

“Panning for Gold”

*26 Habits to Help Students (and Teachers) Find
Applications in the Scriptures*



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A Story . . .

A group of young boy scouts had a marvelous opportunity! Their experienced Scoutmaster was going to take them panning for gold—and any gold they found they could keep! The young boys were enthusiastic about their prospect for finding gold and filled the entire discussing what each would do with the gold that he found. “I’m going to buy me a lifetime supply of candy,” one youngster announced and then quickly added, “if my mom lets me.” “I’m going to get me a new bike with 25 gears and shocks and a seat that’s made of that gel stuff so that my bum doesn’t get sore” said another. “I’m gonna find so much gold, I’m going to make it into a swimming pool and do laps in my treasure!” a final one said. The rest of the trip was occupied with this kind of chatter, each boy eager to begin their treasure gathering.

The wise old Scoutmaster knew the perfect place to pan for gold—a slow-moving stream he had panned for gold before. “I even found these two chunks of gold right here,” he had said at the scout meeting when they planned to make their trip. Each boy’s eyes were wide as saucers as they eyed the gold. One scout turned to another and asked, “How old do you think the Scoutmaster is?” Another replied, “Well, I bet he got that back during the gold rush of ’49.” He said it low enough so that the Scoutmaster couldn’t hear but a few of the closer boys chuckled.

Finally, the group arrived at the river and the Scoutmaster dutifully passed out the pans to the boys’ outstretched hands. Each boy took off in a different direction; certain he knew the best place to find a pile of gold just under the surface of the water. They began eagerly dipping their pans in the water then bringing it to the surface so they could see the golden treasures that lay inside their blackened pans. But no gold was found. So, out with the water and another search.

An hour passed, and still no one had found any gold—not even the Scoutmaster. Boys began to be discouraged. Some threw their pans off to the side of the stream and sat down on the shore. Others got in a water fight and some seemed more interested in the water creatures than gold. There were a few that still panned for gold, but their hearts weren’t in it. One could tell by the look in their eye that they didn’t think gold could ever be found in water. I mean, why would gold be in silly river anyways, they thought.

The wise Scoutmaster could see their disappointment and frustration and figured now was the time to teach—their hearts were ready now. He called the boys over to him . . .

“One must prospect through and dig into the scriptures like a miner searching for precious metal. Scattered here and there are nuggets, some pure, some alloyed with other doctrines. Occasionally one strikes a rich vein which will yield all that one is willing to earn, for the scriptures do not explain nor interpret themselves.”

(Boyd K. Packer, *Things of the Soul*, p.169)

Introduction, Or How This Came To Be

I love teaching the scriptures! I love teaching them so that the words on the page come to life and have meaning to me and my students. I love feasting on them and feeling the Spirit as it directs me to understand them and discover new truths and applications. But I did not always feel this way. I have had a love for the scriptures for as long as I can remember, but when I was younger I remember feeling that I would just read them and get very few insights out of them. I first realized I was lacking in my personal relationship with the scriptures when I got married and read through my wife's scriptures. She had comments and questions in the margins that made her scriptures come to life. They were personal to her. She not only looked for principles and doctrines in the scriptures but would write and mark certain things that would help her apply it in powerful ways. I have to say I was jealous. Why couldn't I do that? I looked at my margins and the two things I had written weren't very inspiring. I was discouraged, but decided that it was time for me to develop this scripture study habit of personalizing the scriptures to myself—"likening them unto" myself. My first attempts were pretty shallow and not very soul-satisfying. But with practice I got better.

