

As you read the following hypothetical dialogue between a young person and a leader, ask yourself what answers you would give. Is the young person answering these questions really a faithful member of the Church?

"Do you believe that the Church is truly led by living prophets?"

"Yes, I sustain our leaders as prophets, seers, and revelators, and I believe they are guided by the Lord in leading the Church."

"How often do you feel these inspired leaders actually receive revelation from God?"

"I believe they receive direction constantly. This is what sustains the Church from day to day."

"How are these revelations made known to the Church?"

"Our leaders teach them to us at general conference. The chief means by which current guidance comes to the Church is the inspired counsel we get from our leaders at each general conference."

"What about those who do not attend the conferences?"

"There's a report of the conference proceedings published for all members to read."

"Do you suppose that most members of the Church read these reports?"

"Certainly not all the members."

"Do you read the reports regularly?"

"Not really. My time is quite limited."

"Are you aware of what was said in the last general conference?"

"No."

"But you really believe that the Church is led by living prophets?"

"Yes."

"How can you have true faith in the living prophets if you don't know what they say?"

"That's a good question."

"Aren't you afraid you might be missing some important counsel or revelation necessary for your personal success and happiness?"

"I never thought of it that way."

President Harold B. Lee told of a very similar incident:

"A man came in to see me and said that he had heard that some man appeared mysteriously to a group of temple workers and told them, 'You had better hurry up and store for a year, or two, or three, because there will come a season when there won't be any production.' He asked me what I thought about it, and I said, 'Well, were you in the April conference of 1936?'"

"He replied, 'No, I couldn't be there.'"

"And I said, 'Well surely you read the report of what was said by the Brethren in that conference?'"

"No, he hadn't."

"Well," I said, "at that conference the Lord did give a revelation about the storage of food. How in the world is the Lord going to get over to you what he wants you to do if you're not there when he says it, and you do not take the time to read it after it had been said?"

"We live in a changing world. The Lord is going to keep his people informed, if they will listen. As President Clark said in a classic talk that he gave, 'We do not need a prophet; we need a listening ear' (see Conference Report, Oct. 1948, p. 82). That is the great need of our generation." ("The Place of the Living Prophet, Seer, and Revelator," in *Charge to Religious Educators*, p. 109.)

(13-1) It Is Important to Study the Talks Given at Conference

Where possible, every member of the Church should listen to the words of the prophets as they are given in the general conferences of the Church (see D&C 1:14). Because there are many who are unable to hear the words of the prophets at the time they are given, or who would like to remember and to study these messages, the conference reports and the conference issues of the *Ensign* are published.

"If we talk about the living oracles and want to pay respect to them, how shall we do this? Shall we do it by never reading their words—by paying no attention to that which they say? That is a very poor way of doing. We ought to listen to their words."



Howard W. Hunter counseled all to study the conference messages

When we cannot hear their words, we should read them; for they are the words of the authorized servants of God. I feel that there is a great neglect among us in this respect." (George Q. Cannon, in Conference Report, Oct. 1897, p. 38.)

Elder Spencer W. Kimball gave the following challenge to a group of BYU students, but it applies to all members of the Church:

"I hope you young people all heard the messages of the ages delivered last month. There will be other conferences every six months. I hope you will get your copy of the Improvement Era [containing the conference talks] and underline the pertinent thoughts and keep it with you for continual reference. No text or volume outside the standard works of the Church should have such a prominent place on your personal library shelves." (*In the World But Not of It*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [Provo, 14 May 1968], p. 3.)

Ten years later Spencer W. Kimball, then President of the Church, gave the following counsel:

"Now as we conclude this general conference, let us all give heed to what was said to us. Let us assume the counsel given applies to us, to me. Let us hearken to those we sustain as prophets and seers, as well as the other brethren, as if our eternal life depended upon it, because it does!

"... May I stress again the value of reading the addresses given at our general conferences in the *Ensign* magazine." (In Conference Report, Apr. 1978, p. 117; or *Ensign*, May 1978, p. 77.)

Similarly, Elder Howard W. Hunter counseled all to study and ponder the messages given in general conference. He promised that prayerfully seeking would bring a personal conviction by the Holy Ghost of the truthfulness of the counsel.

