



“The youth of the Church are hungry for the things of the Spirit; they are eager to learn the gospel, and they want it straight, undiluted.”

Ingriths, 123RF.

Principles and Practices for Motivating Youth for Scripture Literacy

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Brother Howard enjoys teaching his students, and his students look forward to coming to class because they know they will learn important gospel truths. But there is a problem: students are not reading their scriptures as often or as carefully as they should. After careful consideration, Brother Howard decides to encourage students to complete their daily scripture reading by assigning course grades based, in part, on how often they read, and giving students daily quizzes that ask them to recall information from their reading. Brother Howard also plans a series of rewards if students complete their reading for a set number of days. The rewards include games, parties, and free time. He feels like this will provide a balanced approach for motivating his students to complete their daily scripture reading. A “carrot” and a “stick,” so to speak.

Across the hall, Sister Marshall’s classroom is similar to Brother Howard’s insofar as they work hard to learn the gospel and she and her students enjoy being together. Sister Marshall also notices that students are not reading as frequently or as carefully as they should. In response, Sister Marshall thinks about the value of scripture and what it can do for her students. She decides

to encourage them to read more frequently and more diligently by helping them see the power of scripture. In class, Sister Marshall talks more often about the experiences she is having in her own scripture study and invites students to do the same. She also gives them examples of when she has felt close to Heavenly Father as she reads, and explains how scripture seems to be giving her the strength to do things that she could never do before, like forgive past wrongs. As she teaches, Sister Marshall makes it a point to draw attention to how scripture and scripture reading are influencing her and her students and provides a few minutes in class for students to share how scripture makes them feel.

With regard to motivating youth to read scripture, what distinguishes these two classrooms? It is not the teachers' sincerity, knowledge of the gospel, or their love for their students. It is not the students' abilities, sense of responsibility, or testimony. The biggest difference between Brother Howard and Sister Marshall's classrooms is the motivational contexts, specifically the way they think about motivation and the techniques they use to motivate their students to read scripture. On the one hand, Brother Howard attempts to motivate students to engage in the mental, emotional, and spiritual work of scripture reading in ways that may be unrelated to scripture reading, such as grades, games, quizzes, parties, and so forth. Sister Marshall, on the other hand, thinks about motivating students to read scripture by highlighting the value of scripture, scripture reading, and its influence in her and her students' lives.

Background and Review of Key Constructs

This paper focuses on principles and practices for motivating youth to read scripture. It is informed by recent research into religious youths' motivations for scripture literacy.¹ After reading this research, we wondered how we could operationalize in a gospel context the identified principles of motivation. Because the study was intended for a nonreligious, academic audience, one of the issues we faced in writing this paper was making the research applicable for Latter-day Saint religious educators.² Our approach was to identify specific literacy practices that religious educators could use to motivate youth to read scripture in ways that fit comfortably within a Latter-day Saint context and simultaneously cohered with the principles of motivation in the original article. Because the present paper represents a complex conceptual task that could be informed by various theoretical perspectives, framing how we think

about key constructs, such as literacy, scripture literacy, and motivation for literacy, provides insight into our inclusion of the practices examined in the heart of this paper.

Literacy and Scripture Literacy

We conceptualize literacy in this paper from social and cultural perspectives. Social and cultural theorists argue that knowledge is "out there" in the world, waiting to be constructed.³ From this perspective, knowledge is not simply transferred from one object or person to another. Nor do people impose meaning on objects. Meaning comes into existence as we interact with the people, events, ideas, and objects in our environments. Social and cultural theorists maintain that people are agentive and interact with their environments to construct meaning. This interaction, or "collision of the organism and the environment,"⁴ produces new understanding that can transform the way we think and experience the world. Lev Vygotsky explained the process of constructing knowledge as "active adaption to the external world."⁵ From a social and cultural perspective, if there is no interaction between us and our surroundings, then there is no production of knowledge, no construction of meaning, and no literacy.

