

Stake Conference Talk—June 28, 2015

by
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The scriptures are a gift, meant to live in our souls and flow through our veins. They are not just words on a page that we read in a casual way. The Lord desires us to eat, digest, become nourished by his words so our lives glow with His words and bless the lives of others. And President McConkie chose one of these scriptures for the basis of my talk today, without having any idea how pivotal that scripture has been in my life.

Proverbs 3:5-6 reads: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways, acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Let me show you this scripture's impact in the lives of three teachers who savored this scripture: a dear elderly friend Louise Lake (no relation), Suzan Lake, and the Savior.

I first met Louise Lake when I began teaching in California. She was a giant of a woman who had served a mission when most women didn't serve, married, had a daughter, contracted polio confining her to a wheel chair, was abandoned by her husband, and was left with no income. This scripture guided her life most literally. Time passed. I married, and Louise moved to Salt Lake in an apartment across from the temple so that she could easily serve. Her best friends were general authorities, and she lived and loved this scripture. (Hold up framed cross stitching.) Over 40 years ago, I cross stitched this scripture for her where it hung in her house until she died. Then, her daughter graciously gave it to me because Louise had inscribed on the back that I was to have it once again. That scripture speaks to me every time I pass by it in my living room. Louise's life and her heart were perfect examples of trust in the Lord. Her choices were always to serve the Lord—not from day to day, but from hour to hour. She taught me this lesson well.

I am the second teacher who relates to this scripture. At the beginning of my teaching career, I exemplified the second idea in this scripture: leaning to my own understanding. I can remember not wanting to look like a novice fool in class, so when a student would ask a question that I was completely clueless about, I would say, "John, would you look that up for us and report back on Tuesday?" I couldn't admit ignorance. Appearance overshadowed sincerity. The external mattered more than the internal. My heart needed educating. Over the years, I have come to understand that teaching is not just an academic experience, but moreover, a spiritual calling. My job was to center students in the principles of the gospel. So, I altered this scripture to read, "Trust in the Lord's principles of truth, righteousness, and obedience with all your hearts, and lean not to your own understanding." I couldn't preach the Lord directly, but I could exemplify to young people the discovery of profound meaning that accompanies the desire and seeking to find honesty in their pure hearts. Too much of education is about the grades in their eyes; they forget their own growth.

Teaching is not about subject matter. It's about igniting the hearts of those I teach through reading literature and writing about it. Let me share three examples of student writing that shows a shift from "leaning to their own understanding" to trusting in the Lord's principles of growth centered in the heart.

These first two written observations came from two girls, Mary and Emily

Mary: Fear is an internal battlefield where my heart and mind would collide. The battle is between my thoughts and my emotions Ever since my freshman year of high school started, a war of pain has been oscillating through me. The fight began three days before school started when my friend passed away. The fear and pain caused by this sudden loss began a war of overcoming embarrassment, rejection, awkwardness, and loneliness. I didn't want to be around anyone so I closed every entrance into my life and secluded myself from others.

Half way into my sophomore year, I decided that I was tired of being alone. I chose to face my fear of rejection and embarrassment, so I called Annie. Even though my thoughts were telling me I was dumb and that I couldn't handle the embarrassment I felt, I listened to my heart and that gave me the courage to face my fears. . . I am proud of myself for coming as far as I have.

Mary gave up appearance for truth.

Emily: I am crippled by my perfectionism. Every decision, including this paper, seems to overwhelm me to the point where I'm about as useful as a horse with hobbles. Give me a detailed task list, and I will dutifully check off every one of them no matter how difficult. But, give me the freedom to do it *my way*, and my anxiety level skyrockets, all of my abilities seem to shut down, and I freeze.

I made a painful realization last Wednesday. The reason I feel this anxiety is that I desire to please others and act accordingly. It is my greatest weakness, my Achilles heel. I've spent 18 years trying to master the art of reading my parents, and then proceeding with actions I believe will produce a positive response from them. I have no experience making my own decisions based on what *I* think is best and then living with the consequences. What a humbling conclusion to make. I wallowed in these emotions of regret, fear, and hopelessness for about an hour. Then I took a deep sigh, wiped away the last of my tears and resolved to begin anew. I refused to continue choosing to be someone molded by others only. It's time I begin living up to my potential. I know that this realization is the best impetus for growth I could possibly have right now.

