

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES FOR DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING

(revised 2016-08-09)

- The focus here is on tools that you can use for the rest of your life, not on specific examples.
  - Give a man a fish and feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and feed him for a lifetime.
  - Education is what you still know (how to fish) after you forget all the stuff you learned (fish).
- This handout does not comprehensively cover every scripture study tool out there. It does provide a conceptual framework for thinking about scripture study tools, and it covers enough to make you effective.
- Also see: LDS Gospel Library App > Lessons > Institute > Scripture Study: The Power of the Word.

### **1. Searching Is One Part of Reading the Scriptures**

#### **1.1. One of the Reasons for Scripture Reading is to Obtain Doctrinal Understanding**

- As best I can tell, three things should happen as we spend time in the scriptures, either in class or at home. In class we should additionally learn *how* to make these three things happen when we go back home.
  1. Testimony: *Read* to get a 15-30 minute daily dose of the Holy Ghost, like eating, exercising, or shaving;
  2. Doctrinal Understanding: *Study* to learn doctrines of general application as taught by the prophets; and
  3. Personal Application: *Read or study* to trigger promptings that apply to our personal lives.
- **Lesson:** There is a difference between a doctrine of general application and a prompting that may apply to your personal life but is not what the prophet was teaching.
  - Doctrines of General Application: Moses tells us in Genesis that Jacob worked seven years as agreed but then got the wrong bride. Perchik (Fiddler on the Roof) says the moral is “Never trust an employer.” This is a laugh line because we all know it is not the doctrine that Moses intended to teach.
  - Promptings for Personal Application: The story of Jacob might nevertheless trigger inspiration to Perchik about something that is true and important in his personal life, such as not trusting his current employer.
- **Strategy:** In addition to whatever I might read into a passage for myself (personal application), I consciously look for what the author actually intended to teach (doctrinal understanding). (2 Pet 1:20-21; 3:16).

#### **1.2. Doctrinal Understanding Requires Searching and Pondering**

- The general toolset for seeking understanding is: (1) search; (2) ponder; and (3) pray. (3 Ne 17:2-3; 23:1).
  1. Searching is lower order thinking: getting external information created by others into your head.
  2. Pondering is higher order thinking: analyzing and synthesizing things you know in order to create new information or understanding of your own.
  3. Prayer, and having your heart drawn out in prayer, seeks to supplement your natural abilities.
- Thinking comes in two modes. We switch back and forth between these two modes.
  1. Focused Mode is being highly attentive to something, such as playing a video game, working a math problem, or driving downtown in an unfamiliar city. Searching happens in focused mode.
  2. Diffuse Mode is letting your brain draw connections without close control. The extreme example is dreaming while you sleep, but you are also often in diffuse mode while wide awake. Although pondering happens in both modes, it may be helpful to think of pondering as making connections in diffuse mode.
- Always learn well enough to teach. Who says you have to wait for a teaching assignment to scare you into learning something well enough to teach it? Search, ponder, and pray even when learning only for yourself.

### 1.2.1. Searching

- Searching requires diligence. (3 Ne 23:1; D&C 88:118). It often takes thirty minutes before I start learning. And if you want to become proficient at something, there is no substitute for accumulated time on task.
- **General Strategy:** For decades I have spent 5-10% of my scripture study time not studying the scriptures, but thinking about *how* I study the scriptures and seeking smarter ways of searching. This is stopping to sharpen my axe so the remainder of my study time will be more efficient.
- **Strategy:** Use your brain and make notes when you study any important subject, including the scriptures. Make notes on paper or computer, and look at resources, just like studying a novel before a college exam. I occasionally spend scripture study time reviewing several notebooks and a computer subdirectory full of my old notes. I can relearn what I have forgotten much more quickly than I can figure out something new, and I am often pleasantly surprised at what I used to know.
- A major purpose of searching is to get things into your head so you can ponder them. Do not bother memorizing, just become as familiar with a passage as you are with the story of The Three Little Pigs.
- **Lesson:** I can recognize significant relations between concepts much more quickly when those relations actually exist, or when the concepts in my head really are linked to each other by significant relations.
  - **Strategies:** Parts 2.1 and 3.3 below explain specific strategies that can be used to identify chunks of text that are likely to be linked to each other by significant relations. These strategies greatly increase the efficiency with which I am then able, while pondering, to recognize those relations.

