

Sacred Scriptures—the Foundations of Faith

By Elder Quentin L. Cook
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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We cannot underestimate the significance of sacred scriptures both in conversions and in remaining faithful in the gospel. Empty

My wife, Mary, and I recently saw a T-shirt with the picture of a book and a message on the front which read, “Books: The Original Handheld Device.” Empty

I thought about this interesting message and how significant handheld devices of all kinds have become. Upon further contemplation, I realized that any device or even one equipped with artificial intelligence will never be as important or significant as the spiritual guidance that comes from divine revelation.

Whether handheld or digital, the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ provide spiritual guidance and teaching from Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. We treasure these books for their profound role in documenting God’s direction to ancient prophets and people and the guidance they provide for our own personal lives.

Combined with the teachings of living prophets, these sacred scriptures provide doctrinal direction for us in today’s world. These scriptures are most powerful when they give instruction, correction, comfort, and consolation to individuals and families who seek guidance from the Lord.

The scriptures, combined with spiritual inspiration from the Holy Spirit, continue to be the primary source that facilitates the conversion of those who have broken hearts and contrite spirit—and desire to follow Jesus Christ. The scriptures help build a foundation that can withstand the adversary’s constant efforts to undermine faith.

New converts have blessed and been the lifeblood of the Church throughout its history. One example is particularly precious to me. When I was a young bishop, two marvelous sister missionaries were teaching the William Edward Mussman family. The father, a very capable lawyer, was general counsel of a major corporation. His devoted wife, Janet, was helping the family strive to live a more Christlike life.

Their exceptional son and daughter, both in their early 20s, were also being taught. All four had received the lessons and were attending church. The sister missionaries had emphasized reading the Book of Mormon and praying for a testimony of that sacred scripture. Remarkably, the family prayerfully read the entire Book of Mormon in a short time.

The stake missionaries, both of whom were prior ward Relief Society presidents, accompanied them to sacrament meetings.

As the family was nearing baptism, they received a barrage of literature critical of the Church. This was before the internet, but the material filled a large cardboard box.

The sister missionaries invited me as a recently called 34-year-old bishop to help answer the questions being raised. When we gathered in their living room, the large box of pamphlets critical of the Church was in the middle of the room. I had prayerfully approached this assignment. During the opening prayer, the Spirit whispered to me, "He already knows it is true." This was important. The sisters believed that the rest of the family already had a testimony. They were unsure about the father.

I immediately informed him that the Spirit had prompted me that he already had a testimony. "Was that true?" He looked at me intently and said that the Spirit had confirmed the truth of the Book of Mormon and the Church to him.

I then asked whether it would be necessary to review the pamphlets, if they already had a spiritual confirmation.

The father replied that it would not be necessary. The rest of the family concurred with his answer.

He said he did have a significant question: One reason they had received so much literature opposing the Church was that they were members of another faith. In addition, he had made a large pledge to help build a new chapel for that faith. He informed me that the sister missionaries

had taught him about the importance of tithing, which he gratefully accepted, but he wondered if it would be wrong to also honor the pledge he had previously made. I assured him that payment of the pledge would be both honorable and appropriate.

The Mussmans with their son, daughter-in-law, and daughter.

The entire family was baptized. One year later they were sealed as a family in the Oakland California Temple. I was privileged to be present. The son completed law school, passed the California Bar Exam, and immediately served a faithful mission in Japan. I have watched over the years as the succeeding generations have remained faithful to the gospel. I was privileged to officiate at the sealing of one of the granddaughters.

The conversions that are occurring in our day are equally remarkable. Last June, Coach Andy Reid, head football coach of the Kansas City Chiefs, and I, along with others representing our faith and other faiths, spoke in a multifaith event at the Riverside Church in New York City. Coach Reid emphasized second chances and responding to invitations and opportunities, which is what the gospel of Jesus Christ is all about. The next morning, with our wives, Tammy Reid and Mary, we attended the sacrament meeting at the Manhattan Second Ward. It was a spiritual service. There were many new converts in the congregation. Five recently baptized members, four men and one young man, were among the Aaronic Priesthood members passing the sacrament. I am happy to report that a similar influx of new members is happening throughout the Church.