Traditionally, literacy has been understood, in part, as the ability to read. However, sociocultural perspectives maintain that there is more to literacy than saying words in print. Literacy is about how we use language to construct knowledge and how that knowledge and its production align with our social and cultural purposes, values, experiences, and contexts. This means that literacy is always locally informed social practice and, therefore, "a function of the . . . context and culture in which it occurs."⁶ Reading the same text, for example, in different spaces for different purposes can alter the manner of our reading, the meaning that we make, and the use to which we put the meaning we have made. Therefore, literacy is a social and cultural tool for constructing knowledge with specific texts, for specific purposes, in specific contexts.⁷ Due in large part to the body of research that positions young people's literacy learning as social practice, we now have a clearer understanding of how youth use literacy to take hold of their lives, negotiate complex social spaces, navigate complex texts, and use language to position themselves and others as insiders and outsiders.⁸

With regard to scripture literacy, we view it as a special type of knowledge production that privileges the construction of meaning of sacred texts as

informed by the beliefs, experiences, traditions, and practices that are valued in specific religious contexts. Because we also conceptualize scripture literacy as sociocultural practice, reading sacred texts in one religious setting may be different than reading them in other religious settings. For example, reading scripture like a Mormon may be different than reading scripture like a Methodist,⁹ or a Muslim, or a Catholic, based on each faith's commitments, histories, practices, and traditions. Moreover, how one is expected to read scripture across different congregations within a single faith may vary as well, based on the social and cultural nature of the congregations. For example, reading the Book of Mormon in a Fijian village may be different than reading it in a Maryland branch or a Salt Lake City ward.

Even within a single congregation, scripture literacy can look very different from one setting to another. Sunday School may privilege one type of reading. Sacrament meeting another. Young Men another. And the sisters in Relief Society may have a special way of reading scripture not shared by the elders in their quorum. The point is that as social contexts, purposes, and expectations shift, so too can socially acceptable methods and goals for reading scripture. In the end, there is no best way to read scripture; instead, how we read is a matter of social practice.

Motivation for Literacy

Motivation explains why we do what we do, or our reasons for (in)action.¹⁰ Historically, motivation researchers have tended to view motivation for literacy as a psychological construct aimed at explaining individuals' engagement with their worlds and texts by examining their cognitive states.¹¹ However, viewed as a social and cultural construct, motivation for literacy becomes more than individuals' cognitive states. From a sociocultural perspective, motivation for literacy attends to interpersonal and environmental factors that arise from social, cultural, and historical experiences that influence why we engage with texts. We conceptualize motivation for literacy in this paper as a sociocultural construct and operationalize it by situating it as the dynamic processes through which *readers* interact with *texts* through a variety of literacy *activities* within specific instructional and other social *contexts*.¹²

Readers, for example, bring their entire lifetime of experiences with them as they engage with texts. These include their experiences with various texts, their different purposes for reading and their reading abilities, as well as their vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of the world, and their reader identities.

Readers also bring their interests and attitudes about reading, and their preferences for certain types of texts. All of these come to bear upon how, and for the purpose of this article, why, readers engage with texts, including scripture.

Texts refer to the nature of the material that readers navigate to construct meaning. These can include audio, digital, and print texts. With regard to their influence on motivation for literacy, texts contain certain vocabularies, language registers, features, structures, and genre conventions that can affect readers' willingness to engage with them. Texts also have specific discourse patterns, syntax, graphic representations, and varying degrees of conceptual clarity and unity. Any and all of these text characteristics can influence readers' motivations for engaging with them, in specific contexts.

At one level, *contexts* can refer to the instructional settings in which literacy and learning activities occur.¹³ We might call this instructional environment "activities in context"¹⁴ because it represents a more immediate setting for literacy learning that can include and be informed by social relationships, the arrangement of the physical classroom space, and the purposes of classroom literacy instruction. Activities in context can also include specific instructional activities and the classroom's cultural norms. At another level, contexts can represent the larger cultural and historical environments in which readers, texts, and activities interact to inform motivation for literacy.



Youth are motivated to read scripture because it makes them feel loved and gives them a sense of peace, comfort, and security.

