearts, the things that He would have us do. You will receive a copy of this talk as you leave this meeting. So, might I suggest that the things you write down today be those impressions you receive from the Spirit—impressions of things you can do in your own lives and in your service in the kingdom of our Heavenly Father.

When I was called to be the Primary general president, one of the things President Hinckley said to me was, "Sister Lant, there are a lot of children in this world, and we would like you to take care of them. Do you think you could do that?"

I'm sure I don't need to tell you how I felt. First, to be in the presence of the First Presidency, and particularly the prophet, was awe inspiring. Second, to receive such a call to serve was overwhelming. But the thing that struck me was his question: "Do you think you could do that?" The greatest desire of my heart was to do just as I was asked. I love children. My whole life has been dedicated to helping them learn and grow. And I love the prophet. I want to do all that he asks of me. But that was a very hard question. Did I think I could do it? I think he could see in my face my willingness but also my concern because next he said something very important for me to hear, for all of us to hear. He said, "There is a lot of work to do. But you just have to work at it."

I responded that I would dedicate my life to the work. I would give it all I have. However, on the way home, through my tears, I confided some of my fears to my husband. The first question in my heart was, how in the world was I ever going to fulfill this sacred call? My husband was very reassuring. He just looked over at me and said, "You can't!" But then he added, "Only with the Lord's help will you be able to do this."

I knew in my heart this was true. And so I began seeking diligently for the Lord's loving guidance. I have sought His guidance in prayer, through priesthood blessings, through study, through counseling with my priesthood leaders, and by working with my wonderful counselors. I began by going to work.

One of the first assignments I had was to travel to Africa to do Primary training. It was on this trip that I gained an understanding of President Hinckley's phrase, "children of the world." Before leaving, I felt some anxiety about what I would see there. Would I be able to stand seeing how they live? But what I saw were beautiful children everywhere I went. Some were members of the Church, gathering with family in chapels, in Primary rooms, and in homes. Some were children of the street—small, orphaned children carrying even smaller children tied on their backs, begging for money. Some were hungry, while some were loved and cared for. All of them lived in conditions we cannot even imagine. And all of them had sweet, gentle, happy spirits.

They seemed content with the life they had. I realized that all of them are children of our Father in Heaven. He knows and He loves each of them. He loves them because they are His children. Each one is of great eternal worth, and President Hinckley had asked me to take care of them.

It was also on this trip that I realized there are many ways that Heavenly Father brings about His work. Yes, I had been given the assignment to serve the children. Yes, I felt the help and guidance of the Spirit. But there was more. I realized that I didn't have to do the work alone—there are many faithful, dedicated hands and hearts working shoulder to shoulder to take care of His children. There are hands and hearts working and caring in Africa. There are hands and hearts here, doing the work of Primary, blessing the lives of the children.

The next question in my heart was, what would the Lord have us teach the children? I am so grateful for the Primary program that has been so beautifully created by the previous Primary general presidencies and boards. Many long hours have been spent as these wonderful women have sought the Spirit and done the work to bless the lives of the children. As a result, we have wonderful materials that teach children the truths of the gospel.

The work we do in Primary today is centered in our theme: “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”¹ Today's children are strong and they are capable. I testify that this is true. In fact, at times it seems to me that as we teach children, we are only reminding them of things they already know.

This very strength, however, is challenged in today's world. These children are surrounded by unprecedented influences of evil. Some of them have strong families to teach and guide them. Some do not. Satan knows of the strength of these children, and he wants to have them. He would do anything to have them. While we have a large percentage of children who attend Primary each week, there is a significant decrease in the percentage of youth who attend Aaronic Priesthood or Young Women meetings. This drop in attendance is terribly alarming. Something must be done to keep these children. Somehow, in Primary, we must build a strong enough foundation for them that they will not stray from the gospel in their youth or at any time in their lives. In Proverbs we are taught to “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”²

We must help each child develop his or her own testimony. Somehow, we need to do more to spiritually capture and strengthen the children in Primary so that we can deliver them safely into the hands of the youth leaders with strong testimonies deep in their hearts. So I ask, how can we as Primary leaders fulfill this great stewardship?

