

Podcast Episode 71: Effective Study, Part 3

This is Part 3 of a multi-part series, where Denver continues addressing the question: How do I get the most out of Gospel study? Where do I begin? It can be frustrating to read and not really get much out of a text, aside from the most obvious and superficial reading. What can I do or what skills or approaches do I need to utilize in order to make my study effective, so I can both understand and experience the Gospel, as well as prepare for Zion?

DENVER: But if you go and you study mathematics, or geology, or you study music—there are a lot of things in the Old Testament that are based upon music. There's incidents in the Book of Mormon in which there's singing and dancing going on, in a private place among only the daughters, and then the wicked priests of Noah come and abduct them, and the story goes on from there. It doesn't matter what you study in school. Everything you learn can help you better understand what's in the scriptures. So don't think that education doesn't matter. And don't think that you're wasting time in getting an education, because it's not focused in upon directly understanding better the volume of scriptures. That'll come. And everything should be done in its season, in its time.

In fact, there is an opening set of words in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which Bob Dylan turned into a folk song, which the Birds then fixed because Bob Dylan has a horrible voice. The name of the song is "Turn, Turn, Turn," and it talks about: *To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, a time to die... A time to cast away stones...a time to gather stones together* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-5; see also Ecclesiastes 1:10 RE).

In your life there will be time for everything. And as you go through phases of life, at each interval, take advantage of that. Learn when it's time to learn. Play when it's time to play.

What I have learned by sad experience that the best way to approach someone is by your example and not by your mouth. And they can really hate what they're hearing you say, but if what they see you do is admirable, eventually they will reach the conclusion that what you are doing is the result of what you're believing. And if what you're believing is on display in what you do, that will touch them in ways that can't be opposed—can't be argued against.

But if all you're going to do is try to argue someone into agreement with you, well, heavens! There are people that make a living arguing against Mormonism. Well, they've had to spend a lifetime studying it in order to come up with the arguments against it. If information alone was going to persuade, some of our biggest critics would now be converted. But they're not, because their hearts are hard. The way to get through to them is with kindness, is with the example. Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount said: *Blessed are [you] when men shall...say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my [name's] sake. Rejoice, and be*

exceedingly glad...for so persecuted they the prophets [beforehand] (Matthew 5:11-12; see also Matthew 3:14 RE).

Most people have encountered “religious” folk (and I put religious in quotes), who talk a good fight but who will not sacrifice to benefit others. If, instead, you stay the course and you live the example, they’re going to (at first) assume that you’re just another religious hypocrite, because that’s what we’ve all encountered. When, however, that example persists, and it persists against mocking, against ridicule, against criticism—when that example persists—

I mean, one of the questions that it was a vision, it was a dream, and therefore, we didn't finish the story—but fill that great and spacious building with a bunch of real people who are mocking and ridiculing and laughing at the people that are at the Tree of Life, and let them see the great example of the people who are at the Tree of Life. And before long, there will be some who leave the building and go and join the people at the Tree of Life, because that’s what persuades, that’s what convinces, that’s what touches the heart. So I would say, less preaching and more self-sacrifice and example, and even the hard-hearted people will find themselves touched by what they see being done.

We study the Old Testament to learn about individual salvation from God. We study the New Testament to learn about individual salvation through Christ. We read the Book of Mormon to reassure ourselves that like those who lived before us, we can be individually saved in our day. We study the revelations of Joseph Smith to learn about individual salvation. Historic Christianity and the various Mormon traditions have all focused on individual salvation. Christians have been born-again and found salvation through God. Mormons have had their calling and election made sure and claimed God has saved them. Throughout the Judeo-Christian landscape, individual salvation is the great quest, the overarching yearning, and the religious end to be obtained. Salvation is individual. There is only individual salvation and no such thing as collective salvation. While I accept this as true, there is something else that is equally true. God wants people to collectively be His. There are remarkable similarities between the struggle from 1,900 years ago until 1,550 years ago in the Christian tradition, before it adopted a settled—although corrupted—form, and the last 160 years of Mormonism following the death of Joseph Smith. Christians could profit from the study of the more recent events involving Joseph Smith, to gain insight into the earlier Christian experience.

I believe that there is tension, if not outright hostility, between charity as a priority, on one hand, and knowledge as priority, on the other hand—and that as between the two, it is more important to acquire the capacity for charity or love of your fellow man, than it is to gain understanding. It’s like what Paul said: *If I have all gifts and know all mysteries but have not charity, I’m nothing* (1 Corinthians 13; see also 1 Corinthians 1:51-53 RE). Charity, or the love of your fellow man is the greater challenge and the more relevant one, and when you’ve acquired that, you can add to it knowledge. But knowledge has the ability to render the possessor arrogant and haughty, whereas charity renders the possessor humble. If you want the greatest challenge in life, try loving your fellow man unconditionally and viewing them as God would view them and then behaving according to that view. And out of that

you will learn a great deal more about Christ than you can simply by studying. Walking in His path is a greater revelation of who He is than anything else that's provided.

