

Will My Children Accept My Gift?

"For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift?" (D&C 88:33) That scripture left me hoping that I could bestow a gift upon my children that would be accepted. I desired that my three young children, and later two more, would learn to love and cherish the scriptures. Before my marriage, while teaching elementary school for four years, I used an important reading comprehension strategy—having my students draw pictures about what they read. Their understanding increased because the process of drawing pictures solidified their learning with a lasting impression, thereby helping them understand and retain what they had learned. My wish was to teach my own children at their level, knowing that the Lord teaches us "after the manner of [our] language" (D&C 1:24). So, I decided to use the picture drawing comprehension strategy to facilitate my children's understanding and ability to remember the wonderful stories and concepts in the scriptures which I hoped these pictures would in turn assist them to love and cherish these sacred writings. At the time, little did I realize the scope of the challenge that lay ahead. Each day I knelt in prayer and sought to understand scriptural meaning during my personal scripture study time. After reading a few verses that seemed to go together, I wrote a child friendly description to inspire the drawing of a picture—after my children's "manner of language that [my children] might come to understanding." (D&C 1:24) This was a slow process as I tried to accurately represent the scriptures and sought to preserve the beauty of the scriptural language through frequent quotations. I then transferred the handwritten descriptions and scriptural references to create different captions at the bottom of several pages. I called them "scripture picture pages" and had enough ready each Sunday for our family "Picture Page Time." Over the years, all seven family members—parents, young children as well as teenagers, and even, sometimes visiting friends—drew pictures representing the scriptures at the bottom of our pages. Our family gathered around our kitchen table and first discussed the scriptural presentations, next

drew our pictures, and finally, after signing and dating our illustrations, we all shared our depictions of the scriptures, some artistic and some not so artistic creations. Like her mother, our daughter Jessica is a visual learner too. Explaining her childhood experience she says, "Picture pages were perfect for my learning style...If I can't imagine a scene or concept in my head or see it on paper, I have a difficult time remembering it. That's why picture pages opened up my scriptural learning. Even now as I do my daily personal scripture study...those pictures come to mind and help me understand the feelings expressed within the text."

Day after day and week after week I continued this prayerful study-writing process. I chronologically wrote "scripture picture pages" beginning with scriptures about our pre-mortal life and going through the Old Testament. My son Jared, now married and has two little boys, recalled, "I still remember when I was a little boy—no older than three—and my first picture page. I was given the assignment of depicting how we shouted for joy because of the earth's creation. My picture consisted of two beings—circles with arms upright and legs hanging down—jumping for joy with an earth below. That picture and hundreds more, are vividly imprinted upon my memory."

When our "scripture picture page" drawings had reached the chronological time period of King David and we had drawn about 600 pictures, President Ezra Taft Benson, our prophet, was emphasizing the importance of reading the *Book of Mormon*, and he inspired me to move our family course of study to the *Book of Mormon*, a second witness of Jesus Christ. Over the next fourteen years I wrote captions on 2,265 pages that included the happenings of every verse in the *Book of Mormon*. Now our family's pictures are compiled in 12 binders, which we call our *Book of Mormon Picture Pages*. Through inspiration, patience and consistent effort I received more personal spiritual blessings than anyone. While diligently seeking to help my children learn I came closer to my Savior Jesus Christ, and my love for the *Book of Mormon* and testimony of its truthfulness was increased and verified by the power of the Holy Ghost again and again. And yes,

our children did accept my gift and were blessed as they created hundreds of pictures that left impressions on them and helped them develop their own testimonies. I know that "by small means the Lord can bring about great things." (1 Nephi 16:29) My husband and I could see how this process boosted their feelings of self-worth as they knew their own contributions were valued and preserved. These spiritual concepts were cemented as we read, re-read and viewed our homemade illustrations time and time again in our *Book of Mormon Picture Pages* books. Self-expression from each family member resulted in a combined family effort and a treasured family tradition documented by the pictures we drew.

All five of our children are grown and on their own, but they continue to relate stories and feelings about our ongoing family scripture study. Janiece, our oldest daughter recounts, "After my freshman year at BYU a school friend came to visit me at home in California. When he saw our multi-volume set of picture pages he nodded and commented, 'So that's why you're the way you are.' He was right. I know that my foundation in the scriptures and love for the scriptures is based in this experience and the time and effort that my mother put in to teach us in this manner."

Our son Jeremy explains how drawing these pictures affected his life. "At an early age, I learned to love and admire people of the Book of Mormon. I always love to look back through the picture pages we've done and see all the personal portrayals of the stories of Nephi, Ammon, the great Captain Moroni, and Helaman's stripling warriors. It's also fun to see how many different looking towers King Benjamin preached from. Throughout Primary and Sunday School I always seemed to have a good feel for the *Book of Mormon* and knowledge of its teachings. I attribute that all to the fact, that after reading what was in the scriptures, we also had to think and clearly understand what was happening to draw a picture. Not only did this unfold what was going on to my young mind, but also tapped my creative resources and helped them develop. Picture pages have helped me so much that I know I will use them with my kids when I am a parent."

I must admit that there were times when we missed our weekly "Picture Page Time" for one reason or another, but we soon got back on track. As parents, we created many plans to teach our children how to work, cook, learn skills, and live the gospel. Most ideas worked for a while and then we soon implemented something different. However, "Picture Page Time" became a pattern for family learning that lasted over the years. While on her mission, our youngest daughter Jackie connected family picture pages to her missionary preparation. "I am trying to instill the pattern of studying the scriptures in other people's lives. To teach the gospel we must *know* the gospel; just like it says in the Doctrine and Covenants 11:21, "Seek not to declare my word...but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed..." And I *know* that the time we spent as a family doing picture pages helped me to prepare to serve as a servant of the Lord, having the Spirit and "the power of God unto the convincing of men" (D&C 11:21).

My husband, Severin, joined with me as an equal partner fully participating in "Picture Page Time," sometimes assisting younger children with their drawings and by drawing and discussing his own illustrations. He too taught our children to love and cherish the scriptures, which they will in turn carry on this tradition to our grandchildren. In reflecting upon my desires as a young mother I am truly thankful that the Spirit inspired me to have the desire for my children to love and cherish the Holy Scriptures, and that I was blessed with direction and strength to lovingly prepare this gift for them. "For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift?" (D&C 88:33) I am humbled that our family received and profited from my gift of "scripture picture pages." My heart is full. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (III John 1:4)