Heaven and Cell: How to Use Smartphones to Teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ | An Interview with Brandon Comstock

January 22, 2022

00:00:03 - 00:05:04

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Hey everyone, this is Kurt Francom, the host of the leading saints podcast and I am excited to share this episode with you. If you'll remember a few weeks ago, we did an interview with Richard Bernard that was extremely popular. If you haven't heard that, go back and listen. We talk about the gospel library and how to use the gospel library and really to enhance your study and engagement with the scriptures and whatnot and Richard gave some phenomenal tips and tricks in that to interview. And then he mentioned this individual named Brandon Comstock who is a PhD down in Saint George Utah who teaches at a seminary high school seminary down there. I was intrigued because this Brandon, he got his PhD, has dissertation was all about teaching the gospel with the gospel library. I was intrigued by that and thought I'd reach out. And
he agreed to do an interview and that's where this interview came from. Now since we referenced the gospel library, we actually recorded the video of this interview and we're putting it in the teaching saints library, which anybody can gain access to by simply going to leading saints dot org slash teach. And there's tons of hours, 20 plus hours of content all about teaching the gospel. And so you can actually see the video of this presentation for free as well and then jump into some of the other content. This is a virtual conference we did years ago, but it's still so valuable, especially for those teachers out there. So go to leading saint dot org slash teach or simply go to the show notes of this episode and we'll put an easy to access link right at the top to send you to where you need to go to access not only this video recording but many others from the teaching saints library. Today I'm with Brandon Comstock, how are you Brandon? Terrific. Thanks. And you're in Saint George Utah, you teach seminary there. Is that right? Yeah, about 14 years into it now and around different schools on a crimson cliffs high school down here right now. Awesome. And from what I hear is just a dream job. Is that your experience? That's pretty much been the experience. Yeah, a lot of pretty cool experiences to the earth. That's cool. Now we were first connected through did an interview with Richard Bernard, who is a missionary focused on the service missionary, a technology missionary, but he helps make sure that the gospel library is being used and is available to help and whatnot, I probably didn't do a good job of explaining that. But he is aware of you and because of some of your educational backgrounds. So what gives you some education in teaching and as it relates to the gospel library? Yeah, so Richard and I work on the gospel library awareness and user education committee. And my background, I got a masters in structural technology and learning science from Utah state. And somewhere in there kind of stumbled on to before I even had an iPad.