Joseph Smith once remarked that if you could gaze into heaven for five minutes you would know more about it than if you read every book that has ever been written on the subject. (*TPJS*, p. 324) Likewise, if you live charitably for five minutes in the presence of what you would normally condemn—what you would normally find repugnant—if you can deal with that charitably, you will understand Christ better than if you spend a lifetime reading books written about Him.

God's most important inspiration for the most challenging subjects is often not hasty, quick, and without effort at our end. Consider the advice to Oliver Cowdery that he must study it out in his own mind first before asking God to tell him the answer (see D&C 9:8; see also Joseph Smith History 13:30 RE). Many people want a quick, perfunctory response from God, with no forethought. What they receive, in turn, is a quick, perfunctory answer. God is almost always, for the most difficult challenges, not a short-order cook; although there are certainly false spirits who are willing to be just that.

The Father is the source of glory and likened to the sun. The Mother reflects and shares this glory and is likened to the moon. She reflects God's glory, endures within it, and is empowered by it. She can participate with Him in all that is done wielding that glory. Knowledge is the initiator or force, and Wisdom is the regulator, guide, apportioner, and weaver of that power. If not tempered and guided by Wisdom, Knowledge can be destructive. Wisdom makes the prudent adaptation required for order. The Father and Mother are One. But the Mother bridges the gulf between the Throne of the Father and fallen man. She made it possible for the Son of God to enter this fallen world for the salvation of everything in it.

A great deal of reflection and study is needed to understand all this implies. This is an introduction of some basic information about the Mother of God, or *the Mother of the Son of God after the manner of the flesh* (1 Nephi 11:18; see also 1 Nephi 3:8 RE). More will be given in a Temple where mankind's understanding of things kept hidden from the world will be greatly increased, when God directs one be built to His name.

There was a time when Christians recognized that the stars of heaven bore witness of the significance of Mary, Christ's earthly mother. Few Christians now look at the constellations as signs set in the firmament of God as His testimony. The light that was meant to shine on the earth was to illuminate both the eyes **and** mind of man. Man in the first generations understood this, and *a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the Fathers* was written by Abraham, who received that same understanding (Abraham 1:31; see also Abraham 2:4 RE).

The Book of Mormon is filled with ascension lessons and example. There is one verse that captures Joseph Smith's ascent theology. That verse compresses into a single sentence. It

explains why the Book of Mormon contains the fullness of the gospel. And it's perhaps Joseph's most inspired declaration:

Verily thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsakes their sins, and comes unto me, and calls on my name, and obeys my voice, and keeps my commandments, shall see my face and know that I Am, and [that] I am the true light that lights every man who comes into the world... (D&C 93:1; see also T&C 93:1)

"Every soul" includes you and me. Every one of us has equal access to the Lord. The conditions are the same for all. Forsake sins; come to Christ; call on His name; obey His voice; keep his commandments. This is far more challenging than obedience to a handful of "thou shalt nots" because so much is required to be **done**, so much required to be **known**. A great deal of study and prayer is required to stand in the presence of the Lord. Once done, we shall see His face and know that He is the true light that enlightens every one. He is the God of the whole world.

Well, the more I began to take in the truths of the content in the Book of Mormon, the greater the gap grew between the lip-service paid to the Restoration by the Mormon church—the LDS church—and the practice of the institution itself. In fact, the Book of Mormon, used as a guide or measuring stick, condemns all of the institutions of Christianity. In fact, it condemns everyone except the few who are the humble followers of Christ, and points out, despite that few being *humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because [they're] taught by the precepts of men* (2 Nephi 28:14; see also 2 Nephi 12:2 RE).

If you want precepts that come from God, the best place to look at this point is the Book of Mormon text. The closer you look, the more you'll see. The more you see, the more you'll find that, right now, the religion of Jesus Christ is hardly practiced anywhere on this earth. If it's going to be practiced at all, it needs to be done by **you**, by someone who is eagerly searching for and trying to find words that come from Jesus Christ as your guide, as something to lead you back to Him, as the message intended for the last days, and as the means by which you can interpret the earlier New Testament, the earlier Old Testament, to find out exactly what they mean—because the key to unlocking all of what God has been, is presently, and will ultimately be involved with to fulfill all the prophecies is contained primarily in the text of the Book of Mormon.

And so, if you want to escape before the ultimate destruction of that great image with the head of gold beforehand, to be prepared for the coming of the Lord—if you're a sincere Christian, you don't need to go and join another denominational institution, but you better take seriously the Book of Mormon and study it, and take its interpretations/its meaning/its guidance seriously, because it is the standard that has been planted in the last days as the ensign of truth to which all Christians—if they believe in Christ—need to rally, in order to be part of His great latter-day work.