My counselors and I have spent many long hours praying and searching to know where we should begin. I want to testify that answers unfold as we seek to know the will of the Father. Most often it comes slowly, one step at a time. Let me share some of the things we have learned.

We began by turning to the scriptures. In John we read, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”³ And in 2 Nephi, “For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children.”⁴

As we studied and prayed, more began to unfold. The August 2005 *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines focus almost entirely on the scriptures. The First Presidency message extends an invitation to all members to read the Book of Mormon by the end of the year. President Hinckley promises all those who read the Book of Mormon that “there will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God.”⁵ This same invitation appeared in the July 30, 2005, *Church News* and in a letter from the First Presidency that was read over the pulpit in every ward and branch in the Church.

All of our Primary program materials are centered in the scriptures. The Primary manuals are based on books of scripture. The *Faith in God* guidebooks take the children into the scriptures. The theme for the *2006 Outline for Sharing Time and the Children’s Sacrament Meeting Presentation* is “I Will Trust in Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ—Their Promises Are Sure” and is based on God’s promises to His children as recorded in the scriptures. The *Children’s Songbook* has scripture references for each song.

Bit by bit, the pieces fell into place. Through our studies we realized that the way to strengthen the children is to help them become anchored in the scriptures. The scriptures contain the word of God. As we read the scriptures, we learn to love them. We learn to love the Lord. We learn what He would have us do.

First we must become anchored ourselves. We begin by accepting the request from our prophet to read the Book of Mormon before the end of this year. As we read and then pray to have a testimony of the gospel message found in the scriptures, we will feel a great love for the scriptures swell in our hearts. We will then be able to teach the children from the scriptures and bear witness through the Spirit that the things we teach are true. The prophet has asked us to do this. Have you committed yourself to do this? Perhaps you have but find it difficult to be consistent in keeping this commitment. President Hinckley said: “You may think you are too busy. Ten or fifteen minutes a day with the scriptures, and particularly with the Book of Mormon, can give you marvelous understanding to the great eternal truths which have been preserved by the power of the Almighty for the blessing of His Children.”⁶

Believe me, I understand being busy. I understand how hard adding even simple things to a busy schedule can seem. If you are like me, you have read 1 Nephi so many more times than any other part of the Book of Mormon because you have started over so many times during your life. But as Sister Beck, the first counselor in the Young Women’s general presidency said in a recent talk at the Provo Missionary Training Center, “It’s OK if it’s hard. We can do hard things. We receive strength through our covenants.”⁷ Think about that for a moment. We have covenanted to take upon ourselves the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. How can we do that if we do not know Him, if we do not follow His example? How can we do these things if we do not read the scriptures regularly? I believe I know what the desires of your hearts are. I also know we can complete reading the Book of Mormon as we follow the counsel President Hinckley gave me when I was called: “Just work at it.”

Of course, as we study the scriptures, we must follow the invitation found in Moroni 10:4–5:

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if

ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

“And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”

A young boy had been studying the scriptures regularly with his family. Each day they would read a few verses. One day they read this invitation in Moroni 10. At the end of scripture study, his father asked him to offer the family prayer. His prayer began in the same way all his prayers began, but then he said something different, something that made his family really listen. He said, “Heavenly Father, is the Book of Mormon true?” There was a long pause—long enough that the father wondered if he needed to help his son finish. Then the boy simply said, “Thank you Heavenly Father. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

The whole family felt the Spirit rest upon them with a strong witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

By this same means, we can know that the scriptures are true.