### 1.2.2. Pondering

- Much of pondering is looking for connections between the ideas in your head while the Holy Ghost guides and confirms. Feel free to brainstorm and reason until you finally stumble onto something the Holy Ghost can confirm.
  - Step back from the trees and look at the entire forest until you can see it as a well planned orchard.
  - Often my best pondering is while showering or driving down the highway, while *not* staring at the page with my brain in focused mode, but with my brain relaxed in diffuse mode.
- **Lesson:** I recognize the relations between concepts much more quickly when I already know the answer.
  - **Strategy:** Once I identify a group of concepts that are likely related to each other, I see if I can explain the relations between them with a framework that I have already used before. When this works, it increases the efficiency with which I can understand the relations among a new group of concepts. It also helps me to see concepts in broader or more generalized terms.
  - For example, a generalized relational framework I often use in my topical study is Head (beliefs), Heart (desires), and Hands (abilities). I first recognized this framework one evening before I went to bed while my brain was in diffuse mode. Over the next two hours I remained awake as every fifteen minutes or so I recognized how this framework also explained the relations among yet another group of concepts:
  - **Deliberate Action:** Lectures on Faith says faith is a principle of action because you would not act to plant in the spring unless you believed you would harvest in the fall. I see three principles or preconditions to deliberate action. You will not mow someone's lawn: (1) if your Head does not believe that you will get paid; or (2) if your Heart does not desire the offered payment more than it desires to go swimming; or (3) if your Hands lack the ability to mow because your mower is broken.
  - **Agency:** When (1) your Head has accurate information about the choices available to you; and (3) your Hands are at liberty to act upon those choices; then (2) you are free to pursue the desires of your Heart.

- Good Social Institutions: The Book of Mormon discusses two social institutions that protect agency: (1) the church provides your Head with accurate information about the nature of your choices; and (3) the state protects the liberty of your Hands to act upon those choices.
- Bad Social Institutions: Good institutions are opposed by: (1) anti-Christ's that seek to fill your Head with false information; and (3) secret combinations that seek to tie your Hands.
- Devil: Satan largely tries to: (1) fool the Head; (2) entice the Heart; and (3) force the Hands.
- Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit: (1) Fruits of the Spirit provide your Head with information by confirming truth, teaching, and bringing things to your remembrance; and (2) sanctify the desires of your Heart and provide it with motivation and comfort; while (3) Gifts of the Spirit, or miracles such as healings, supplement the natural abilities of your Hands.
- Faith, Hope, and Charity: (1) Faith is the Head's belief in the reality of the path that Lehi saw leading to the tree of life; and (1) Hope is the Head's belief that you are actually on that path and moving forward; while (2) Charity is the Heart's desire to reach out and help others join you on that path.
- Exaltation: (2) Only when your Heart is fully constrained by traits such as truth, justice, and mercy can you be entrusted with (3) unconstrained, omnipotent Hands; and (1) an unconstrained, omniscient Head.

## **2. Strategies for Searching Based on the Form of Communication: Universal Forms of Communication Based on Biology**

### **2.1. Cohesion, Relation, and Prominence**

- Linguists have identified several tools for reading a text that are based on how the human brain works. I think this one is both the single most important and the easiest to learn. It is also the foundation for Part 3.3 below.
- Cognitive Psychology tells us that the human brain has two kinds of memory:
  - Working Memory (WM) acquires new information, and it can process both new and old information to transform it. WM is very powerful, but capacity is limited to only a few items at once and to only a few seconds. Adding a new item to WM usually pushes out an old item, and WM fades very quickly.
  - Long Term Memory (LTM) simply stores information for retrieval. Huge capacity. Very long term. No processing power.
- Cognitive Psychology also tells us that, without consciously thinking about it, the human brain uses three strategies for getting information into LTM while working around the limitations of WM:
  1. **Cohesion:** We acquire information in small chunks and combine them into larger meta-chunks. We identify chunks and meta-chunks by looking for cohesion. In a narrative story or movie, a new chunk begins when there is a break in cohesion, or in unity of time, place, character, and action.
  2. **Relation:** We relate new chunks to old information that is already in LTM so the new information can be retrieved from LTM. WM quickly chunks and indexes new information before storing it in LTM.
  3. **Prominence:** Information that is perceived as important is held longer in WM, is processed more times while in WM, and is related to more concepts for better retrieval out of LTM.
- Psycho-Linguistics tells us that we learn through trial and error to rely on communication strategies that succeed, and to abandon communication strategies that fail, again without necessarily realizing.
  - **Lesson:** People learn unconsciously to speak in ways that accommodate WM by breaking up information into cohesive chunks, indicating how those chunks are related, and indicating what is important. That is why a well written essay uses paragraph breaks to indicate cohesion, transitions to explain the relations between paragraphs, and topic sentences that state key points in prominent locations.