I say that to a Christian audience because the Book of Mormon has largely been so neglected by the people who are nicknamed “Mormons,” that if Christians were to take that book up and to examine it through the eyes of a devoted Christian believer, I believe that Christians are going to find treasures within the Book of Mormon, an understanding (as a result of their Christian background) from the Book of Mormon that the Mormons themselves have never been able to harvest, have never noticed, and do not have the eyes with which to even see its presence. The Book of Mormon remains a Christian treasure that has yet to yield its greatest results, having only been taken seriously—

In 1950 there were leaders in the church who had never read the Book of Mormon—Mormon church leaders who did not read the Book of Mormon, much less understand it. It was quite some time after that before the Book of Mormon became something in which there was some regular study among Latter-day Saints.

Because the Book of Mormon was published before there was an LDS church and because the Book of Mormon stands as an independent witness, there is no reason why accepting the Book of Mormon requires you to be institutionally loyal to anyone. You can be a Baptist and believe in the Book of Mormon, and there is at least one minister out there who is doing that right now. There is no reason why Catholics and Presbyterians and other mainstream Christian denominations can’t pick up the Book of Mormon and make use of it, without pledging allegiance to any institution that claims ownership over the Book of Mormon.

In fact, the most accurate edition of the Book of Mormon currently in print is one that was prepared independent of any institution and is available for purchase on Amazon. It’s part of two books, combined in a single volume, called the New Covenants. The first half of the book is the New Testament, and the second half of the book is the Book of Mormon. They were intended to go together, as a witness by people who—on one side of the world and on the other side of the world—both witnessed the ministry of a resurrected Lord, who showed the prints of the nails in His side and in His hands and in His feet. And had people bear testimony that it was Him who was sacrificed, that rose again from the grave, and who is the Savior prophesied of by Isaiah—He uses Malachi in the Book of Mormon—He uses other texts to demonstrate and to teach His identity as the Son of God and the Redeemer of mankind.

And I believe if the Presbyterians and the Baptists and the Catholics were to pick up the Book of Mormon and treat it seriously, it would yield truths to them, which they could then preach independent of the LDS church or the people who are nicknamed “Mormons,” and they would find themselves growing closer to Christ, as a consequence of having this material available to their study.

It’s been too long that the Book of Mormon has been neglected. It’s been too shoddily handled by the people to whom it was originally given. The copyright has expired. The book is now available to the public. The institution that got it originally has made precious little use of it. And if you find yourself not only disbelieving the LDS church, but because of

your institution's native hostility towards the LDS church, you will find in the Book of Mormon a great deal of ammunition to use to condemn, to criticize, to censure the LDS institution; because the Book of Mormon spares very little ink in criticizing, condemning, and judging harshly the people to whom the Book of Mormon would be delivered, including the LDS Church.

The use to which the Book of Mormon can be put by Christians is so relevant to the Christian belief system, that if Christians will soften their heart and consider it and allow for the record that is latest in time to be used to help understand the records that are earlier in time—because God's latest word clarifies and governs the interpretation of His earlier word—Christians are going to reap a fabulous reward in doing so.

And unlike the texts that we have in the New Testament, many of which are copies of copies of copies that we know have been altered in the process of transmission—

Bart Ehrman (a one-time believer—now agnostic) parsed through the texts of the New Testament, compared it to quotes in the Ante-Nicene (the pre-Nicene) Fathers and to internal evidence in the New Testament itself and reached the conclusion that the New Testament text deserves a great deal of skepticism, because the method and manner of its transmission has been demonstratively shown to be inaccurate and the record to be muddled. In one place, the less-altered text of Hebrews preserves the words that are drawn right out of the 7th chapter of Proverbs: *This is my son; today I have begotten you*—a statement that was made prophetically about Christ. The book of Hebrews preserves it in that form. The Gospels, however, were altered, and the statement that was made at the time of the baptism of Christ, when John the Baptist was baptizing the Lord, was changed to be, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* (Matthew 3:17; see also Matthew 2:4 RE), because of a controversy that erupted over the nature of Christ during the Christological debates of the 3rd and 4th Century—and it's one of the illustrations that Bart Ehrman points to in his book, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. That title tells you something about the transmission of the New Testament: *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. Bart Ehrman isn't the only scholar, but his books are fairly easily available (if you're interested in the topic) through Amazon.

Another scholar who has done essentially the same thing in picking apart the Old Testament and the integrity of the transmission of the Old Testament text is a Methodist scholar in England named Margaret Barker, whose works demonstrate that there was an earlier (an older) religion that got defeated at about the time that the Jews were taken captive into Babylon—and on the return from the exile, a new religion (that had been altered) emerged. Christians generally view information like that as threatening the very core of their religion, because if their Bible is flawed and not inerrant, if their Bible has been poorly transmitted and is inaccurate, then the basis upon which they seek salvation is itself threatened.