These larger contexts can include broad economic environments, political climates and dynamics, and institutional policies and practices.

Together, this model represents a sociocultural conception of motivation for literacy, signaling that motivation does not reside solely in the individual; rather, motivation for literacy can be informed by several factors, such as the reader, the text, the activities and activities in context, and the larger social and cultural contexts. As such, motivation for literacy may be “less a static and singular feature of . . . an individual, and more a feature of the texts and contexts . . . [that youth experience].”¹⁵ Informed by sociocultural views of literacy, scripture literacy, and motivation for literacy, this paper examines principles and practices for motivating youth to read scripture within a Latter-day Saint instructional context.

Motivating Latter-day Saint Youth for Scripture Literacy

Although “religion is a significant presence in the lives of American teenagers”¹⁶ and by and large religious youth read religious texts, precious little research has sought to explore the motivations that drive religious youth to read these texts. Often we assume youths’ motivations, or draw inferences about what might motivate them to read religious texts based on anecdotal information or our personal experiences with them. This paper goes beyond these approaches by examining what drives religious youth to read scripture using a fivefold motivation for scripture literacy framework.¹⁷ We use READS as a simple mnemonic to help remember the key features of the framework:

- *Religious knowledge*: Religious youth are motivated to read scripture because they want to develop their religious knowledge by learning about their religious traditions and the lessons they feel scripture has to offer them.
- *Endure life’s challenges*: Youth are motivated to read scripture because they believe it can give them the strength to endure the challenges they face and prepare them for the challenges ahead.
- *Application to life*: Religious youth also read scripture because they feel it can show them how to become certain types of people and how to live their lives in accordance with the principles and standards of their faith.
- *Divine connections*: Youth are motivated to read scripture because they believe it connects them to divinity and helps them develop a

stronger relationship with God, the Father; his Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost.

- *Security, comfort, and love*: Youth are also motivated to read scripture because it makes them feel loved and gives them a sense of peace, comfort, and security.

Although these principles can stand alone as guides for developing specific approaches for motivating youth for scripture literacy, we believe they are more advantageous to teachers and students when thought of as features of an interconnected motivational framework. In the rest of this section, we describe each of the principles in more detail and demonstrate how Latter-day Saint religious educators might use them in their classrooms to motivate students to read scripture.

Religious Knowledge

Because scripture is inspired by God, we believe we should read it and that it has important things for us to learn. In fact, one of the primary reasons we read scripture is to learn what it has to teach. Sometimes we might be tempted to look beyond scripture to motivate youth to read it, like Brother Howard did. Given the character of our youth, this might be a mistake. We do not have to sneak up on them with the gospel or entertain them with elaborate lessons. Youth in the Church want the gospel. And they want it directly. “The youth of the Church,” President J. Reuben Clark said, “are hungry for the things of the Spirit; they are eager to learn the gospel, and they want it straight, undiluted.”¹⁸ Learning as motivation is a simple yet profound principle of motivation for scripture literacy that can transform youths’ gospel learning and the development of their faith.

In our classrooms we might consider explicitly teaching students skills for developing scripture knowledge and highlighting the various ways that that knowledge is being developed. We must be clear, however, about the types of religious knowledge that students are developing and how and why that knowledge is an important part of what it means to be a member of a particular congregation or community of Saints.

If, for example, mastery of factual knowledge is privileged, then teaching students some skills for developing a clearer understanding of what is happening, when, and to whom could increase the religiosocial bonds among the youth and their community. It could also motivate them to read scripture

because they would see how the knowledge they are developing is the type of knowledge valued within their religious community. The same is true for congregations that value the development of scriptural interpretations or privilege the ability to analyze scripture passages to identify gospel principles embedded in the stories. Therefore, before we teach youth generic scripture study skills, we want to be sure that the *types* of skills we teach them to learn from scripture are developing the types of knowledge that are, or can be, important to them.