We will have a deep witness borne to our hearts about the principles we are to teach the children if we anchor ourselves in the scriptures through study and prayer and if, in addition, as we prepare our Primary lessons and material, we study the scripture references found in our Primary lesson manuals, *Faith in God* guidebooks, outline for sharing time, and *Children’s Songbook*. We will then be able to teach and to testify with great conviction and spirit. Then, as we take the children into their own scriptures to find these same references, the Spirit will be able to testify to them of the truthfulness of the words of God. The principles of the gospel are plain, simple, and true. They will ring true in the hearts of the children, and the children will be able to make them their own.

Let’s see how this might work. Let’s look at the 2006 outline for sharing time. In the month of August our theme is, “As I follow the direction and righteous examples given in the scriptures, the Lord promises me rich blessings.” The scripture for the month is, “And now, . . . I would that ye should remember to search [the scriptures] diligently, that ye may profit thereby; . . . according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers.”⁸ And the song we are to learn is “Search, Ponder, and Pray” from the *Children’s Songbook*. This particular song is a beautiful message about loving to read the scriptures. Notice that there are scripture references at the bottom right corner of the page in the *Children’s Songbook*. Let’s turn to our scriptures and read them together before we sing the song.

- **2 Nephi 4:15**

“For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them.”

- **Mosiah 1:6–7**

“O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true.

“. . . I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby.”

- **Moroni 10:4–5**

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

“And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”

Could we sing this song together? And as we do, think of how much more meaningful these words are because of the scriptures we just read.

I love to read the holy scriptures,
And, ev’ry time I do,
I feel the Spirit start to grow within my heart—
A testimony that they’re true.

Search, ponder, and pray
Are the things that I must do.
The Spirit will guide, and, deep inside,
I’ll know the scriptures are true.

So, prayerfully I’ll read the scriptures
Each day my whole life through.
I’ll come to understand. I’ll heed the Lord’s command
And live as he would have me do.

Search, ponder, and pray
Are the things that I must do.
The Spirit will guide, and, deep inside,
I’ll know the scriptures are true.⁹

Another example of using the scriptures with our Primary materials is in the *Faith in God* guidebooks. Let’s look at “My Baptismal Covenant” on page 2. Let’s read it together:

“When I was baptized I made a covenant to take upon me the name of Jesus Christ and to serve Him and be obedient.

“Heavenly Father has given me the Holy Ghost.

“Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, I can be forgiven of my sins when I repent.

“If I keep my baptismal covenant, I can return to live with Him.

“When I take the sacrament, I renew my covenant to take upon me the name of Jesus Christ, to always remember Him, and to obey His commandments.

“When I do this, I can feel the Holy Ghost guiding me.”¹⁰

Now let’s turn to the scripture reference at the bottom of page 3.

- **Mosiah 18:8–10**

“And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light;

“Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

“Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you.”

Let’s continue with verse eleven:

“And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts.”

Reading these scriptures, along with the *Faith in God* guidebooks, opens up a whole new area for discussion and understanding. We could talk about what we can *do* in our own lives to keep this covenant. We could also talk about how it feels when we live this covenant. Reading from the scriptures will also help the children gain a personal commitment about baptism.

Please invite the children to bring their scriptures to Primary every Sunday. Then be sure to use them as you teach. Take the children into their scriptures. Have them read the scriptures aloud to one another. Have them underline them. Help them memorize them. Have them discuss them. Let them bear testimony of the truths they are learning during your discussion in class or when they are giving talks in Primary, whether during sharing time or opening exercises. Let them hear your testimony as well. These testimonies can be heard in both word and song.

This process of teaching from the scriptures need not be dry or boring. Engage the children in interesting and challenging ways. If we are excited about our scriptures, if we love to read them, if we pray about them, the Spirit will help us know how to do this. It will also be important to adjust how we teach from the scriptures according to the age of the children we are teaching. For very young children we can still go to the scriptures to look for specific words or read just a very small part of a scripture. But the children will love having the books in their hands, if only briefly. They will love the scripture stories and songs. They will love to look at the beautiful pictures from the “Gospel Art Picture Kit” as we tell them scripture stories and draw the

principles of the gospel from them. They can even memorize short phrases from the scriptures. They will feel the Spirit radiating from the scriptures. They will know the scriptures are true.