The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, bears witness of the very same Lord in essentially the very same kinds of terms, identifying Him as having accomplished the work of the redemption by the sacrificing of His sinless life in order to defeat death and to restore

mankind back to life. But unlike the transmission of the Bible record, the Book of Mormon record was preserved for generations by a singular transmission through a line of record holders. At the end of that line, a prophet named Mormon—hence the name for the book—did a summary explanation, excerpting from all of the prior records a final and inspired, God-commanded, and prophetically-infused record-summary of the preceding nearly-millennium of history, giving us the truths that God wanted preserved. He turned that record over to his son; his son finished it up and then buried it up. And when it came forth out of the ground it was translated by the person who accomplished the translation through the means he called *the gift and power of God* (see Title Page of the Book of Mormon). And the original language in which the Book of Mormon was first published in the last days was English.

The original of the first transcription has been preserved in part; it was put into a cornerstone and water damaged it, and so we only have about 28% of that original, but the original was hand-copied before it was taken to the printer for the first printing. And all of that printer's manuscript still exists. And then the one who was responsible for the translation of the Book of Mormon had the opportunity to review it for another edition in 1837, and to review it and again publish it in 1840.

We do not have the transmission issues with the Book of Mormon that are existing with the current Bible. Christians hear this criticism about the Book of Mormon—that there's been 9,000 changes made to the text. Those 9,000 changes have been located and largely dealt with, every single one, in that New Covenants edition of the Book of Mormon that is currently in print and available through Amazon. Most of those purported changes are punctuation changes. Many of them come from the fact that when it was first printed, it was printed like a book, but it later became versified and divided into chapters, and footnotes were added—and in the tally of changes, many of the changes also are superficial changes to versification and chapter divisions and other such things. There were some errors made. There were some lines that were dropped out between the original manuscript and the printer's manuscript that have been located and have been put back in. But even with every one of the identified changes to the Book of Mormon, the fact is that it is—demonstrably, on a whole other order of magnitude—more faithfully preserved and more reliably a text attesting to Jesus Christ than anything that we have transmitted in the Bible.

In short, if you are a Christian who feels some insecurities as a consequence of the criticism leveled at the Bible because of its clear transmission issues (its very demonstrably true problems of conveying the text from the original authors down to what we get printed) and the vagaries of how you convert some Greek lettering into other languages—

At the time the New Testament was written, the form of Greek that was used didn't have lower case; it only had uppercase—didn't have punctuation. And in almost every text there's no separation from the end of one word and the beginning of another. Dividing it up into words, upper and lower-casing the alphabet that was used, all of that was accomplished by monks hundreds of years after the original text had been handed down.

Well, the Book of Mormon has far greater integrity. So if you're insecure about the reliability of the content of the Bible, none of those insecurities should attach to the text of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is not only a testimony of Jesus Christ, but it is perhaps the most reliable testimony of Jesus Christ that exists in available print right now, today, in the English language.

So, if you're a Christian and you're sincere about your faith, I think you neglect the Book of Mormon at your peril. If God has sent to you a message, a testimony about His Only Begotten Son—in order to bring you closer to Him, to prepare you for the day of His coming to judge the world—and you decide that you're simply going to dismiss that message that came from God, then what kind of a Christian are you, really? Have you no faith? Do you think that God cares less about the generation of people who will be on the earth at the time of His returning to judge the world, cares less about them, than He did about the people to whom He came and ministered when He came here to sacrifice His life to redeem mankind?

Institutional, formal churches invest in programs and productions to help their members believe in God. Institutions pre-package what is taught so their members will agree with them on religious worship. God has provided you scriptures and given you the ability to read and think. You need to find God directly and let your religion include your individual search for truth. Joseph Smith defined Mormonism in this way: "One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may" (*Discourses of Joseph Smith*, p. 199, Kindle Book). We all want to freely search for truth, and when we find it, we want to be free to accept it. That is Mormonism. That is us.

There is a new edition of scriptures available in paperback and online. They will soon be available in a leather-bound edition. These new scriptures are the most accurate and complete volumes of Joseph Smith's work made available. If you study them, your understanding of the Restoration will exceed all others. Make them something you review daily, even if you only have a few minutes.

While Joseph Smith was alive, he taught that the Restoration would fail if the Saints did not have the new translation of the Bible published as part of their scriptures. Joseph said, "God had often sealed up the heavens, because of covetousness in the Church. Said the Lord would cut his work short in righteousness and except the church receive the fulness of the scriptures, that they would yet fall" (*Joseph Smith Papers*, "Documents Volume 2: July 1831-January 1833," p. 85).