As we teach youth scripture study skills designed to help them develop the types of knowledge that mean the most to them in their religiocultural settings, then we are not only helping them develop the types of religious knowledge that they and others close to them value but are building motivation in them for reading scripture. In this way, scripture can become a tool for reinforcing the most important relationships in their lives because students could learn the skills to develop the “right” types of knowledge from reading it.

If youth can be motivated to read scripture because of what they learn from it, then we could draw attention to the manner in which knowledge is being produced. We could recognize when students are learning by explaining how they learned something or what they did to understand scripture. For example, we could draw attention to the times students learn through analysis, synthesis, recognition of patterns, identification of principles, application of principles, rereading, pondering, asking questions, talking with others, making connections, solving problems, and so forth. We might say,

- “Notice how Tom reread that verse at least four times until he felt he was ready to move on to the next one. Did you notice how each reading was a little different? Each time he seemed to draw attention to different words and read at different speeds. Tom, could you tell us how rereading influenced your understanding of the verse?”
- “Stephanie’s understanding of the key phrase seems to have shifted when she read the sentences before and after it. Stephanie, talk to us about how you used context to understand what you were reading.”
- “That question seemed to drive our learning today. We kept going back to it as we read the passage, wondering how it might influence our understanding of Lehi’s love for his family. Sometimes holding a

question in our minds gives us focus and encourages us to think more carefully.”

- “Anna seemed to be really wrestling with that idea. She read the passage, looked up the footnote, talked to a neighbor, and then she seemed to just think about it. Anna, could you talk to us about how you figured that out and what you think you should do next?”

These suggestions highlight what is being learned—and how—in the moment that it is occurring. In a few well-placed phrases, we can explicitly show students *that* they are learning, *what* they are learning, and *how* they are learning, which can make their development of knowledge and faith more transparent. Over time, this approach to motivation for scripture literacy can demystify students’ scripture learning and give them the time and space to see how much they are learning and how much closer they are drawing to the Lord, which can encourage them to read more regularly and carefully in class and on their own.

Endure Challenges

Being a teenager—even a religious teenager—can be complex.¹⁹ Although religious youth appear to be doing well on many metrics compared to their nonreligious peers,²⁰ they are not immune to the stressors that can complicate and confuse teenage life. When things seem particularly challenging, one of the tools religious youth have to support themselves is scripture. In our gospel classrooms, we can tap into the power of scripture to help young people see how it can give them the strength to endure the challenges they are facing and perhaps prepare them for the challenges that will come.

One way to regularly highlight the power of scripture in students’ lives is to establish a simple routine in which students are invited to reflect on their recent experiences with scripture, searching for and lingering over those moments when they felt a renewed sense of strength, resolve, or faith that allowed them to more clearly understand or more surely endure the challenges before them. For example, “Think of a time when scripture made you feel strong. What was that like? How did you feel? What was happening in your heart?” It is important that youth have opportunities to identify moments when scripture gave them the strength they needed to endure. It is equally important that youths’ subsequent scripture reading—and their lives—be informed by these experiences. If they can remember the power scripture has

given them, then “when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon [them]” (Helaman 5:12) our young people will have a chance, through their faith and the Lord’s grace, to weather the storm.

Because not all youth will know how to find strength to endure from scripture, we may need to teach them. As they prepare to read scripture, we might invite students to think about the tensions, troubles, and challenges in their lives and to keep these in mind as they read, seeking the Lord’s direction to know how to manage them and, if necessary, bear them. We might also encourage students to pray as they read to explicitly find direction, comfort, and strength to endure their challenges. Because God can speak to us through scripture, we could invite youth to listen for his voice as they read. As Heavenly Father speaks to them, his love and guidance will give them power, enabling them to find their way through the troubles they face, more clearly understand the purposes of the challenges before them, and find peace as they come to realize that God, as their Father, will forever keep them close to his heart even when they might feel that they are alone. This can be a powerful reason for youth to read and stay engaged in scripture.