Another Example

Another example was that as I sat in on faculty meetings and inservices, I would observe and (again) covet the ability of some teachers to find the most marvelous and true applications in the scriptures that would make even the words of Isaiah dance on the page for even the most stubborn teenager. I thought it was a skill that you must be born with because I couldn't do it. I couldn't even see the insights for myself, but had to be shown them. I was wrong however that I couldn't learn how to find great insights and powerful applications in the scriptures. Again I began to practice what they would do, using these teachers and their examples as models for myself. I began discovering things on my own and learned to love my scriptures even more because now they were truly speaking to me. And not only that, they were speaking to my students and they were excited to 'get into the scriptures.' When I first began teaching, many students would say, "Do we need our scriptures today?" like it was some burdensome task I was Egyptianly placing upon their backs. Today, I still do have some students who ask that question, but more students are getting their scriptures eagerly, because they are ready to see the scriptures come to life. They have begun to see how they can make the scriptures real and personal for themselves. But this had to be taught.

The Reason For This Article

Thus, when the Teaching Emphasis came out, I decided I would like to analyze some of the things that I and other great teachers did to help students 'mine' their scriptures for scriptural application—to teach them how to find great things in their scriptures so that they can feast on their scriptures and really feel full. I decided that once these habits were defined though, there would have to be a method of teaching students how to do it, practice it, and finally encourage students to do it on their own as well as coming up with their own habits of 'mining' the scriptures. That is where this packet comes in.

Rationale

I have often felt that kids do not know how to learn and teach by the Spirit because they do not know how to “Look For” significant things in the scriptures. They do not know how to feast upon them as Nephi instructed us. This list of ways to “mine” the scriptures is a way to help students gain habits of really studying and searching their scriptures and then giving them specific things to look for so that they can discover the true treasure that the scriptures are.

Disclaimer

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, nor can all of these habits be used in every scripture block. They are meant to help students discover how to ‘mine’ precious treasures in their scriptures and discover their own ways of ‘feasting’ on the scriptures as they practice and use these habits. Its goal is to assist the individual student learn to “learn by the Spirit” and then teach it to others in a way that will hopefully be inspiring to others so that the Spirit can be shared with all.

Suggest Method of Use

Don’t Forget the Fundamentals

These habits cannot be taught to the students all at once. They can’t have all 26 habits thrown at them and expect them to go deep into their scriptures on their own. Or for that matter, discover their own new habits of scripture study. It also assumes that the teacher and students understand the most basic and necessary foundations to scripture study, without which none of these habits will bring forth new insights by the Spirit. These foundations include:

- **being humble and prepared spiritually** to receive instruction from the Lord. A student of the scriptures must be **prayerful and submissive** and willing to be lead by the Spirit.
- The students must also **be believing** that even they can find insights in their scriptures by being spiritually lead. They must have faith and suspend their doubts so that they see their scriptures with the eye of faith.
- They must also **have the desire to learn for themselves**, even as Alma said, for some even if they can just begin to believe with a seed’s amount.

These are some of the fundamental truths that must be understood and practiced before teaching some of these other habits.

How to Use the Habits

Many of our students have not had much modeling of these types of habits in the home, or in Sunday school, or even in their own study. This may be very new to some students to actually look for something specific, and it may be harder for some students to create this habit or utilize all of the habits. Use much patience and modeling, not only of yourself, but those students who have already learned to pay the price to learn how to feast on the word.

Start With Yourself

My suggestion is that you become familiar and practice these habits for yourself and learn to discover the scriptures in new and deeper ways. You might take notes of what you learn in the process and the feelings you had so that you will be more sensitive to your students as they begin this journey for themselves.

Once you feel like you can at least understand the habits, teach them to the students one or two at a time. Show them several different models of how to use the habit. Then give them a chance to practice it. Repeat often and allow them to share with each other. They will learn how to discover new things from others modeling as well as yours. In fact, they may learn how to do it better from other students than from you.

Suggested Method for Teaching

For myself, I am going to have the title of each habit printed on card stock and laminated so that I can velcro them to my wall of my classroom. On the first day of the week, I will introduce a tool as part of the devotional, provide a good "model" of how to find it and what to look for, give them time to practice finding their own example in their scriptures, and then encourage them to find other examples as they have their personal reading that week. I will also have one other time during the week (perhaps another devotional) where they can share examples that they have found with a partner in their own personal study. We will go through these week after week till all are introduced and then they can be repeated or allow the students to chose one for themselves or other "habits" of good "Look For" skills can be introduced and practiced.