After that warning on July 17, 1840, two men were assigned to go on a mission for the purpose of raising money to publish the scriptures. These included a new edition of the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. In October 1840, a letter to all the Saints was published in the *Times and Seasons*, asking for their full support in the effort to publish "the new translation of the Scriptures" (*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 1, October 1840). That effort failed to put the Joseph Smith Translation in print, and Joseph died without it ever being published. Excerpts, with edits done by others, were published by the

Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but it failed to include all of Joseph's work.

The new edition of the scriptures is the first time the full work Joseph accomplished, without additions and including hundreds of punctuation changes previously omitted, have been made available in print. You are the first generation to have these scriptures available. Do not neglect them.

There are two things that will bring you closer to God than anything else; start this in your youth:

- First, personal scripture study. Learn from them when you have time. Your private study will be more important than what others tell you about the scriptures.
- Second, personal prayer. Your private time spent in prayer will have the power to shape your life.

If you study the scriptures when you're alone and you pray in private, these two things, more than anything else, will draw you to God.

Joseph Smith once said that a man can get closer to God by heeding the Book of Mormon than any other book and that it was the most correct book that there is; and that if you will abide its precepts you will come closer to understanding God (see "Introduction to the Book of Mormon").

I started out with the Book of Mormon as a pedestrian looking at the book and saying, "Yeah, it's something. And it's part of the religion." If I had not been called to be a Gospel Doctrine teacher and left in that position—I moved again into a third location. I taught Gospel Doctrine in Pleasant Grove, UT; Alpine, UT; and Sandy, UT in two different places there. I was this guy going through this material. It took between 10 and 20 hours of study and preparation each week for a 50 minute class, as I went deeper and deeper into the text of all these materials, but deepest of all into the Book of Mormon.

One of the things that I have—and I want to point out to you these features of the new scriptures in hopes that you'll take note of the same kinds of things—one of the things that I have found is that when you get a new set of scriptures, everything is laid out differently than the way that it used to be laid out in the set that you're accustomed to reading and using. As a result, what used to be in the top left-hand side is now on the bottom right-hand side. Everything is re-oriented. And the new scriptures do not have versification. They're divided into paragraphs in order to have complete thoughts gathered together. (Now the paragraphs are numbered in order to cite them, but the purpose was to divide it into paragraphs so that you got a complete thought.) Therefore, when you're reading something that you're used to seeing out of context—

Some verses in the scriptures are a phrase; they're not even a sentence. They're just a phrase, but the phrase belongs inside a sentence, and the sentence belongs inside a paragraph, and when you pick up the new scriptures and you read them in this current layout, everything changes. You begin to see things—

I have read one way, a passage in a January 1841 revelation—the entire time, over 40 some years, I read it the same way. I got the new scriptures with the new layout, and I read the same material, and all of a sudden, it has a different meaning. I'm not going to take the time to read it, but I want you to find it. It's the January 1841 revelation. When you have time, read it. And read the words about *they shall not be moved out of their place* (D&C 124:45; see also T&C 141:13), which I've always read to mean, the people who are in Nauvoo. And if they're faithful, the people who are in Nauvoo shall not be moved out of their place. In the new scriptures, I read that and I believe it is referring to Joseph and Hyrum Smith—that **they** would be preserved and not moved out of their place if the people were faithful. And if they were not, they were going to lose Joseph and Hyrum. Now it doesn't matter whether the words are referring to the people living in Nauvoo or to Joseph and Hyrum. The sign was that they would be moved out of their place, and both were. We lost Joseph; we lost Hyrum; and we lost Nauvoo. So, things like that happen when you've got the new scriptures.

Last night, as I was listening to Jeff and others who spoke, one of the things that struck me is that almost all revelation—going back to the days of Adam and coming right down to today—come as a consequence of understanding scripture. That was true even of Enoch, because Enoch had a record that had been handed down from Adam. And in the case of Abraham, the records belonging to the Fathers fell into his hands, and he studied them to gain the understanding that he had. Micah quotes Isaiah. Isaiah quotes Zenos and Zenoch. Jacob quotes the allegory of Zenos. Nephi quotes Isaiah. All of them study scripture in order to get an understanding, and revelation is largely based upon expanding your understanding of scripture. The Book of Mormon is really the keystone of the religion but also the keystone to revelation itself. It was intended to open our eyes to things that we couldn't see before. The Book of Mormon is really a giant Urim and Thummim intended for our benefit.

By studying the scriptures and plumbing the depths of the message that we have in the scripture record that's in front of us, you can arrive at a point in your understanding in which it really doesn't matter if an angel appears to you or not. The angel's purpose is never going to be to produce faith in you. If the angel is going to produce faith in you because of their appearance, then the angel ought not appear. Because they'll turn you into a sign-seeker. On the other hand, if you have developed faith by the careful study of what we've been given in the scriptures, and the presence or absence of an angel will have no effect on your faith—you will believe, you will have confidence, your understanding reaches the same depth with or without the angel's presence—then there's no reason for the angel to withhold. There's no reason for him not to appear.

