

THE SCRIPTURE STUDY TOOLS: **A RESOURCE GUIDE**

1. FOCUS ON THE WORDS -- When we trace a word and its meaning across all the standard works, we learn all the nuances of meaning associated with its use. You will be amazed what great insights you will come up with by this relatively simple process. Learn to use the LDS.org scriptures and learn to use the search capabilities on that website. Once you get used to using this you will wonder how you ever got along without it!

2. FOCUS ON THE PATTERNS-- Get the lay of the land--an overview. Get an overall sense of the form of what you're reading. Note when something is a) poetry, b) a letter, c) narrative history, d) a sermon, e) chiasmus, f) a list, g) doctrinal explication, etc. Mentally cut the chapters into bite size sections, which can then be "digested" readily and remembered more easily. Which leads to:

3. ANNOTATING AND MARKING FOR MEMORY-- Don't be too dainty! Draw on your scriptures! Connect verses with arrows; make titles for sections as you discern them; number lists as you find them; record your personal insights. Your scriptures will then become a precious and personal record of what you have learned.

4. FOCUS ON THE GRAND DESIGN-- The LDS people have a certain advantage when it comes to studying scripture because they are always aware that there is an overall grand plan and design to God's dealings with His children. When you build a building you begin with a foundation and you deliberately and purposefully add additional elements according to the overall plan. Much in the Old Testament is foundational to understanding that plan and what will come in the New Testament. Always read with the Big Blueprint in mind. Which leads on to number 5:

5. FOCUS ON SHADOWS AND TYPES-- At every point there are hints, prophecies, and foreshadowings that suggest things to come, and there are also elements that hearken back to the overall plan which was laid "before the foundation of the world." Some things point forward; others hearken backward. Your enjoyment and understanding will be so much greater when you see these relationships that exist between small details (elements of the Mosaic law for instance) and the central role of our Savior in the Big Blueprint.

6. FOCUS ON THE PEOPLE-- In the scriptures are marvelous biographical sketches of real people. They are presented with great honesty, "warts and all", as we say. We should study and learn from the lives of these individuals.

7. FOCUS ON THE LANGUAGE-- Learn to appreciate and use the language of the Lord. As we become familiar with the scriptures, it will become more and more natural to think and speak and pray in the phrases we find there. One of the great gifts of the scriptures is that the language we find there can give greater power to our own prayers. (Ps 61:2 for example, "... my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Mark 9:24 "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!")

8. FOCUS ON THE THEMES-- Learn to pick out the "big ideas" with wide application that are treated in the scriptures. These are the things you remember from your literature classes: the nature of good and evil, redemption, human suffering, etc. There are also some themes peculiar to scripture, such as Zion vs. Babylon. As you read, think "What does this teach me about (name your theme) ?

9. FOCUS ON LIKENING-- The word 'likening', of course, comes from the well known scripture in 1 Nephi 19:23, " ...for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning." Here's one way of understanding this concept: Imagine you were reading a huge book on Food, including chapters on the history of agriculture, on food preparation, food and holidays, etc. No matter how long you pored over the pages of this book, it would not fill you up or provide fuel for your body. But now imagine that this was an enchanted book, and that you could actually reach through the pages and pull back out into your real world a peach or a sandwich and have it for lunch. That would be some book! Well, guess what. The scriptures are some books! We can liken things in them to ourselves, which is like pulling out of their pages a truth that we then apply to our own present time needs and situation, and this word of God will provide life giving nourishment and light to our own spiritual lives.

10. FOCUS ON FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE-- Scriptures often teach truth by comparing or rhetorically equating one thing with another. We are all familiar with Jesus being called "the Lamb of God" for example, to emphasize his innocence and purity, which the mental image of a lamb calls forth. The various figures of speech---metaphor, allegory, simile, etc, --will be studied in more depth as we come upon them in the text.

11. AFTER FOCUSING, PONDER-- After we have prayed for enlightenment, used our God-given brain power, and focused on the various elements we find in the word of God, it is time to do what the scriptures say and 'ponder' the things we have read. There is something powerful in mentally relaxing from the study mode and letting our minds just "be still and know" that God is God. Mary and Nephi were both said to have "pondered in their heart". It is often into such quiet moments that the still small voice comes.

We wish you well in your personal study of God's word. The authors can bear their personal testimony of the great worth of spending time in God's word. Too many Latter Day Saint women avoid personal scripture study because they think it must be done by a BYU professor, priesthood leader, seminary teacher, or some other expert in order to 'get it right.' It is our strong conviction that studying with too great an emphasis on discovering the official or correct interpretation of every scripture will only paralyze you. If you are to make your study a living relationship with the Living Author of the scriptures, you must believe that He will talk to you about your life through His word. You must also believe that a close and careful reading of the words of scripture themselves will produce your own insights that will be valuable and meaningful to you because you found them. Always relying on the insights of others will leave you as weak as if you always relied on the muscles of others to do your lifting. Flex your scripture muscles! You're gonna love this!