- My dog can communicate in simple sentences (Go away. Feed me.). But most human communication involves concepts too big for single sentences. Most human communication is therefore organized hierarchically into larger meta-chunks as we combine sentences into paragraphs, paragraphs into chapters, and then into groups of chapters and books.
- **Strategy:** I spend a lot of energy looking for an author’s use of cohesion, relation, and prominence.
- **Strategy:** Cohesive chunks often do not follow the verse and chapter breaks in the scriptures, so I have pasted the standard works into my word processor where I can re-chunk the text and add headings.
- **Strategy:** Once I recognize a meta-chunk and the smaller chunks that comprise it, I get them into my head and ponder the relations between them as I drive or shower. This is when significant flashes of understanding most often come to me.
- **Lesson:** It is possible to understand every single sentence in a book, yet miss the author’s main point, if I do not understand how the train of thought develops from one chapter to the next.
- **Strategy:** I spend a lot of energy pondering the relations between the largest units of a text because I find that this is often the best key to understanding the author’s overall message.

### 3. Strategies for Searching Based on the Form of Communication:

#### Forms of Communication Based on Ancient Israelite Culture

**Lesson:** Nephi says we must learn “the manner of prophesying of the Jews” in order to fully understand the scriptures. (2 Ne 25:1-8). I am aware of three culturally-based communication strategies in ancient Israel that are often not learned in western society: (1) symbolism; (2) historical parallelism; and (3) literary parallelism. In each case we must first recognize *how* something is said in order to recognize *what* is being said.

#### 3.1. Symbolism

- **Lesson:** The Israelites frequently used symbols, metaphors, and allegories.
- In church we usually learn to recognize some major symbols: atonement; cleansing; shepherd, sheep, and lambs; temple; vineyard and fruit; mountain and temple; marriage supper of the bridegroom.
- Less familiar symbols common to the ancient Near East:
  - Oceans and other large untamed bodies of water: death, evil, chaos (Rom 6:3-5; Acts 27; Ether 6:5-11).
  - Air or wind: life, spirit, Holy Ghost (Gen 2:7; Acts 2:2-4; Ether 6:5-11).
  - Horses, chariots, sometimes locusts: armies, war, invasion (Isa 2:7; Joel 1:4-6).
- Numbers
  - 3: presidency or presiding
  - 4: all, as in the four winds, four corners of the earth, or four directions of the compass
  - 7, 70: completion, fulfillment, or perfection
  - 8: accountability
  - 40: preparation
- I usually interpret symbols in the broadest and least specific way possible. For example, the number 3 often stands for presidency, and in Revelation the number 6 stands for imperfection or evil. So I interpret the number 666 to simply stand for being evil and in charge. I do not care that the numerical values of the Hebrew letters in any particular individual’s name can be made to add up to 666. I just look for a type or a pattern that I can recognize and apply whenever I see it out in the world.

### 3.2. Historical Parallelism

- **Lesson:** The Israelites used past historical events as types or patterns for future historical events.
- Exodus Pattern: (1) leave a home of plenty and comfort but limited opportunities for growth; (2) mature through adversity; until (3) qualify for a promised inheritance. Examples: Moses, Lehi, LDS Pioneers, Adam & Eve leaving garden, all of us coming to mortality, kids going off to college.
- The Book of Mormon was written by four authors who each used a different prophetic device: Nephi (Isaiah), Jacob (Zenos), Mormon (Nephite history), Moroni (Jaredite history).
  - Nephi quoted Isaiah, who described the Israelite world: (a) Egypt; (b) Assyria; (c) Israel; (d) Babylon.
  - Mormon described an analogous Nephite world: (a) Nephites; (b) Lamanites; (c) church; (d) worldliness.
  - The Book of Mormon was written to the last days (Morm 8:34-35), and Isaiah's words "have been and shall be" (3 Ne 23:2-3), so look for parallels in the last days: (a) rich liberal democracies; (b) expansionist authoritarian states; (c) LDS church; (d) worldliness.
  - Nephi delighted in Isaiah. (2 Ne 11:2, 4-6). He was familiar with Isaiah's day (2 Ne 25:6), saw Nephite days and last days in vision (1 Ne 11-14), and thus could recognize the historical parallels.
  - In the last days we will likewise understand Isaiah. (2 Ne 25:7-8). We have records of Isaiah's day and Nephite days, we will see the last days, and thus we can likewise recognize the historical parallels and understand Isaiah.

### 3.3. Literary Parallelism

- While the communication strategies of cohesion, relation, and prominence are universal, they are often implemented in ways that vary from culture to culture.
- **Lesson:** The author's outline in Israelite scripture is often a patterned repetition of concepts, frequently in the form of assertions and analogies that our culture would not call logical proofs. This is the least familiar concept in this handout, and it will require time and effort to become proficient.
- When you read two passages as a pair, you can read them like an impressionist painting, focusing on the overall image rather than the individual brush strokes or words (see Isa 3:18-23 where you can understand the message without understanding every word). This is not always the best way to read, but often it is.
- There are four generalized patterns of repetition:
  1. aa - bb - cc - dd (**parallel lines** that rhyme content, just like couplets that rhyme sound) – Isa 2
  2. a - bcd - a (**inclusion** or *inclusio*) – D&C 121:34-40; 3 Ne 27:13-21
  3. abcd - abcd (**parallel lists**) – Amos 1-2; Luke-Acts
  4. abcd - dcba (inverted parallelism ">" or **chiasmus** "X") – Alma 36; Daniel
- Chiasmus is the ancient Jewish equivalent of the modern five paragraph essay.
  - Chiasmus identifies cohesion, relation, and prominence. It identifies where a unit of thought begins and ends, which parts are related to each other, and which parts are most important.
  - Main point is in the middle, next most important is edges, and middle and edges are often related.
  - In western culture we are used to comparing and contrasting stories and main characters. In chiasmus, blocks of text that are opposite each other in parallel positions should likewise be read as a pair.
  - Location within a chiasm matters. Why did the author say *this*? Why did the author say this *here*?
- The point is to understand the logic of the author's message, not to force square pegs into round holes. These patterns are only useful to the extent they help us understand what the author intended to say.