People that are brought into God's presence are convicted of their own inadequacies because, you see, here at last, now, is a complete being—is a pure, just, and holy being. And in comparison, we all lack. We all lack. When Isaiah was caught up to the presence of the Lord, he's shouting, *Woe is me! ...I am undone; ...I am a man of unclean lips...I dwell among people of unclean lips* (Isaiah 6:5; see also Isaiah 2:2 RE). He recognizes the enormity of the

gulf, the gap between him and God. And so God purges it. It's because of the faith and the confidence that he has in God that Isaiah afterwards says, *Here am I, Lord, send me* (Isaiah 6:8; see also Isaiah 2:2 RE). It's not because Isaiah is suddenly a greater being than he was before. It's because Isaiah had faith that this Being can indeed make one as flawed as we are, cleansed, holy, pure, confidence in him. If I were to make one recommendation about the process, I would say: forget about asking for signs; study the depths of the scriptures, and you'll find yourself in company with angels who will come help you to understand what is in these scriptures—and in particular, above all, the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is a giant Urim and Thummim; used in the correct way, you'll find yourself in company with angels who are helping to tutor you, in a conversation, as you look into an understanding of what's written in the scriptures. And then there's no reason for them to withhold their presence from you. "Adam, having conversed with the Lord through the veil, desires now to enter into His presence" (LDS Temple Endowment). There's no reason, after you've conversed through the veil, for that presence to be denied you. But it follows an order. It follows a pattern.

QUESTION: The question is, Do you run any risks by studying? That you can just as easily study your way out of belief as you can study your way into belief.

DENVER: The way that I think that works is—

Everyone wants to understand, because of how proximate—how close—Joseph Smith is, everyone wants to understand how Joseph Smith did it. So, if we think we can figure out how Joseph Smith did it, then presumably, that will equip us to understand or put it into context. But most people who are studying to figure out how Joseph Smith did it are only interested in debunking it—"I want to know how he pulled this off because I'm a little skeptical that what he pulled off is actually genuine; and maybe, if I can understand how Joseph Smith pulled that off, then I can understand how Jesus pulled it off. Then I can understand how Moses pulled it off. Then I can put it all to rest because I needn't worry about it." Or, "I want to understand how Joseph Smith pulled it off, so I can pull it off—and when I get that and I figure it out, and I try it, and it doesn't work for me, then I can say Joseph made it up because it didn't work for me." I mean, there are a lot of pitfalls along the course of study.

The first and primary question you have to ask is—

Take a look around this world and ask yourself if—in this world—it makes sense to you that there is no Creator? Does it make sense to you that everything that's going on here, simply is a haphazard accident, that there is no Creation? There's no Creator? There's no Divine plan? There's nothing here that operates on any other basis than random chance? If you reach the conclusion that everything that's going on here could possibly be by random chance, then read Darwin's *Black Box*. There's a little over 200 different things that have to line up perfectly, in order for your blood to clot. If any one of those 200 things don't happen simultaneously—it's a little over 200—if any one of those don't happen simultaneously, you will die. For some of those, if you get a cut and they're not present, you'll bleed out.

You'll simply die, because you will exsanguinate. For others of those, if you get a cut, your entire blood system will turn solid, and you will die because clotting knows no end. Darwin's *Black Box* makes the argument that it is evolutionarily impossible for trial and error to solve the problem of blood clotting because every one of the steps that are required, if nature simply experiments with it, kills the organism. And that ends that. You don't know that you are going to succeed until you've lined them all up and you've made them all work. It's an interesting book—Darwin's *Black Box*. In essence, it's saying that the evolutionists require more faith, really, than do people that believe in God, because the theory upon which they base their notion requires far too many things to occur by trial and error than is conceivably possible.

Well, if there is a Creation, then there is a Creator. If there is a Creator, then the question is—

I assume all of you have had a father or a grandfather—someone that you respected—a mother or a grandmother, an aunt or an uncle that over the course of a lifetime developed skills and talents and humor and character—someone that you admire. And then they pass on. How profligate a venture is it to create someone that you—a Creation that you view as noble, as worthy, as admirable, as interesting, as fascinating—some person that you love—take that, and just obliterate it. God, who can make such a Creation, surely doesn't waste a Creation. He's not burning the library at Alexandria every day by those who pass on. God had to have a purpose behind it all.

I don't know how many of you have had a friend or a loved one or a family member who passed on, who subsequent to their death, appeared to you, had a conversation with you, in a dream, in a thought. I can recall going to my father's funeral, and his casket with his body was in the front of the little chapel we were in, but his presence was not there—that may have been the hull he occupied while he was living and breathing—I had no sense at all that my father was there. I did have a sense that he was present, but he wasn't in the coffin. He was elsewhere in the room. I couldn't see him, but I could have pointed to him and said, "He's here." In fact, I made a few remarks at my father's funeral, and I largely directed them at him.

