

Interfaith Voices GT Column: The Importance of Learning and Education

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Oregon schools are back in session. We are fortunate to live in communities where learning and education are valued and encouraged. Throughout history, learning has been a hallmark of the great civilizations. As new communities were established, often the first building constructed was a school. With education, a future is created. But learning and educating is more than filling a mind; it is igniting a desire and pattern for life-long learning.

Latter-day Saint teachings outline “a vast field of valuable knowledge, incorporating an unlimited array of secular and religious subjects. Geography, culture, history, science and innumerable other subjects fall within these wide parameters, which extend well beyond the conventional scope of religious knowledge. Indeed, at one level, members of the Church do not distinguish between secular and religious knowledge. They regard all forms of truth as relevant and sacred.” (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/>)

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recognize five sources of canon including the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants. The Doctrine and Covenants is composed of teachings that were revealed to Joseph Smith and other latter-day prophets during the last two centuries. Many of these teachings are summarized in a verse from this book stating, “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36).

In Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, admonition is given to study “...things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass, things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgements which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and kingdoms” (D&C 88:78-79). Later in this section of the Doctrine and Covenants, we are asked to, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88: 118).

I love this encouragement to learn about nations, the heavens, history, the earth, kingdoms, wars, perplexities, and more, but to do so through the best books, by study and with faith. Quality and substance are not guaranteed just because words are published on a piece of paper or on a website. How can we develop the ability to recognize teachings that not only educate or entertain but are based on truth?

Kim B. Clark was Dean of the Harvard Business School and a former Commissioner of Church Education for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Dr. Clark recognizes the linkage between knowledge and understanding with this thought, “Deep learning...definitely means increased knowledge, but it also means increased understanding of the heart. It means increased skill and capacity to act. It means increased strength of character, including integrity, courage, and kindness.” High school and university degrees open doors of opportunities in life, but do not always guarantee strength of character. Wisdom is developed when we combine deep learning with faith.

Thankfully, we live in a glorious day when learning and education are not limited by gender, age or occupation. There is an explosion of opportunities for increasing our understanding of the world and its inhabitants. Yet there is hidden truth in the profound words of King Solomon, memorialized over 3000 years ago, when he said “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). This advice has stood the test of time.