Application to Life

A third principle of motivating youth for scripture literacy is to make scripture applicable to their lives. For their part, youth must feel like they are able to do something meaningful with what they learn from scripture. Recently, Eric’s fifteen-year-old daughter, Josie, came home from seminary and told him about Abraham being commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Eric asked her, “Why do you think this matters? Why do you think you studied this?” She said, “Because sometimes the Lord needs us to do hard things.” As they talked, he thought about how good it felt that his daughter understood that messy, complicated, and ostensibly unfair experiences were nothing to be afraid of or get angry about. They also talked about how difficult this must have been for Abraham and Isaac, and how they could draw strength from their strength.

It may be a cliché to ask youth, “How can we apply this to our lives?” but the concept of application can motivate youth to put forth the time and effort to read scripture in the ways that it needs to be read. When we invite youth to apply scripture, the implicit message is that it will influence who they will, or can, become. And who do our youth want to be? Many of them want to be

like the people they read about in scripture: Nephi, Jacob, Mary, Eve, Mosiah, Adam, Rachel, Ruth, and Rebekah.

When Josie was about eight-years-old, she asked if she could have “Rebekah” as her middle name. At some level, she had fallen in love with Rebekah and wanted to be like her. She wanted her name! For the next few months a picture of Rebekah hung near Josie’s bed and when Eric put her to bed he whispered, “Sweet dreams, Josie Rebekah.” Because many of our youth have had similar experiences, the people in scripture are more than characters in a book. They are friends, mentors, and guides that can stay with them for a lifetime.

Being clear about how applying scripture can help them become like the people they love and admire can motivate students to read scripture with more effort and a clearer focus. In our classrooms, we might help the people we read about become more real by trying to understand them more fully. Specifically, we can invite students to do the following:

- *Empathize with the characters’ experiences.* What might Nephi have felt like when he realized that his brothers took pleasure in his sorrow? What would you be thinking about if you were with Lehi and Nephi in a Lamanite prison? How do you think you would feel if you were Leah, in desperate need of Jacob’s love?
- *Ask the characters questions.* What would you like to ask Chief Captain Moroni about his war strategies? We just read about Eve eating the fruit. What are you curious about? Ask her a question. The Savior just finished the Sermon on the Mount. What do you want to ask him? What do you want to ask the people who were there?
- *Describe what they think the characters were like.* We know so little about Teancum. How do you imagine him? What do you think he looked like? What do you think he sounded like in battle? What do you think he was like as a father? Knowing what we know about Teancum, what do you think he was like as a friend?
- *Engage in invented conversations with the characters.* Let’s take a moment to reflect on what we know about Mary. What do you think it would be like to talk with her? How do you think you would feel spending time with her? What do you think she would want to talk about?

- *Identify what they love about the characters.* What do you love about Rebekah? What impresses you most about Peter? What do you admire about Isaac?



Because God can speak to us through scripture, we could invite youth to listen for his voice as they read.

designpics, 123RF.

With a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the people they read about in scripture, students can develop a clearer sense of the types of people they want to become, which can motivate them to live what they are learning from scripture. Furthermore, we all have imagined “future selves” that can encourage us to become better people. When we invite youth to apply scripture, we extend the invitation to be better and to become more like their best “future selves.” It would behoove us to talk less about generic application of scripture and offer more explicit invitations for students to apply what they are learning to their lives. We might ask,

- “How can living this commandment help you become the person that you want to become?”
- “How can this experience help you become the type of person who would feel comfortable in the Savior’s presence?”
- “How could living this principle help you become someone who could more clearly hear the whisperings of the Holy Ghost?”

Closely connecting scripture reading with becoming the people that they want to become can motivate students to apply the lessons they learn from scripture to their lives.

Divine Connections

The heart and soul of religion may be the development of our relationship with divinity. In fact, developing a personal relationship with the Savior may be the most important thing we can do. The late Elder James E. Faust explained that “having such a relationship can unchain the divinity within us, and nothing can make a greater difference in our lives as we come to know and understand our divine relationship with God.”²¹ We believe that youth in the Church understand the connection between reading scripture and drawing close to God. President Spencer W. Kimball said that to narrow the distance between himself and divinity he would “immerse [himself] in the scriptures.”²² As a tool for drawing close to the Lord, scripture may be one of the most promising, and certainly one of the most motivating. As the understanding that can make the greatest “difference in our lives” as Latter-day Saints, knowing divinity clearly deserves special attention as a way to motivate youth for scripture literacy.