During the year I will also pull them off the board and have the students use the habits in looking for insights in lesson blocks. It is a good reinforcement and I can utilize the tools in lesson development and give the kids more to look for and come up with principles on their own.

Critical!!!

A critical addition must be made though besides just "finding" an example of habits. The students (and you) must take the next step though and answer the following two questions: 1. "So, What?" and 2. "How can I liken this to myself?" The first question encourages the reader to learn by the Spirit, opening their hearts and minds to direction of the Holy Ghost by pondering. The second question is also Spirit-led, but asks them to personalize it. To take the information, insight, doctrine, principal, etc and put it in a useful way in their lives. **Students are not used to this type of learning!** School work typically requires rote memorization and regurgitation. Rarely are they called to feel deeply into a subject and search for answers. This habit is critical to their success with learning more from the scriptures and being taught by the Spirit. D&C 88:112 says, "Seek learning, even by study and also by faith." Usually we apply this principle to secular subjects, but it is true of the scriptures. Students must understand that in order to gain spiritual insight and knowledge they must apply their hearts and minds. So, remember:

Use the following two questions with each habit:

- 1.) **So, What? (what does this teach *ME*?)**
- 2.) **How can I LIKEN this to myself? (How can I apply what it taught me to myself?)**

The Hope

The point is not to have them memorize and rotely regurgitate “The 26 Habits for Feasting on the Scriptures.” But it is hoped that this method will introduce them to several ways of looking at their scriptures and learn that they can discover on their own by the Spirit. They can find new patterns and habits that help “mine” treasures out of their scriptures. The ultimate goal is to have them love their scriptures and know ways that they can study them so that they are spiritually fed.

Panning for Gold!

26 Ways to Apply the Scriptures to Ourselves

- 1. Power Phrases!** = What are a group of words or phrases that can stand alone and carry a powerful meaning by themselves.
LOOK FOR> Look for phrases or verses that can stand by themselves and contain a powerful message. They would make great captions to hang on your wall or desk.
Example>> Job 23:10 "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold!"
D&C 78:18 "Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along!"
1 Nephi 15:8 "Have ye inquired of the Lord?"
- 2. Motivating Words** = Look for and circle/highlight words that are especially motivating, inspiring, comforting, thought-provoking, etc.
LOOK FOR> Be aware of words and phrases that really stand out to you. They may seem powerful, motivating, comforting, though-provoking, etc.
Examples>> Hebrews 7:25 One night while reading Hebrews I came upon this verse and one word really stuck out to me and caused me to ponder its significance for the verse. The verse says that Christ is able to save to the "uttermost." It was this word that I focused on. What does it mean that Christ saves to the "uttermost"? It gives me hope that Christ can not only change the big things in my life, but also even the tiniest of bad habits or most enduring weakness that seems impossible for me to get rid of. It also means that Christ will be with us not just everyday, but every hour, even every second. He can save us to the "uttermost"!
- 3. Footnotes** = Find a powerful footnote that helps explain, empower, or give insight to a verse in the block where you were reading.
LOOK FOR> Look for the little letters that precede a word that indicates a footnote.
Example>> "And then the Lord ^acleansed the man . . ."
- 4. ???** = What are the things, phrases, allusions, etc that you don't understand. What questions do you have after reading some scripture verses? ALSO, look for actual questions in the block. Can you answer them? What does it teach you if you had to answer the question, especially if they are from the Lord or His prophets?
LOOK FOR> 1. Where do you have questions? What verse or phrase do you want to understand more fully? 2. Are there any questions in the verses you just read? How can/do they apply to you? How would you answer them?
Example>> Alma 5 is full of questions! Going through them asking them to your self and really answering them is like a powerful personal priesthood interview!