"We would say to the world: Listen to and weigh the words of this conference; consider the direction and counsel that come from those who speak. Then, after prayerful pondering, that sweet warm conviction that comes from the Holy Spirit will testify to you of its truthfulness." (In Conference Report, Oct. 1981, p. 16; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, p. 13.)

(13-2) Conference Reports Should Guide Our Walk and Talk

As President of the Church, Harold B. Lee said: "If you want to know what the Lord would have the Saints know and to have his guidance and direction for the next six months, get a copy of the proceedings of this conference, and you will have the latest word of the Lord as far as the Saints are concerned" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, p. 168; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, p. 128).

Hearing the word of God is not sufficient in and of itself. We must study and ponder the message. Elder Marion G. Romney emphasized the importance of the messages of general conference when, in the April Conference of 1954, he said, "We have heard enough truth and direction in this conference to bring us into the presence of God if we would follow it" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1954, pp. 132-33).

(13-3) General Conference Should Inspire Us to Improve

"This has been a great conference and as each one of these wonderful sermons has been rendered I've listened with great attention, and I have made up my mind that I shall go home and be a greater man than I have ever been before. I have listened to all the instructions and the suggestions, and I am hoping that every person who has heard them has done likewise. We have heard many things, all in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ. They have been beautifully given by men who are dedicated to the service of the Lord. I urge you to take much thought in your return home from this conference and think again of the things that have been brought to your attention; and so far as they approach your life in any way, see if you can use them to bring you back—all of us—toward the perfection which the Lord has asked of us." (Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Oct. 1977, p. 113; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, p. 75.)



We should study the words of the prophets with our families

"As we return to our homes, brothers and sisters, I hope we will not close the door on the conference. Take it with us. Take it home with us. Tell our families about it, . . . give them the benefit of any inspiration that might have come to you, any determinations to change your lives, and make them more acceptable to your Heavenly Father.

"... I know that this is the work of the Lord. You haven't come these long distances for nothing. It is to feed your souls." (Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Oct. 1974, p. 162; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, p. 113.)

"As you return to your wards and stakes, your missions, and to your individual homes around the world, I pray our Heavenly Father to bless you and your families. Let the messages and spirit of this conference radiate and find expression in all that you do henceforth—in your homes, in your work, in your meetings, and in all your comings and goings.

Let us be better Latter-day Saints now than we have ever been before." (Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Oct. 1978, pp. 110-11; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, p. 73.)

(13-4) Some Suggestions for Studying Conference Talks

Inspired addresses are delivered at every general conference. Listeners often make such exclamations as "It was such a wonderful conference. The Spirit was so much in evidence. I only wish I could remember all that was said so I could apply it in my life."

What can we do so that we will remember and apply the messages given at conferences?

Written copies of the conference addresses are provided in the May and November issues of the *Ensign* and in the official report of the conference, which can be obtained from Church headquarters. Carefully, prayerfully reading the conference addresses, noting, summarizing, and cross-referencing important points will help us remember and apply the messages.

An effective way to study the conference reports is to analyze the contents of each address using the following categories:

- Official announcements
- Doctrinal interpretations or clarifications
- Prophetic statements
- Commandments or counsels
- Inspirational sayings, stories, or incidents which illustrate principles
- Personal insights gained

Each of these categories is briefly discussed below and examples are given of ways you might study.

Official Announcements

Official announcements include important decisions made by church leaders, or changes in organization, policy, or personnel. Examples of such items are: the reorganization of the First Quorum of the Seventy, announcements of new temples, and the addition of sections 137 and 138 to the Doctrine and Covenants. Mark these items for future reference.

Doctrinal Interpretations or Clarifications

An important part of each general conference is the interpretations the Brethren, particularly the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, give of the standard works and the prophetic statements they include in their addresses. You could make these materials more accessible and useful by noting, underlining, or filing them.

In your copy of the *Ensign* or conference report, underline or block out the doctrinal interpretations or explanations of passages in the standard works. Then cross-reference these explanations to the standard works and create a file of the quotations you might want to use in study and teaching. For example, you might take a 4" x 6" card and put a quotation on it.

D&C 1:36

"And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world." (D&C 1:36.)

"How does he reign in our midst? How shall he have power over his saints? If you had been in the meeting of the priesthood last night, you would have seen the great power that was in evidence there, where there were 2,000 holders of the priesthood—the power of God by which he works through men to the accomplishment of his purposes. He is reigning in our midst through them." (Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Manchester England Area Conference 1971, p. 135; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1971, p. 12.)