In our classrooms we could use two broad approaches: teach students to find divinity in scripture and help them recognize when they are developing a relationship with divinity through scripture. First, to help students find God and Christ in scripture, we could make running lists of responses to important questions that we keep posted on the walls to help youth learn specific things about divinity. For example, we could invite students to look for the following as they read:

- How does Heavenly Father talk to his children?
- How does Heavenly Father feel about his children?
- What are the characteristics of divinity? (What is God like? What is Christ like? What is the Holy Ghost like?)
- Which passages help me feel the Lord's love?

We would certainly want to model how to find responses to these questions as we read scripture and invite students to keep these questions in their minds as they read. We might also invite students to add to these lists as they identify possible responses, and take time periodically to discuss what has been added and perhaps identify themes that might shed additional light on students' developing relationship with divinity. We could say, "It looks like you've added some important responses to 'Which passages help me feel the Lord's love?' Let's take a minute to review the list and look for patterns across the passages." Regularly returning to the lists through conversation and analysis sends a message: These things matter! This approach can help students develop the spiritual tools for nurturing their relationship with divinity and engaging more readily with scripture.

Second, in addition to helping students find divinity in scripture, we can help them recognize when and how they are developing a relationship with divinity through scripture. As teachers, we could set the stage for this by regularly sharing brief moments that focus on how experiences with specific passages have drawn us closer to the Lord.

- "As I was looking closely at the words Lehi uses to talk to Laman and Lemuel, I began to wonder what it must be like for Heavenly Father to watch me make poor decisions so often. I'm grateful for his mercy and the moments of grace that I feel from him."

- "I get excited every time I start the Book of Enos because I love reading about Enos's experience with the Lord. I feel closer to Heavenly Father when I see how invested he is in Enos's life. I feel like, at some level, he wants to be in my life like that too."

Once we have shown students how to recognize when they are drawing closer to the Lord during their scripture reading, we can invite them to do it as they read, and then develop simple classroom routines that allow them to share and learn from each other how their relationships with divinity develop through scripture reading. Drawing students' attention to how they are developing relationships with divinity creates a place for youth to be more aware of the role scripture plays in knowing and loving the Lord.

Security, Comfort, and Love

Thus far we have seen how youth can be motivated for scripture literacy by the knowledge they can develop from scripture, by the strength it can give them to endure the challenges they face, by the way scripture can be applied to their lives, and by its ability to connect them to divinity. Religious youth are also motivated to read scripture because of how it makes them feel. In religious settings youth are often taught to pay attention to their feelings as a way of understanding religious truths. It seems reasonable, then, that youth have learned to associate positive feelings with scripture and that these feelings can influence their desire to read it. Helping youth identify the feelings of comfort, love, hope, joy, happiness, and so forth that they are experiencing—or can experience—as they read scripture can motivate them for scripture literacy.

In our classrooms, we could motivate students to read scripture by helping them recognize the positive and powerful feelings that scripture brings into their hearts. Specifically, we might ask questions that invite them to feel. President Henry B. Eyring provided an example of the contrast between questions that invite factual responses and those that invite students to feel truth. He said:

Here is a question that might not invite inspiration: "How is a true prophet recognized?" That question invites an answer which is a list, drawn from memory of the scriptures and the words of living prophets. Many students could participate in answering. Most could give at least a passable suggestion. And minds would be stimulated. But we could also ask the question this way, with just a small difference:

“When have you felt that you were in the presence of a prophet?” That will invite individuals to search their memories for feelings.²³

Feelings can invite inspiration and confirmation of truth. In our experience, the Spirit often whispers truth to our hearts through feelings of security, comfort, love, hope, and peace. As we invite youth to *feel* scripture, we are encouraging them to read with their hearts, which can help them recognize truth in personally meaningful ways. To help them experience how scripture can invite them to feel, we could ask students to consider the following:

- How does scripture help you feel safe?
- How does reading scripture give you hope?
- When does scripture make you feel loved?