- Highlighting, cross-referencing, and ponderizing are often sufficient to unlock the meaning of a verse or short passage. But to unlock a chapter or a book, you must be able to follow the author’s train of thought from one passage or chapter to the next. You must understand the outline (or “literary structure”) of what the author has written. In other words, at the level of the chapter or book, you must understand *how* an ancient Jewish author says something in order to unlock *what* they are saying.
- Literary structure often reveals hidden questions that then become easy to answer. In 1 Ne 3-4 (>4:24-25), Nephi takes the plates *and Zoram*. This surprised me. But once I recognized the prominent position in which this statement was made, I quickly recognized a whole lesson about how the Lord will treat wicked leaders like Laban (3x to kill) differently than their followers like Zoram who are misled in ignorance (3x to save).
- Literary structure often reveals *where* the main point is before I understand *what* the main point is. In Gen 37-50 (>44:6-17), I recognized, years before it finally clicked in my head why, that the cup in Benjamin’s sack is the center of the entire Joseph cycle. At the beginning Joseph has a vision of his brothers bowing to him, in the middle they agree to be his servants, and at the end it is Joseph who establishes the House of Israel by caring for his servant-brothers rather than all scattering as in the previous three generations.
- Leviticus 16:8-10 (the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement). The five books of Moses literally point to Christ’s atonement like a “>”. This does not instantly make every passage in the books of Moses easy, but it does tell you to read them as supporting, or in light of, this central concept.
- Do not be constrained by punctuation or by chapter and verse divisions. They were all added much later. Also, while English punctuation is now based on the logic of grammar, it used to be based instead on the need that public speakers had for clues about where to pause for breath, and how long to pause for best effect (wherever you see colons used like periods, commas, and semicolons, you are seeing that older system).
- “I know it when I see it.” You are qualified to make your own subjective judgments about literary structure. True, like beauty, it is often found “in the eye of the beholder,” and others may disagree with what you see. Some scholars, understandably, want to reach academic consensus by applying objective statistical analysis, and that approach may have some use. But in my opinion, patterned repetition was intended to assist understanding and memory, not to hide meaning until the invention of higher math. People in ancient Israel were expected to recognize literary structure as the scriptures were read aloud, even without doing calculus-based statistics in their heads in real time. You were better fed as a child than the average Israelite peasant, you are better educated, you have greater access to the scriptural text, and you will probably live longer. So if Israelite peasants could be expected to understand a passage, then so can you, once you likewise become proficient in the manner of prophesying of the Jews.

### 3.3.1. Examples of Literary Parallelism

#### D&C 111 (chiasmus: abcd - dcba)

- a. I forgive your follies (1)
  - b. much treasure (2)
    - c. people in city, promptings (3-4)
      - d. concern not yourselves about ... (5)
        - d'. concern not yourselves about ... (6)
          - c'. people in city, promptings (7-9)
            - b'. more treasures than one (10)
              - a'. be wise (11)

**Daniel (chiasmus: abcd - dcba)**

- A. the king's food, personal purity (1)
- B. vision of the statue in four parts, last one with ten toes (2)
- C. three friends in the fiery furnace (3)
- D. King Nebuchadnezzar's pride and insanity (4)
- D'. King Belshazzar's feast and destruction (5)
- C'. Daniel in the den of lions (6)
- B'. vision of the four beasts, last one with ten horns (7); also the vision of two beasts (8)
- A'. when will Jerusalem be purified (9)                      → *out of chronological order, but in conceptual order*
- B''. vision of the two warring kingdoms (10-12)

**Revelation (chiasmus: abcd-dcba - you can get the main point without sweating every detail)**

- A. John's commission (1)
- B. The imperfect church as it exists in the world today (2-3)
- C. God and Christ praised by the righteous; the imperfect first six seals while man rules (4-7)
- D. Transition to seventh seal: Seven trumpets sound (8-11)
- E. The real underlying conflict between the dragon and the Lamb (12-14)
- D'. Transition to seventh seal: Seven bowls poured out (15-16)
- C'. Perfect seventh seal opened: Fallen Babylon lamented by the wicked; Christ conquers the dragon and reigns on earth (17-20)
- B'. The perfected church as it will exist at the end of time (21-22a)
- A'. John's commission (22b)