Emily cast off self-deception for a pure heart.

Finally, a couple of months ago I received this letter from David, a former student:

David: Only an especially cocky nerd could stride from my desk to you the way I did to pick up my paper on John Donne's poetry. It was my first graded essay of your 11th grade English class, and I eagerly awaited its return, sure I would earn a glowing "A" with rave reviews, just as I had regularly done for some eleven years. What I found instead was a little half-sheet with your comments and a bunch of sub-scores that, when summed and added to my ten extra points for an early submission, gave me a whopping 64/100. What's more the paper itself was so thoroughly ravaged with that electric blue ink, I could have wrung the essay like a soaked rag and left a neon blue puddle on the floor.

Thus began my learning how to really write.

In all my years of schooling, you were the first teacher to call me on the carpet for empty pedantry and demand I present a coherent and well-reasoned thesis. You taught me to think and write lucidly and convincingly, and the skills I learned in doing so have formed an especially sturdy and essential portion of the academic foundation that has seen me through college, medical school, and six years of oncology. For so passionately and masterfully teaching me all this and so much besides, thank you.

David learned to trust in true principles and gave up leaning to his own understanding of himself.

The honesty of these students touched my heart. They were discovering trust in true principles and the growth that brought them.

Now I turn to the greatest teacher to give truth and light to the world. Spiritual sight depends on the internal purity of the heart, and Christ's heart was pure and purely centered on the Lord for every single minute he lived on the earth. Never did he "lean to his own understanding" through self-centered loneliness, guilt, regret, fear, anxiety, or despair. He spoke the words of his Father with clarity, truth, and power. Yes, Christ taught truths with his words, but even more forceful and deeply felt were his actions. Jesus Christ showed us how to know and trust in his Father's will by doing, daily performing that which the Father desired. He showed great empathy and kindness by healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the blind to see, forgiving sinners and valuing their worth, reaching out to those with heavy burdens, inviting them to cast these burdens on him. Never did Christ allow adversity to extinguish his open dedication to his Father and his principles. He suffered and endured it. He trusted in the Lord without giving in to human weakness. He chose to give his life to save us from spiritual death and obtain exaltation. He chose to present us with paths that lead to eternal happiness. He taught spiritual truth.

So we need to (2 Nephi 32:3) . . . feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

When, "In all our ways we acknowledge Him, and He shall direct our paths."

Open your hearts. Let yourselves be taught. Feel the love Christ has for you. He taught us the way, the truth, the life. He restored the keys through which we may go on to immortality and eternal life.

And the scripture invites us to "Trust in the Lord."

If we become half-hearted and "lean to our own understanding" by not "acknowledging him," he cannot direct our paths.

Today, take home with you your resolve to let your heart be so full of Christ's love that your behavior will reflect your understanding of trusting in the Lord. To help you feel the tangible power of Christ, listen to a dream that Elder Melvin J. Ballard, an apostle under President Heber J. Grant, experienced. Listen with your heart. Elder Ballard reports:

I found myself in that sacred building, the temple. After a season of prayer and rejoicing, I was informed that I should have the privilege of entering into one of those rooms to meet a glorious Personage, and, as I entered the door, I saw, seated on a raised platform, the most glorious Being my eyes have ever beheld. As I approached to be introduced, Christ arose and stepped towards me with extended arms, and he smiled as he softly spoke my name. If I shall live to be a million years old, I shall never forget that smile. He took me into his arms and kissed me, pressed me to his bosom and blessed me, until the marrow of my bones seemed to melt! When he had finished, I fell at his feet, and, as I bathed them with my tears and kisses, I saw the prints of the nails in the feet of the Redeemer of the world. The feeling that I had in the presence of him who hath all things in his hands, to have his love, his affection, and his blessing was such that if I ever can receive that of which I had but a foretaste, I would give all that I am, all that I ever hope to be, to feel what I then felt.

Imagine the joy Christ experiences when we give up leaning to our own understanding and fully, wholly trust in the Lord and allow him to direct our paths and help us to purify our hearts and actions with his love. Let this scripture live in your hearts and actions.

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." I pray for this most humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.