
TEACH YOUR STUDENTS TO FISH: HELPING STUDENTS PULL POWERFUL PRINCIPLES FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON

John Hilton III

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WHAT ARE PRINCIPLES?

Elder Richard G. Scott: Principles are “concentrated truth, packaged for application to a wide variety of circumstances. A true principle makes decisions clear even under the most confusing and compelling circumstances” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 117; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 86).

Elder Boyd K. Packer: “A principle is an enduring truth, a law, a rule you can adopt to guide you in making decisions. Generally principles are not spelled out in detail. That leaves you free to find your way with an enduring truth, a principle, as your anchor” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 22; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 17).

Examples: “Wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” (3 Nephi 13:33).

WHY ARE PRINCIPLES IMPORTANT?

Principles are important because they grow out of doctrine. This statement by Elder Boyd K. Packer is instructive: “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, 20; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 17).

“And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5).

WHY INVEST THE TIME TO TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO FIND PRINCIPLES ON THEIR OWN?

Commissioner Henry B. Eyring: “I think the very best way we can invite [students] to come unto him is to have them reading the scriptures far more than we can do in our classrooms, alone, by themselves” (address to CES area directors, 6 Apr. 1981, 11).

President Gordon B. Hinckley: “There is an old saying that if you give a man a fish, he will have a meal for a day. But if you teach him how to fish, he will eat for the remainder of his life” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 68; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 52). In this case: Give a student a spiritual lesson—feed him for a day. Teach him how to find his own spiritual lessons—feed him for a lifetime.

When our students learn how to find their own principles they will *want* to have personal scripture study, and consequently they will read the scriptures more than they currently read them.

HOW CAN WE FIND PRINCIPLES?

Some principles are easy to find because the scriptures highlight them with phrases like “thus we see” or “therefore.” Other principles, such as “ask, and ye shall receive,” are plainly written in the scriptures. Many other principles are there but are not so easy to find: we have to pull these principles out of the verses.

WHAT SHOULD WE TEACH OUR STUDENTS SO THEY CAN FIND PRINCIPLES ON THEIR OWN?

1. Teach Them to Read Between the Lines.

Elder Scott said, “Carefully separate [principles] from the detail used to explain them” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 117; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 86).

Examples: (There are several different principles that could be pulled out of these verses.)

“And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14).

Principle: Everything we do as seminary and institute teachers should point our students to Christ.

“And it came to pass that Amalickiah caused that one of his servants should administer poison *by degrees* to Lehonti, that he died” (Alma 47:18; italics added).

Principle: Satan can poison us spiritually “by degrees.”

“And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; *but we heeded them not*” (1 Nephi 8:33; italics added).

Principle: Don’t give in to peer pressure.

“And now as Moroni had supposed that there should be men sent to the city of Nephihah, to the assistance of the people to maintain that city, and knowing that it was *easier to keep the city from falling* into the hands of the Lamanites than to retake it from them, he supposed that they would easily maintain that city” (Alma 59:9; italics added).

Principle: It is easier to maintain good habits (such as scripture reading) than to get out of the habit and later try to resume the habit.

“But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me” (Alma 29:3).

Principle: We should be content with what the Lord gives us.

“The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it” (2 Nephi 13:9).

Principle: Sin is visible in a person’s countenance.

“Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was *no excuse for thee*, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted” (Alma 39:4; italics added).

Principle: It is not a valid excuse to say that everyone else is doing it.

“O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. *Do not endeavor to excuse yourself* in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God” (Alma 42:30; italics added).

Principle: Don’t make excuses.

2. Teach Them to Pause and Ask Questions.

Elder Russell M. Nelson taught that when reading the scriptures we should pause and ask, “What principle can be learned from these teachings of the Lord?” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 18). Questions like “What can I learn from this situation?” or “What is the author of this passage trying to teach?” often highlight a hidden principle.

3. Teach Them to Rewrite in Their Own Words the Principles They Find.

By rewriting principles, students will phrase them in a way that is meaningful to them. When students write the principles in their own words the principles become more tangible.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES USING PRINCIPLES

Search, analyze, apply, and other activities centered on principles will help your students learn how to find principles without your help.

Search

Write a principle on the board; students search for how it was obtained from the verse.

Example: I should be willing to leave all to follow the Lord.

Scripture reference: 1 Nephi 2:4

Write three principles on the board; students look for which ones are in the scripture block.

Example: (1) We prosper when we keep the commandments. (2) We should love our enemies. (3) We are blessed for our faith.

Scripture reference: 1 Nephi 2:19–21 (Only two of the three are actually found in these verses.)

Students look for their own principle.

Example: Direct students to 1 Nephi 3:6 to find a principle of obedience.

Students match principles to the verses they come from.

Example:

1. Jacob 2:2 a. Do what God says, even when it is hard.
2. Jacob 2:5 b. Don’t think that you are better than others.
3. Jacob 2:5 c. The Lord and His servants can know our thoughts (see D&C 6:16).
4. Jacob 2:10 d. We are responsible to magnify our callings.
5. Jacob 2:13 e. The word of God can heal us.

Analyze

- Ask students: What are some situations in which this principle would help you know what to do? Why is this principle meaningful to you? Why did _____ (Moroni, Nephi, etc.) want to teach us this principle?

- Develop a skit that shows a situation in which this principle could be applied.
- Have students fill in the following sentence using principles taught from a scripture block: “And thus we see . . .”

Apply

- Students ponder about the principles discussed.
- Ask a student to bear testimony about a particular principle.

Group Work

- Each student in a group reads a different scripture block, finding principles from the block. Students then share with other group members the principles they find.
- Have each group develop a skit that shows a situation where one of the principles from the scripture block could be applied. Each group then performs their skit.
- Assign each group a scripture block. Give them five minutes to prepare a presentation for the class where they read some of their verses and explain the principles they learned.
- Give each group a section of the newspaper and have them find an article that correlates with the principles discussed in class that day. Have the groups present their findings to the class.

Writing

- Ask students to make a list of the principles discussed that day.
- Have students pick one of the principles from the block and write about how it can help them in their lives.
- Students write a situation in which one of the principles from that lesson could help them. Read some of the situations, and have students decide which principle is applicable.
- Students write a fictional short story using the principles discussed. Ask a few students to read their stories.

Other Activities

- Have students summarize the principles from the lesson before ending class.
- Have each student tell you a principle from that day’s lesson as they walk out the door.

Conclusion

As we teach our students to “fish” for their own principles, scripture reading will become more exciting to them. When students learn to feed themselves from the scriptures, they will be more likely to have personal scripture study—something that will continue to help them even after they have forgotten the specific lessons that we taught.