**Luke-Acts (parallel lists: abcd - abcd)**

What happened to Paul at the end of Acts? If Acts is read by itself, then we don't know. Paul appealed to be tried before Caesar in Rome, but we do not know how the trial turned out. But if Acts is read in parallel with Luke, then everything that happened in Luke in the life and ministry of Christ is repeated in Acts in the life and ministry of his followers. We understand that Paul and everyone on the boat symbolically died and were resurrected, and that this will happen to everyone. Now the ending is both satisfying and profound.

- |                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A. <i>Luke 1-4a</i><br>four pairs of episodes mostly with John / Jesus<br>(merged pair when Mary visits Elizabeth)                   | A'. <i>Acts 1-5</i><br>four pairs of episodes with Peter & John /<br>full body of apostles                                              |
| B. <i>Luke 4b-9</i>                                                                                                                  | B'. <i>Acts 6-12</i>                                                                                                                    |
| C. <i>Luke 10-19a</i><br>Christ's Judean ministry<br>three times: I must go to Jerusalem<br>> in Jerusalem: Jews rejected (13:34-35) | C'. <i>Acts 13-21a</i><br>Paul's missionary journeys<br>three times: I must go to Jerusalem<br>> in Athens: Gentiles invited (17:26-27) |
| D. <i>Luke 19b-24</i><br>Christ's four trials, death, resurrection,<br>seen of many                                                  | D'. <i>Acts 21b-28</i><br>Paul's four trials, shipwreck, seen of many at<br>Rome, no fifth trial recounted                              |

### 3.3.2. Examples of Light Bulb Moments: I See a Repetition – Is It Intentionally Patterned?

These repetitions each caught my eye and caused me to search the larger passage for more repeated elements. This is what patterned repetition looks like to me when I first start to see it but have not yet worked it out.

- D&C 6 – a gift, another gift (10-13, 25-28); a witness, another witness (14-17, 22-24)
- First Nephi – each half has three stories, a hard steel object that does not save, and a soft brass one that does
  - edited to be silent about tools used to build the boat since that would confuse the parallel symbols
  - “brass and steel” can begin teaching the literary concepts of symbolism and parallelism to a six year old
- Mosiah – compares Benjamin at the beginning and Noah in the middle to draw a lesson at the end
  - and in between groups go down to the land of Nephi, and then groups return to Zarahemla
- Third Nephi 11-30 – Christ settles doctrines about which there is to be no more contention (11, 27)
  - Old World scriptures given to Nephites (12-14, 24-25)
  - discourses on the scattering and gathering of Israel (15b-16, 20b-23a)
- Ether – two great faith speeches (3-5, 11)
  - two sets of main characters: Jared and his brother (ch 1-6), Coriantumr and Ether (12-15)
  - camp four years before crossing water (2:13-14) and before final destruction in battle (15:14)
  - Jaredites arrive in eight boats (3:1; 6:2) and are wiped out in an eight day battle (15:15-31)
  - Jared’s four sons decline the throne (6:14, 27), Coriantumr’s four challengers (13:23; 14:3, 11, 16)
  - Coriantumr twice fights battles in both Moron and Akish (14:4-6, 11-14)
  - two periods of great prosperity (9:16-20; 10:19-28)
  - two kings are “descendant” rather than son of the prior king (10:1, 9)
- Matthew has five major speeches – parables of apostasy and restoration (13)
  - instructions on growing church through missionary work (10) and on administering church (18)
  - Sermon on the Mount (5-7) and Olivet Discourse (or sermon on the mount of olives) (24-25)

### 3.3.3. Practice Exercises to Develop Proficiency with Literary Parallelism

1. Without looking at any resources, work through and diagram **Alma 36**, then read **Daniel 1-9** and diagram the relationships between the chapters (don’t worry about the vision in Daniel 10-12). You can do your diagram in a word processor or on a sheet of paper. It may take multiple drafts.
  2. Then read **Esther** and **D&C 1** while referring to the outlines on the LDS-oriented scripture wiki at [FeastUponTheWord.Org](http://FeastUponTheWord.Org) (it also has historical background and other resources in various stages of progress).
  3. Then read **Ether** and **Amos** while again referring to the outlines on the same site. After reading Ether, tackle the **Question in Part 6** with regard to Ether 8:20-26. The point in answering the question this time is not to test your mastery of Ether, but rather to demonstrate to you how you can better understand Moroni’s train of thought by thinking in terms of this question and of chunks, relations, and prominence.
- It may take a couple months to get comfortable with Ether or Amos. This is study, not just reading. Fluency in any form of communication takes practice, and there is no substitute for time on task. You will get better as you practice thinking in terms of symbolism and patterned repetition of chunks. You will become proficient much faster than I did through trial and error if you will instead go through these exercises in sequence.
  - Working through these exercises will also teach you how to evaluate for yourself, when someone else points out a repeated pattern, whether it is intentional and, if so, what it means.