We are grateful for the noticeable increase in those who respond to sacred invitations, change their lives, and accept the opportunity to follow Jesus Christ. They enter the covenant path through faith, repentance, baptism, and confirmation as taught in the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon.

We cannot underestimate the significance of sacred scriptures both in conversions and in remaining faithful in the gospel. The ancient prophets described in the Book of Mormon knew about the mission of Jesus Christ and taught His gospel. The Book of Mormon helps us draw closer to God as we learn, understand, and apply its teachings. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught,

“A man [or woman] would get nearer to God by abiding by [the book’s] precepts, than by any other book.”

To know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, we need to read, ponder, and pray about it and then act according to its precepts. The prophet Moroni promised that God will reveal the truth of the book to us as we pray with a sincere heart, with real intent, and with faith in Christ. Studying the Book of Mormon is essential for enduring conversion.

As we contemplate the relationship between the Bible and the Book of Mormon as handheld devices, one might ask a question. How useful and complementary do you think two books would be if the Lord declared they would be joined together and “become one in thine hand”? That is what the Lord declared concerning the “stick of Judah,” the Bible, and the “stick of Joseph,” the Book of Mormon.

In many significant respects, the Book of Mormon provides fundamental doctrine that enhances and builds upon the Bible. The doctrine of the Atonement of Jesus Christ is a profound example.

The Bible provides an accurate account of the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ, including His death and Resurrection. The Book of Mormon is more explicit about the Atonement of Jesus Christ, something prophets explained in detail prior to His death.

The heading to Alma chapter 42 reflects the doctrinal significance of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

It reads: “Mortality is a probationary time to enable man to repent and serve God—The Fall brought temporal and spiritual death upon all mankind—Redemption comes through repentance—God Himself atones for the sins of the world—Mercy is for those who repent—All others are subject to God’s justice—Mercy comes because of the Atonement—Only the truly penitent are saved.”

President Russell M. Nelson has said, “I promise that as you prayerfully study the Book of Mormon every day, you will make better decisions—every day.” He also promises that if “you daily immerse yourself in the Book of Mormon, you can be immunized against the evils of the day.”

As I mentioned, I was impressed with the concept of the original handheld device—a book.

However, I recognize the incredible significance of the internet in the world today. One modern handheld device can provide the information that historically has filled a major library. We are grateful to live in such a time as this. I am particularly grateful that it allows sacred books and Church materials to be available digitally. The internet is a powerful tool for studying the gospel. Today, many people share scriptures with friends using technology. The Book of Mormon app, for example, is a wonderful way to introduce friends to the Book of Mormon and can easily be shared in normal and natural ways wherever you may be.

While the internet provides many blessings, unfortunately, like the written pamphlets critical of the Church I described earlier, it has also been used to create doubt and undermine faith in precious gospel principles. It can be part of the “evils of the day” that President Nelson mentioned.

The adversary and those who assist him, knowingly or unwittingly, have created on the internet the equivalent of the box full of written material critical of the Church I described earlier, intended to draw you away from God’s truth.

The issues raised to create doubt over the years have been remarkably similar. This is especially true when you compare our day with the 1960s, when I was in my 20s.

The scriptures teach us to use judgment and be wise in all things. The internet can be used in a positive way or a destructive way.

Both long-term members and those newly studying the gospel need to be intentional about what they view. Do not entertain immoral, dishonest, or unrighteous material. If you do, algorithms can lead you down a path that destroys faith and impairs your eternal progression. You can be acted upon positively or negatively. Seek righteousness and avoid dark internet rabbit holes and doomscrolling. Fill your life with positive, righteous ideas; be joyful; have fun but avoid foolishness. There is a difference. The thirteenth article of faith is a marvelous guide. Above all, immerse yourself regularly in the Book of Mormon, which will draw the Spirit into your life and help you discern truth from error.

My counsel for those who have in any way deviated from the covenant path is to return to the sacred scriptures, prophetic guidance, religious observance in the home, and the music of faith. Every soul is precious to the Lord. We need

you! The Lord needs you, and you need Him!
You will always be welcome. During my many years of Church service, I have cherished the wonderful people who returned to the covenant path and then served and blessed everyone they loved or with whom they came in contact.

The sacred scriptures and living prophets are a major way a loving Heavenly Father makes His plan of happiness available to all His children.

I bear my sure witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ and the reality of His Atonement, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.