Nature testifies over and over again. It doesn't matter when the sun goes down; there's going to be another dawn. It doesn't matter when all the leaves fall off the deciduous trees in the fall; there's going to come a spring. There's going to be a renewal of life. There are all kinds of animals in nature that go through this really loathsome, disgusting, wretched existence, and then they transform. And where they were a pest before, now they're bright, and they're colorful, and they fly, and they pollinate. Butterflies help produce the very kinds of things that their larvae stage destroyed. These are signs. These are testimonies. Just like the transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly—the pest into the thing of beauty; the thing that ate the vegetables that you were trying to grow into the thing that helps pollinate the things that you want to grow—that's the plan for all of us.

So when you study the scriptures, the objective should not be: Can I trust the text? Can I evaluate the text? Can I use a form of criticism against the text in order to weigh, dismiss, belittle, judge? Take all that you know about nature, take all that you know about this world and the majesty of it all; take all that you know that informs you that there is hope, there is joy, there is love—

Why do you love your children? Why do your children love you? These kinds of things exist—they're real, they're tangible, and they're important. And they're part of what God did when He created this world. Keep that in mind when you're studying, and search the scriptures to try and help inform you how you can better appreciate, how you can better enjoy, how you can better love, how you can better have hope. What do they have to say that can bring you closer to God? Not, can I find a way to dismiss something that Joseph said or did? As soon as Joseph was gone off the scene, people that envied the position that he occupied took over custody of everything, including the documents; and what we got, as a consequence of that, is a legacy that allowed a trillion dollar empire to be constructed. Religion should require our sacrifice. It should not be here to benefit us. We should have to give, not get. And in the giving of ourselves, what we get is in the interior; it's in the heart. It's the things of enduring beauty and value. If your study takes you away from an appreciation of the love/the charity/the things that matter most, reorient your study.

QUESTION: So you spoke of the need to plumb the depths of the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, and how it becomes a Urim and Thummim to us. And the Book of Mormon itself informs us that this is the lesser things. It's intentionally withholding much. And it specifically states the purpose is to try our faith. The faith having been so tried, those who plumb the depths can expect more to come forth at some point—in terms of scripture; in terms of record. I guess the question there is—and not to minimize what we've already been given, because it's clearly enough for our present state and more—but does that sort of thing, those sorts of records that are promised, is that a Millennial sort of thing, after the Lord returns? Is that the sort of thing that, if we finally take seriously enough what's been given now, can we expect more to come forth before the Lord comes?

DENVER: I believe that how we respond to what we are given will drive that entirely, and whether we get it before the Millenium or after is dependant upon us. But I also think that—

Look, the people who prepared the summaries on the plates—the abridgement—and the Lord, who provided the translation of that, both know what's being withheld. They abridged what they abridged with what was being withheld in front of their eyes. So they can't tell you the abridged story without the content of what's being withheld present in their mind. If you go through the text carefully, you'll begin to see that there are patterns that start fitting together. I don't think that when the rest of what has been withheld is suddenly brought out into the light—if you've carefully looked at what's in the scriptures already, you're not going to say, "Wow! That is shockingly different!" You're going say, "I always suspected that. And that fits in with this, and this fits in with that, and the picture begins to emerge a bit more clearly. And, yeah, that just—I've always sort of suspected that

to be the case.” When we read the scriptures, keep in mind that the people writing them have in their mind the rest of the picture, and it leaks through; a great deal leaks through because you can’t—

If you know the rest of the story, and you're telling the tale (but you're leaving out some of the big punch lines, but they're present in your mind), the punch lines are going to leak through. There's a lot that comes through in the Book of Mormon. The character and the nature of God is probably better understood by what we have in the Book of Mormon, and it is perfectly consistent with the testimony the Gospel writers who knew Christ in mortality. And if you take what we got in a fairly battered New Testament record and the Book of Mormon together and what happened in the life of Joseph Smith, and you weave them all together, you begin to understand that God is a very patient, loving, kindly Being—and that the mysteries of God largely consist in developing the attributes of godliness in us. The things that matter the most are the things that make us more like Him—better people, more kindly. You want to know more of the mysteries of God? Serve your fellow man, and be of more value to them. In the process of blessing the lives of others, you find out that you know more of the character of God as a consequence of that.

In the new scriptures, there is a section in which Joseph Smith discusses at length the topic of false spirits. It's an editorial he published in the *Times and Seasons* on April the 1st of 1842. This new section 147 in the Teachings and Commandments is worth careful study—the Teachings and Commandments being the new volume of scripture recovering and restoring the text as it was originally; available (if you're interested) either for free online to read at www.scriptures.info, or if you want to purchase a copy, it's available through Amazon.