Genesis 3:16

"And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." (Gen. 3:16.) I have a question about the word *rule*. It gives the wrong impression. I would prefer to use the word *preside* because that's what he does. A righteous husband presides over his wife and family." (Spencer W. Kimball, "The Blessings and Responsibilities of Women" [Relief Society Conference address], *Ensign*, Mar. 1976, p. 72.)

When making cards like these, be sure to include the scripture reference, the quotation from the conference report in which the explanation of the scripture is given, and the source in the conference report.

After you have put the information on an 4" x 6" card, you might cross-reference your scriptures and the conference report (or *Ensign*) by noting the source of the conference statement like this:

1 CORINTHIANS 15

ig, at to od ou ea ic- : I id- let	<p>ing to the scriptures:</p> <p>5 And that he was ^bseen of ^bCe-phas, then of the twelve:</p> <p>6 After that, he was ^aseen of ^babove five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.</p> <p>7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.</p> <p>8 And last of all he was ^aseen of me also, as of one born out of due time.</p> <p>9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not ^ameet to be called an</p>
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bedience.
Cor. 14: 35...

^b Acts 3: 18; Alma 5: 27.
4a to Jesus Christ, Resur-

Even though this process takes time and effort, you will find that if you are willing to make the effort you will benefit greatly. Remember that the greatest resource for understanding the prophets is other prophets (see 2 Peter 1:20-21). What prophets explain about the scriptures is especially valuable to our understanding of them. You should have some personal system which helps you remember these explanations and allows you to find them again easily.

Prophetic Statements

Underline and keep notes on the prophecies in the messages of the Brethren. For example, in 1967 President Hugh B. Brown, then a member of the First Presidency, told the young men in the priesthood meeting:

himself to be tempted to do anything that would cause him to blush if it were known by those he loves the most.

I hope that every young man under the sound of my voice will resolve tonight, "I am going to keep myself clean. I am going to serve the Lord. I am going to prepare every way I can for future service, because I want to be prepared when the final battle shall come."

And some of you young men are going to engage in that battle. Some of you are going to engage in the final testing time, which is coming and which is closer to us than we know.

I want to leave with you my blessing, the blessing of the First Presidency and the Twelve. We are greatly ap-

Commandments or Counsels

A command or counsel is an entreaty or exhortation to do some specific thing. Conference messages contain many of these statements. By studying these you will learn the specific things you should be doing to be in harmony with the Lord's will. Underline these statements in your conference report and then make a list of them to refer to so you will remember the things you should be doing. Entries such as the following would probably appear on your list:

Plant and use a garden
Write my personal history
Keep a journal
Pay a generous fast offering
Avoid contention in the home

It would be good to head your list with all of the imperative statements made by the President of the Church, since his counsel is the most important. But remember that the counsel of other General Authorities will be in harmony with that of the President of the Church and will give you valuable guidance in your life.

Inspirational Sayings, Stories, or Incidents Which Illustrate Principles

It is useful to save inspirational sayings. For example, "the time to listen is when someone needs to be heard" (Marvin J. Ashton, in Conference Report, Apr. 1976, p. 80; or *Ensign*, May 1976, p. 53.)

Stories and incidents are valuable to have for lessons, talks, or your own inspiration. For example, the principle "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40) can be illustrated by the experience of Bishop Monson and his ward members in helping a German brother and his family. (See Conference Report, Oct. 1980, pp. 133-34; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, p. 91.)

Personal Insights Gained

As you ponder the counsel given by the Brethren in general conference, you can receive from the Holy Ghost insights and promptings tailored to your needs and your level of spiritual maturity. Writing down such insights can help to cement them in your mind and heart so they will have greater influence on your behavior.

(13-5) Further Application and Study

1. How can you make the conference addresses "the guide to [your] walk and talk during the next six months"? (Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Apr. 1946, p. 68). Devise a system for doing this. For example, you might make a list of challenges given in the conference that you feel you need to work on, including such things as studying the scriptures daily, avoiding contention in the home, and paying a more generous fast offering. Now formulate a plan to accomplish the things you have listed.

2. Select from the suggestions given in this lesson some ideas for your personal study. Begin an individual study of the last general conference using the methods you select.