Stumbled on to LDS dot org at the time where you could annotate talks and things like that and kind of learn some of the features. We were super, super poor. And I remember thinking, I wonder if I got an iPad will this all transfer into the app I keep hearing about. This is a very early stages. And there's a Black Friday deal, and so we wouldn't bother so far. Wouldn't bought an iPad and I remember being so nervous as I logged in and hitting the button and being like, oh my gosh, it all synced. This is so fantastic. And from there, kind of started to explore some stuff with that masters I did. And then when it came time to do a doctorate, I said, yeah, I really want to explore this seduced more formal research with this. So I just finished back in May, a doctorate in educational technology for Boise state. And spent four years just studying all the research on digital reading and in classroom stuff and distraction and it's the whole impact of smartphones. In fact, I'll show you right now because this was funny, all of my advisers up there weren't members of the church, but they were terrific. And but they all have, they wanted to use boring academic titles. And so my dissertation was exploring the relationship between different smartphone reading annotation strategies and student comprehension or something really dry.
But I'm super excited because I get to use this title now. So this is my title for this. Heaven and sell. How do you smartphones to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ? And I pitched it to him over and over again and they're like, let's just be a little bit more academic. But I guess here with the leading saints, this is the time to break it out. That's right. I have a marketing background. And so my marketing heart is just so proud right now of this title. So that's awesome. Well, obviously, I have some slides to share here. I have a lot of questions that I know that you'll get into in a solid, you lose there, but I know me personally, you know, I'm not a novice when it comes to technology, generally speaking. I mean, I'm not intimidated. I love jumping into the gospel library. But also there's this feeling of, you know, I just feel like over time just growing up with the paper scriptures and marking and highlighting and cross referencing and putting my bookmarks and my gluons and things like that that I sort of feel like I know that's my brain is just wired naturally for paper scripture. So I should probably default there generally speaking. But maybe some information you'll share today will shift that thinking for myself and many others. So do you want to jump into your presentation and I love that question, by the way, we're going to talk about that. Some of the ways the wiring of our brains and the way that it works. And some of the academic research behind it, and then also just some really practical tips that I'd love to get out and some lines that we can use to kind of help make this better experience. So yeah, let me start out with a couple of things. So we're just going to jump right into the maybe the elephant in the room here with distraction, right? Especially with youth, I think we worry a lot about the distraction. And we should. Rosen did a study where he wanted to see how distracted students were and he took college students. And he said, let me install this tracking software on your phone. And we're going to see how much time we spend actually in class tasks. And this is with them knowing finds out they were spending about 42% of the time off task. On their phones. And he said, the problem with that study is it's probably understating the problem significantly because they knew what we were doing. So they did a follow-up study and they went in and sent in a researcher that looked like a student and sat in the back of the room and just watched what students were doing on their devices. And in the end, they found out that 58% of students were using their devices for non class purposes more than half of the class. And so that's a pretty big issue. These are college students. It's not a religious class, but it's the best data that we've got on it. So now the question is how big of a problem is that when we're in a class? And Bowman Levine and wait and gender onto the study and to kind of see how big of an impact these distractions were and had 89 subjects, they were at a 3800 word text and then they had three different groups that they divided them into. And the group one, they send these instant messages to before they read. And group two received them, excuse me, group one received them while they read. Group two received them before they read and group three received no messages at all.
That was the control group. And then they tested them at the end and they actually found out that there wasn't any difference in their comprehension. But it took them a lot different timing to get through the reading. Okay, so Kurt will test you here. Which group would you expect to take the longest to get through the reading? So we have group run messages while they read. That's just before they read, received no messages, which one took the longest, right? Which was the most distracted. I'd say group one. It's gotta be a group one, right? Okay, yeah. So group one took the longest of 45.57 minutes. This is where it gets interesting, which group would you think would be the second longest to read? Man, I guess receiving messages before they read, they may be somewhat distracted. So group two. Yeah, that's what I would have thought too. So group one took 45.57 minutes to get through. Group two took 28.63 minutes to get through group three. This is the control group that got no messages. 37.44 minutes. I kind of interesting, huh? Yeah. At first they were really perplexed by this. What's going on here? And then they realized afterwards that the way they designed it was that nobody was told what group they were in. So if you received all of your messages at the beginning, they were told about the three different groups, but not which group they'd be in. So if you were told at the beginning, one of the groups gets all these at the beginning and you got off at the beginning, you can now focus. But if you were in a control group, you don't know whether there's going to be messages coming as you go and just the thought that you might be distracted was enough to slow you down. Yeah. And this is really applicable if I'm thinking of those youth leaders on Sunday. You deal with this day to today as a seminar teacher. But we've heard stories about cell phone basket as they walk in. They put the phones in the basket. You don't want to be distracted. You know, this is spiritual stuff that we're talking about eternal Salvation here. So let's make sure everybody's focused. And this is just amazing to see maybe something else is going on. It's bigger. In a lot of ways, it's a lot bigger of an issue than we think. And so you look at this, you're like, well, yeah, but they still have the same comprehension. So here's where it starts to get a little scarier. Ruby and Weinstein did this study where they had two strangers sit down. And they gave them two different topics. The first one was, how do you feel about plastic Christmas trees? And the second one was tell me about a meaningful experience you've had in the last year. And then they didn't know what they were getting studied on. The researcher came in and either took a smartphone and put it on the table or a smartphone size notebook. Wasn't their phone, it never rang. It never buzzed. And then when they got done, they had them fill out a little survey and asked them about the quality of their conversations. And questions like, is it likely that my partner and I could be friends if she interacted a lot? I'll empathetic. They rated them things like that. And this is surprising. It's called the mere presence effect. Just having a phone there led to lower relationship quality and closeness with their partner. Wow. And it wasn't even their phone, right? Not even their phone. Just having it on the table. And of course, you don't know that. So then they repeated it just a little bit different a couple years later, Thornton fairs Robinson Rollins. And they wanted to see if it impacted your academic performance. So they have this thing called the digit cancellation test. Whole page worth of single space digits. And on the simple test, oh, by the way, then those conversations, if you were talking about plastic Christmas trees, it didn't make any difference at all. It's only in the meaningful conversations, which is, of course, what we want to get to in the gospel. So they go through in here and the first test was to circle every occurrence of a number like for instance 6. And the more complex one was circle every time two digits add up the number 11. So 5 and 6, 9 and two 7 four. Again, they
come in, either a smartphone or a notebook on the desk and they found again at the end that just the presence of a smartphone had no impact on the simple task, but on the more complex task, it was a real issue. So this is a big deal in the gospel where you're looking to go and meaningful conversations and deep learning are kind of our thing, right? And so you might right now be sitting there thinking, well, I guess that settles it, we need to ban all devices in the church, right? I have cell phone basket or whatever. But this is the problem. That's not going to fix it.