## 4. Strategies for Searching Based on the Content of Communication

This section finally gets past *how* something is said to focus on *what* is being said.

### 4.1. Starting Out

- Just read. Before you start searching out the meaning of a book of scripture, you have to be somewhat familiar with it. At some point you will want to move from just reading what is said to thinking about what it means. But the very first step of all is to just read and become familiar with a book of scripture.
- Skim through chapter headings to quickly remind yourself of the big picture of what you have previously read.
- You can memorize passages if you want. But do not let memorization turn into blindly sequential recall. Understanding is more likely to flow from hierarchical recall based on relations of meaning. People who memorize can freeze up without any sense of where they were headed conceptually.

### 4.2. Reading Individual Authors

- Not every prophet uses every word in exactly the same way as every other prophet. Alma uses the word “hope” in Alm 32 to mean you would like for something to be true, but you do not yet have any confirmation that it is in fact true. But when Moroni uses the word “hope” in Moroni 7 in the middle of “faith, hope, and charity,” it means an expectation of personal salvation that, like faith, is based on a confirmation by the Holy Ghost. So do not automatically assume that all of the associations one author has attached to a word or idea automatically attach to another author’s use of the same word or idea. They often do, but not always. Take each author on their own terms.
- I think the debate is overblown regarding Paul’s emphasis on grace and James’s emphasis on works. I think it is not hard to reconcile the two if that is your goal. But the debate does at least recognize the importance of reading each author on their own terms.
- Think about the situations in which characters find themselves, how they see those situations, and how they respond.
- Always ask: (1) who is speaking? (2) who is the final editor of this text? and (3) what is the point that each of these people is trying to make? Or: What point is Alma trying to make? and: Why did Mormon include that speech in his account of Nephite history?
- Look for statements by the author of his reason for writing. This is most frequently provided in the Gospels and the Book of Mormon. “Now this is written to you so that ...” “And thus we see ...”

### 4.3. Topical Study Across Multiple Authors

- Topical study is about synthesizing doctrinal concepts across multiple authors rather than analyzing an individual author’s message. This is a big part of why we read, but it is different than reading to understand the points an author is trying to make in a chapter or book.
- Highlight and cross reference significant passages. Follow the footnotes at the bottom of the page in the LDS edition of the scriptures. Build scripture chains. Follow the scripture chains in books (Articles of Faith, A Marvelous Work and a Wonder) and in talks by general authorities. If you cannot figure out how to do this when reading electronic scriptures, then you need to either read a paper copy you can mark on, or else organize your scripture chains in notebooks or computer files.
- Use the Topical Guide to study a word, a subject, or a symbol. Or use the ability to search for words in the online scriptures at lds.org or in the LDS Gospel Library app.

## 5. Strategies for Searching that Look Outside the Written Text

- Discourse analysis (linguistics) seeks to understand a text in light of its context, text, and co-text. When I work at understanding a book of scripture, I look for a “bookshelf” of resources that collectively address these three approaches. Not all of these resources always exist, but this is the ideal.
- This Part 5 adds two more ideas to what has already been covered:
  - Reading the text and co-text (defined below) in light of their situational context; and
  - Reading commentaries in order to get a head start rather than trying to figure out everything from scratch by yourself. Just remember that scholars are fallible, often disagree, and are often incentivized to publish new ideas regardless of whether the old ideas were already correct. So take what they say as food for thought, evaluate their conclusions for yourself, and feel free to disagree.
- **Context (or Setting).** A text is often intended to address a specific situation. Understanding that situation can help you better understand the text. The meaning of “Fire!” depends on whether you are in a movie theater or a winter campsite. It is worth pondering a text, not only in light of related chunks and symbolism as discussed above, but also in the context of its situation. For the Doctrine & Covenants and parts of the Bible, that situational context is often missing and must be obtained from an outside resource. Context can include:
  - Historical setting (including the immediate situation of the story, and of the author and original audience).
  - Doctrinal setting, or the religious beliefs and understanding (correct or incorrect) of the audience.
  - Cultural setting, or the cultural literacy of the author and original audience.
  - Geographic setting, including climate and political neighbors (pictures, videos, maps).
  - Biographical sketches of main characters when none is provided in the story (Doctrine & Covenants).
- **Text.** Text refers to the actual words you are studying.
  - Original text, or critical text showing textual changes over time (such as Royal Skousen’s work on the Book of Mormon text).
  - For those like me who do not read Greek or Hebrew, alternative Bible translations. I like the NIV, RSV, NASB, Amplified, JPS, Gileadi/IIT. Also refer to Strong’s Greek and Hebrew Lexicons. (BibleGateway.com, Biblia.com, and BlueLetterBible.org).
  - Identify passages in the text that quote from other earlier scriptures.
  - Linguistic analysis (discourse analysis) of the text, outline of the text, and reformatted text with headings. These should be based on the communication strategies discussed in Parts 2-3 above. You can also do much of this for yourself.
- **Co-Text.** Chunks of text should be understood in light of their larger meta-chunks, or the surrounding co-text. I look for resources that treat the text as part of a larger coherent whole, or as contributing to the main points of the entire book. I find it unproductive to try, or to read commentaries that try, to extract every last ounce of possible meaning from a verse. My experience is that when people communicate, they generally intend to clearly make one or two main points, not to simultaneously make several points that are subtly hidden.
- **Interpretative Commentary.** Interpretation of the text, or telling what the text means, can be based on: (1) the reasonableness of logic applied to the context, text, and co-text; and/or (2) the authority of inspiration. The following types of interpretive commentary occupy different points along that continuum:
  - Scholarly commentaries and LDS course manuals.
  - Uncanonized statements about the text by general authorities (BYU Citation Index).
  - Subsequent scriptures that quote or interpret portions of the text, and the Joseph Smith Translation.