The alert teacher will also watch for opportunities when students are touched by a verse of scripture, or when the teacher personally feels a spiritual witness of the power of the verses being discussed. At such times we must be willing to identify that the Spirit is present. We might say, “I am feeling the Spirit now.” Or ask, “What are you feeling right now?” or, “Are you feeling the Holy Ghost as we read these words?” Identifying when the Spirit is present can increase students’ sensitivity to the Spirit in their own scripture learning.

We could also identify *how* we know when the Spirit is present. We could say, “I know the Spirit is here because I feel peaceful about the verse and what it implies for my journey with the Lord,” or, “I know I’m feeling the Spirit because my mind seems clear and I feel ready to listen to what he has to tell me.” Closely related to the previous point, we might also identify *what* the Spirit is doing when he is present. He can confirm truth, bring peace, guide, chastise, or draw us to God and Christ. In our classrooms, as we are sensitive to the workings of the Spirit, we can learn to identify *what* the Spirit is doing when he is present:

- “The Holy Ghost is helping me understand the importance of something that happened recently with my son.”
- “The Spirit is reminding me how important it is to be kind, especially to those whom I sometimes struggle with.”
- “The Holy Ghost is calling me to repentance. He’s helping me see what I need to change in my life.”

When we have demonstrated how to recognize the presence and influence of the Spirit, we may invite students to share when they are feeling the Spirit, how they know, and what he is whispering to them. As we work together to learn how to recognize the feelings we are having as we read and discuss scripture and how the Spirit is working on us to draw us to God, then we are creating a space in which youth may be more willing and able to read scripture with renewed effort and skill. When this happens, students are more likely to want to read scripture on their own and have things to say about it because of the way it makes them feel.

Conclusion

Motivation for scripture literacy is not simply about individual cognitive states, or games, or rewards, or grades. It is a matter of the texts and activities that we use and our social and cultural contexts. And in many cases, it is also a matter of the heart. It behooves religious educators in the Church to pay more attention to the social and cultural nature of scripture literacy and the motivations that drive it. Motivation for scripture literacy should not be an “add-on” to a lesson, or something “extra” we do to get students excited. Instead, we might think of motivation for scripture literacy as a regular and important part of what we do every day. Motivation for scripture literacy is a way of thinking, talking, and being in a gospel classroom to nurture students’ relationships with scripture—and through that, their relationships with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ—much like Sister Marshall did when she spoke openly and intentionally about her experiences with scripture and encouraged her students to do the same.

If we desire young people to continue developing in their faith, motivation for scripture literacy is key, in part because reading scripture in adolescence can influence religious commitment in adulthood.²⁴ Clearly, reading scripture does not inevitably produce highly committed Latter-day Saints, but in combination with other factors, becoming literate with scripture can have profound implications for youths’ religiosity as they enter adulthood. In the end, the attention that we give to motivating young people to read scripture can turn into an important legacy in the development of their gospel knowledge and their faith. **RE**

Notes

1. See Eric D. Rackley, "Religious Youths' Motivations for Reading Complex, Religious Texts," *Teachers College Record* 118, no. 11 (2016): 1–50.
2. The original article identifies a general framework for motivating youth to read scripture. In the current paper, we aim to examine what this framework can contribute to the thinking and practice of motivation for scripture literacy in a Latter-day Saint context. We make no research or generalizability claims; instead, we explore the motivation for scripture literacy practices that could align in a religiocultural way with the principles of the motivation framework.
3. Lev Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978). J. V. Wertsch, *Mind as Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
4. L. S. Vygotsky, "The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions," in *The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology*, ed. James V. Wertsch (White Plains, NY: Sharpe, 1981), 152.
5. Vygotsky, "The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions," 151–52.
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7. See James Paul Gee, *Literacy and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
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