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That's what we just learned. If all they do is put their phone in their pocket, they're still focused on the phone, they're still distracted. If you put it in a basket, in fact, we've got a couple studies. If you put it somewhere outside of where they're at, not only does their academic performance drop, but their anxiety goes through the roof. If they hear their phone buzz or ring. So my whole perspective on the phone issues is we’ve got to find a way the only way we win this battle, we can't just say put it away. And why should we? We've got the biggest issues our youth are facing. I'll come back to phones that pornography, self esteem issues dealing with social media and stuff wasting time, all of that comes back to this. They come into our classroom. The only way we get them to win is if we can actually change their mind about what the device is for. And get them to move from. This is a toy that's there to entertain me too. This is a tool to help get me closer to my savior. Yeah. So where do we go from there to do that? That seems intense. Yeah, it's a huge undertaking. And it's interesting when you go and you look at what the profits are saying, most of the time they're given really balanced approach approaches to this. They're saying technology can do this and technology can do this. Let me show you here. So these are the 5 things that I feel like have to happen if we're going to get effective smartphone use in church. It's training modeling, simplification, direction, and then assistance. So we have a lot of people that think that they're doing really good with their training. And they get really exasperated and worn out because they say, I train my students on phones, but it doesn't seem to work. They're still distracted. But when you look at what they're doing, most of the time what that means is stop playing games on your phones. Those are so bad and they'll take away the spirit and it's gonna distract you and these are spiritual things and we need to be focused. And we say, yeah, I trained my students. What else am I supposed to do? Or we're supposed to train about how to use them, not just on how not to use it. So this is Blackwell Gardner and she went back. And this was not a religious study. It was just in general talking about phones with parents and youth. And they said that while parents report that they communicate with their children about technology, their children say that parents only tell them which behaviors to avoid rather than which behaviors to pursue. So take a look at that in the church and tell me which one do you do more of when you're talking with youth? Are you doing more tell them what not to do or actually tell them how to use it effectively? Yeah, I think typically we're focusing on what not to do, right?
Yeah. So I think our opportunity here is to say let's switch this. We're going to have a whole mentality shift, and to do that, we're going to have to start saying, no, these are a good thing. There's no way this technology was inspired by Satan. Satan doesn't create stuff like that. God came up with this. Let's use it how we want this to use it. So let me show you some stuff on what we can do with that. Awesome. And I think maybe a starting point here is digital reading is different than print reading. And we think it's the same, but it's not. So the question everybody always wants to know is which one's better, right? Printer digital, and you talked about being loyal to your books and things. Kong sea islands eye, I don't know if I'm saying their names right or not. Did a meta analysis they took all the studies on digital and print reading and said, let's see which one's better, which one gets higher comprehension. And they got done and they said, there's a little bit of mix analysis here, but basically reading on paper was better than reading on screen in terms of comprehension. But quite possibly the advantage of reading on paper could be accounted for by the reader's extensive experience of reading on paper, which shapes their preferences for read on paper and strengthen their use of read on paper strategies. Be like, what does that mean? How is this possibly any different? It's the same words the same letters that were putting up on the screen. We'll come to find out. It's a totally different experience. I shouldn't say totally largely different experience. So for example, imagine you walk in a desert book or Barnes and noble or wherever you're going. I'll ask it this way and I'll see if you even know what I mean. In my what? Are you a book smeller, smeller? Well, I don't intentionally put it up to my nose, but yeah, there's definitely a smell when you pick up New York. Okay. So you go into the Barnes and noble or whatever, and you're trying to pick out the next book you're going to read.