## 6. Comprehension Self-Test Question

- **Lesson:** Learning is faster (though sometimes blindered) when given focus by good questions. A good question (a fishing tool) is thus often more valuable than a good answer (a fish).
- In Lectures on Faith the overall structure is a series of three questions: (1) What is it?; (2) How do you get it?; and (3) What are its effects? I have expanded upon and reused that set of questions with regard to hope, charity, meekness, humility, etc., which makes the set of questions I got from Lectures on Faith just as valuable as its answers about faith.
- **Strategy:** I seek out and develop sets of questions that I can use over and over again. I have developed the following self-test question for use in my study of the scriptures:

Discuss the following passage: \_\_\_\_\_ by:

- (a) Identifying the principal message(s) the author attempts to convey in this passage;
  - (b) Explaining why you believe this is the author's principal message, including:
    - (i) describing the situation that gave rise to the events or statements recorded in this passage, the situation of the audience for whom it was recorded, etc.; and
    - (ii) outlining the author's train of thought in developing this message throughout the passage;
  - (c) identifying any larger units of thought to which this passage belongs (group of chapters, book, etc.) and explaining how this passage supports and develops the principal message(s) of those larger units; and
  - (d) Identifying any significant applications or doctrinal contributions of this passage, either alone or in conjunction with other specific passages.
- To fully answer this question, I have to address all of the approaches described in this handout.
    - I have to account for hierarchically organized chunks, the relations between those chunks, and prominence. When applicable, I should also account for symbolism, historical parallelism, and any other tool for understanding a text that I learned from linguistics or from English literature. (Parts 2-3).
    - I have to address the context, the text, and the co-text. (Part 5).
    - I have to cross reference across authors throughout the standard works. (Part 4).
    - I have to decide what doctrines of general application are being taught and what personal applications I should draw from the text. (Part 1.1).
  - This question is open book, open note, and can be answered in bits and pieces in the car or shower. I just have to say the answer. This is a great way to ponder a passage out loud.
  - **Strategy:** When I am unable to answer part of this question, then I have identified a question that can focus my study on something likely to yield significant new insight. Hooray for efficient learning strategies!

### Two Final Thoughts

- **Don't be intimidated.** Nobody with a day job has yet satisfied this ideal for the entire standard works.
- **Don't lose focus.** The ultimate goal in mortality is sanctification, not intellectual understanding. Scripture study is intended to support personal development and good works, not to replace them.