This new section of the Teachings and Commandments is worth careful study. Keep in mind the meaning of several words. Priesthood means a fellowship. You can have a Priesthood that is a fellowship of men. You can have a Priesthood that is a fellowship between men and angels. You can have a Priesthood that is a fellowship between man and Christ. And you can have a Priesthood that is a fellowship between man and God the Father.

You pray each time you partake of the Sacrament to always have my Spirit to be with you; and what is my spirit? It is to love one another as I have loved you. Do my works and you will know my doctrine. For you will uncover hidden mysteries by obedience to these things that can be uncovered in no other way. This is the way I will restore knowledge to my people. If you return good for evil, you will cleanse yourself and know the joy of your Master. You call me Lord and do well to regard me so, but to know your Lord is to love one another. Flee from the cares and longings that belong to Babylon, obtain a new heart for you have all been wounded. In me you will find peace and through me will come Zion, a place of peace and safety. Be of one heart and regard one another with charity. Measure your words before giving voice to them and consider the hearts of others. (T&C 157:51,53)

Although a man may err in understanding concerning many things, yet he can view his brother with charity and come unto me and through me, he can with patience overcome the world. I can bring him to understanding and knowledge. Therefore, if you regard one another with charity, then your brother's error in understanding will not divide you. I lead to all truth. I will lead all who come to me to the truth of all things. The fullness is to receive the truth of all things and this too, from me, in power by my word and in very deed. For I will come unto you, if you will come unto me. Study to learn how to respect your brothers and sisters, and to come together by precept reason and persuasion, rather than sharply disputing and wrongly condemning each other causing anger. Take care how you invoke my name. Mankind has been controlled by the adversary, through anger and jealousy which has led to bloodshed and the misery of many souls, even strong disagreements should not provoke anger, nor to invoke my name in vain, as if I had part in your every dispute. Pray together in humility, and together meekly present your dispute to me, and if you're contrite before me I will tell you my part. (T&C 157:53-54)

QUESTION: We're separated from the first Fathers, to whom our hearts must turn, by a vast expanse of time, language, and culture. How can we best reach out in our hearts and our minds to these successful mortals?

DENVER: You know, it's a great question. There is an enormous advantage that you'll find in reading the new scriptures and all of the things that have been added that focus upon that, both in the Old Covenants and in the Teachings and Commandments—in particular those two, where our knowledge of what the Fathers were up to is enormously expanded—and then in parts of the New Covenants that have been added through the Joseph Smith Translation. I think the scriptures equip us to accomplish something that—

Study them. Look there.

The time is now far spent, therefore labor with me and do not forsake my covenant to perform it; study my words and let them be the standard for your faith, and I will add thereto many treasures. Love one another and you will be mine, and I will preserve you, and raise you up, and abide with you for ever and ever. Amen. (T&C 158:20)

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver's remarks at *A Day of Faith and Connection Youth Conference* in UT on June 10th, 2017;
- Denver's conference talk entitled "Civilization," given in Grand Junction, CO on April 21st, 2019;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #1, given in Cerritos, CA on September 21st, 2017;

- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #3, given in Atlanta, GA on November 16th, 2017;
- A fireside talk entitled "That We Might Become One," given in Clinton, UT on January 14th, 2018;
- Denver's conference talk entitled "Our Divine Parents," given in Gilbert, AZ on March 25th, 2018;
- The presentation of Denver's paper entitled "The Restoration's Shattered Promises and Great Hope," given at the *Sunstone Symposium* in Salt Lake City, UT on July 28th, 2018;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #5, given in Sandy, UT on September 7th, 2018;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #6, given in Sandy, UT on September 8, 2018;
- Denver's remarks entitled "Keep the Covenant: Do the Work," given at the *Remembering the Covenants Conference* in Layton, UT on August 4th, 2018;
- Denver's remarks entitled "Remember the New Covenant," given at Graceland University in Lamoni, IA on November 10th, 2018;
- Denver's remarks entitled "Book of Mormon as Covenant," given at the *Book of Mormon Covenant Conference* in Columbia, SC on January 13th, 2019;
- Denver's lecture entitled "Signs Follow Faith," given in Centerville, UT on March 3rd, 2019;
- Denver's Q&A session held in Grand Junction, CO on April 21st, 2019; and
- The presentation of "Answer and Covenant," given at the *Covenant of Christ Conference* in Boise, ID on September 3rd, 2017.

In addition, Denver has written extensively about this topic. If you are interested in learning more, please review the following blog posts:

[Gospel Study](#), posted November 17, 2011

[Christians Should Study Mormonism](#), posted January 12, 2017

[How I Study the Scriptures](#), posted March 18, 2010

[3 Nephi 11: 36](#), posted September 29, 2010

[Scriptures, Not Traditions](#), posted February 24, 2014