As we anchor ourselves in the scriptures, it will be important to “liken” the scriptures to our own lives. We can do this personally, and we can help the children do this. When Nephi was teaching his people the words of Isaiah, he said, “For I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning.”¹¹

As we help the children relate the scriptures to themselves and apply them to the things they do in their everyday lives, they will be strengthened. The principles we teach will no longer be things that we as their leaders and teachers are just telling them to do. Rather, with our help, the children will discover principles for themselves directly from the scriptures. They will be able to internalize these principles and make their own commitments to live close to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. These commitments can be lifelong.

We can see an example of this by looking again at our 2006 outline for sharing time. Let’s go once more to the month of August. One of the weekly themes is, “I can be faithful like the stripling warriors.” By turning to the reference in *Primary 4*, lesson 27, we find a whole series of questions that can be answered by searching the scriptures. Follow-up questions then help children “liken” the principles taught unto themselves. Let’s do the first one together.

- **What covenant had the parents of the two thousand young warriors made? (Alma 53:10–12)**

“And now behold, I have somewhat to say concerning the people of Ammon, who, in the beginning, were Lamanites; but by Ammon and his brethren, or rather by the power and word of God, they had been converted unto the Lord; and they had been brought down into the land of Zarahemla, and had ever since been protected by the Nephites.

“And because of their oath they had been kept from taking up arms against their bretheren; for they had taken an oath that they never would shed blood more; and according to their oath they would have perished; yea, they would have suffered themselves to have fallen into the hands of their brethren, had it not been for the pity and the exceeding love which Ammon and his brethren had had for them.

“And for this cause they were brought down into the land of Zarahemla; and they ever had been protected by the Nephites.”

- **Why did they think about breaking this covenant? (Alma 53:13)**

“But it came to pass that when they saw the danger, and the many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them, they were moved with compassion and were desirous to take up arms in the defense of their country.”

- **Why did Helaman not want the Anti-Nephi-Lehies to help fight the Lamanites? (Alma 53:14–15)**

“But behold, as they were about to take their weapons of war, they were overpowered by the persuasions of Helaman and his brethren, for they were about to break the oath which they had made.

“And Helaman feared lest by so doing they should lose their souls; therefore all those who had entered into this covenant were compelled to behold their brethren wade through their afflictions, in their dangerous circumstances at this time.”

And then comes this final question:

- **Why is it so important to keep our covenants?**

This last question could easily lead you into a discussion of the covenants children make when they are baptized and why and how they can keep them.

In this turbulent world, where all of us are pulled to and fro, let us become anchored in the scriptures. Let us anchor the children in the scriptures. I know that they contain the word of God. I know that they carry the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. I know that they are a precious gift from our Father in Heaven. I know that as we immerse ourselves in them, we will truly see and feel the rich blessings of the Lord in our own lives and in the lives of the children in our care.

As a presidency, we invite you to help the children to become anchored in the scriptures. By so doing, we will be able to accomplish our goal: “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”¹²

I know that God lives. Jesus Christ is His son and my Savior. This is His true Church upon the earth today, and we are led by a prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley. I know that the scriptures contain the words of eternal life. And I know that the Holy Spirit testifies of the truth of these things. May the Lord bless you as you go forward to bless His children. May you feel the peace and the joy we are promised. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ 3 Nephi 22:13.

² Proverbs 22:6.

³ John 5:39.

⁴ 2 Nephi 4:15.

⁵ “A Testimony Vibrant and True,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2005, 6.

⁶ “Rise to the Stature of the Divine within You,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 97.

⁷ Relief Society meeting at the Missionary Training Center.

⁸ Mosiah 1:7.

⁹ “Search, Ponder and Pray,” *Children’s Songbook*, 109.

¹⁰ *Faith in God* guidebooks [2003], 2–3.

¹¹ 1 Nephi 19:23.

¹² 3 Nephi 22:13.