**The Book of Mormon Outlined as Units of Thought**

	TP	Moroni			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Title Page</li> </ul>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Two preachers: Lehi and Nephi (1-2)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Three travel stories: brass plates, parents in wilderness, wives (3-5, 7)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. About the record (6, 9)                                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Two visions of the Tree of Life: Lehi and Nephi (8, 10-16a)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Three travel stories: land journey, build boat, water journey (16b-18)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. About the record (19a)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Two quoted prophets: Zenos and Isaiah (19b-22)</li> </ul>	1 Nephi	Nephi Isaiah 20.4%	Be Faithful		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Lehi's last words to his family, Nephites live after the manner of happiness (1-5)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Jacob quotes and explains Isaiah (6-10)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Why Nephi delights in Isaiah (11)</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Nephi quotes and explains Isaiah (12-24, 25-30)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Nephi's last words to his readers (31-33)</li> </ul>	2 Nephi				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Jacob as a good shepherd (1)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Jacob preaches at TEMPLE about personal righteousness (2-3)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Jacob's testimony of Christ (4)</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Jacob preaches about the covenant of scattering and gathering (5-6)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Sherem as an anti-shepherd (7)</li> </ul>	Jacob	Jacob Zenos 3.4%			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enos</li> <li>Jarom</li> <li>Omni</li> <li>Words of Mormon</li> </ul>			Misc		
	483 - 421			Be Converted	
	421 - 362				
	362 - 175			Be Perfected	
	175 - 130				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. King Benjamin's speech at TEMPLE, people converted, names written, kingship to Mosiah II (1-6)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Two groups travel south from Zarahemla to land of Nephi (7-10)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Abinadi preaches to Noah, Alma converted (11-19)</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Alma and Limhi lead two groups north from land of Nephi to Zarahemla (20-24)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Church organized, names written, Alma the Younger converted, power to judges (25-29)</li> </ul>			Mosiah	Mormon Nephtie History 65.1%	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Nehor, invasion by dissenter Amlici at River Sidon (1-3)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Alma the Younger regulates two churches (4-7)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Theologically liberal Nehors kill converts (8-16)                                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Mission of sons of Mosiah to theologically uncertain Lamanites (17-25)                                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E. Summary: joy, contrition, forgiveness versus anger, judgment (26-29)</li> </ul> </li> <li>D. Korihor as an insistent agnostic (30)</li> </ul> </li> <li>C. Theologically conservative Zoramites expel converts (31-35)</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Alma the Younger regulates his three sons (36-42)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Invasion by dissenter Zoramites at River Sidon (43-44)</li> </ul>	1 - 18 Judges	91 - 74 BC	Alma 1-44		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Change of leadership and record (45a)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Amalackiah's internal revolt put down, Lamanite invasion repulsed (45b-49)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Nephite internal dissensions, Lamanites invade to heartland (50-51)                                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. War of stalemate (52-53)                                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Position statements, negotiating for and rescuing prisoners (54-55)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>C. Helaman's account of his soldiers' obedience and protection (56-58)</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Internal dissension put down, Lamanites quickly retreat (59-62)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Shiblon's record (63)</li> </ul>	19 - 39 Judges	73 - 53 BC	Alma 45-63		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The record of Helaman II and his sons Nephi and Lehi (1-6)</li> <li>The Prophecy of Nephi (7-12)</li> <li>The Prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite to the Nephites (13-15, 16)</li> </ul>	40 - 90	52 - 2	Hel		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. The sign of Christ's birth (1a)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Gadianton robbers fail to conquer righteous Nephite society from outside (1b-5a)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Mormon's personal witness (5b)</li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Social elites destroy wicked Nephite society from within (6-7)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. The sign of Christ's death (8-10)</li> </ul>		1 BC - 34 AD	3 Ne 1-10		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Day 1: Christ appears at TEMPLE to multitude, selects Twelve disciples, baptism, no contention (11)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Christ gives the Nephites more scripture: Sermon on the Mount (12-15a)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Exposition on the covenant of scattering and gathering (15b-16)                                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Christ tarries: blessing, fire, and the sacrament (17-18)</li> </ul> </li> <li>D. Day 2: Christ returns: fire, blessing, and the sacrament (19-20a)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C. Exposition on the covenant of scattering and gathering (20b-23a)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>B. Christ gives the Nephites more scripture: Malachi 3-4 (23b-26a)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Day 3: Remainder of Christ's personal ministry summarized (26b)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Later: Christ appears to Twelve, name of Church, no contention, Three Nephites (27-28)</li> <li>Mormon speaks to reader (29-30)</li> </ul> </li></ul>		34 - 35 AD	3 Ne 11-30		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fourth Nephi</li> </ul>	36 - 321		4 Ne		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mormon given charge of Nephi's large plates and of Nephite armies (1-2)</li> <li>Mormon refuses to continue leading armies, preaches in vain (3-4)</li> <li>Mormon again leads armies until final destruction (5-6)</li> <li>Mormon's last words to the remnant of Lehi (7)</li> <li>Moroni finishes the record of his father (8-9)</li> </ul>	322 - 385		Mormon		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prologue, origins, and genealogy (1a)</li> <li>A. Jared and his brother: Jaredites established in the land (1b-6)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Centuries of kings, prophets, and secret combinations that cause three destructions (7-11)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Coriantumr and Ether: Jaredite final destruction from off the land (12-15)</li> </ul>		2500 (?) - 550 BC	Ether		Mormon Jaredite History 9.9%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moroni's situation (1)</li> <li>Church practices: ordinances and shepherding (2-6)</li> <li>A. Faith, hope, and charity; laying hold on every good thing (7)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Decay within church: infant baptism of those not yet accountable (8)</li> <li>B. Decay within society: wickedness and accountability of Nephite nation (9)</li> </ul> </li> <li>A. Faith, hope, and charity; gifts of the Spirit (10)</li> </ul>	400 - 421 AD		Moroni		