And you see a book cover, right? So you're using your visual capacities and you pick it up and you can kind of feel the heft. And then the first thing we all know is we start flipping through the pages. Why? You're not getting any really right? The reason we do that is we're feeling the quality of the paper. And so you start feeling it. And as you do that, you start to get that page smell that comes up, right? And so you're smelling it and you're seeing it and you're feeling it. You're using all of these. I bet you can remember the sound of your scriptures fluttering in 17. Oh, yeah. Absolutely. You know, you know what your scripture sound like. And you have this experience, uses all your senses, and then we come into digital, and everything's the same. It feels the same. It sounds the same. It's all the same stuff. And so we sometimes struggle to connect and the data shows us over and over again that people struggle to have the same emotional connection with it. With a digital devices they do with the print device, especially people that have had meaningful experiences with print in the past. And then that's the easy stuff. You get into body bodies and you've got backlit screens that cause eye strain. And you've got they've got studies out there that show that when you read from a digital device, your
posture is different than when you read from print, especially in the early days, when we were reading largely off of monitors, you take a book and you usually lean back. And if you're on a screen, you're leaning forward. And it leads to more muscle skeletal strain. Which often leads to a lower experience or inferior experience. But these are all things that we're working on in the field to make it better. The big stuff is the mental stuff that you process the information differently. So let me give you a quiz. And I gave you a little heads up when we chatted the other day. All right. This is the number one thing people say when they go to digital scriptures is I dismiss being able to find it on the page. Okay. So here we go. I'm going to see how well you know where you read mostly from printer from digital. I'm pretty much all digital now, but I should do all right. We'll see. We'll test your memory here. I'm going to use some scripture mastery versus lilies. Okay. First thing by three 7, tell me where it's at on the page. You want to say left page top left of the page. Is that, right? You're one for one. All right. Here we go. Question two. Second, if I two 25. What's the context? Okay, I'll say write page, bottom left. Right page, bottom left. It's locked in, you've got it. All right, this is the hardest one by far. It's kind of a trick question. You'll see. Okay. Mosaic two 17. Oh. Man, you got me here. I'm just guess write page. Bottom left again. All right, you're close. 'cause there's actually split between the two pages, right? Okay. So I'm guessing there's people out there listening right now. They're going, yeah, I know exactly where that's at, right? They can see, especially if they're heavy paper users. And the reason is, our brains are wiped, you talk about our wiring of our brains. A researcher called you have mangan talks about how our brains don't really have a designated spot for reading. It's kind of a new invention readiness in the history of humanity. And so what we do is we borrow from different functions to put together how we read. So for example, with reading, we most typically rely on the same functions that we use to navigate a landscape. So say you had a house at the end of a long road, and you were trying to help me get there, you might say, you're going to go past the green sign on the left. Take a little turn when you get to the big oak tree, and when you see the big red barn, my House is just around the bench from there. Well, when you're trying to figure out a text and where things are at you use the same method. So you'll say, I'm looking for Alma 7 11 through 13. I know it's on the right hand page in the left hand column towards the top. And there's your verse. Right. And that's really easy to do because you've got two columns and four corners and you've got chapter headings.

All of these different things that are concrete navigational markers to help you know where you're at. And then you switch over to digital and you lose all that. Yeah. And even you giving me just the verse, if you would have said the scripture, like Adam Val, then it might be like, I know, even that's more visual. Like seeing it in numbers doesn't do it for me. Yeah. So we get it and there's the benefits, obviously, right with the digital side of yeah, now I can adjust my font size and things like that, but you lose all of the concrete navigation. Because of that. So you
have to come up with a new way to make this work. And the good news is they have other ways through things like tagging and linking and different colors of highlights and stuff. But my point here is it's not the same as reading from print. We have to learn how to read digitally effectively. Yeah. And would you say there's specific best practices to do that? Or is it ever to teach their own to come up with whatever system works for them or I guess the foundation is maybe tagging and things like that. But maybe there's different strategies, right? Yeah, and obviously it's a little bit of both of those, right? I do think there's definitely some best practices. You know, when we go back to that map that I just showed you a second ago. A major difference between is relying on in our day for navigation. You remember the days when you rely on maps to get around, right? Yeah. And you'd study your map out, you'd figure out where you're going. And you'd know exactly where you're at in the course of the map. We don't do that today. You plug it into your GPS and it tells you where to go and you rely pretty heavily on the computer to get you there. And in a lot of ways, gospel library and some of the features we have now are kind of similar. We can rely the attacking and things like that on the computer to help us return and find the content rather than having to rely entirely on our own brain. And it allows us to index a whole lot more content, even if we can't necessarily find it without help immediately. Yeah. So let me give you an example. Maybe I have some training here. I'm hoping some people are reading through right now and going great. So I'm going to teach my class and I'm going to spend part of a day or a whole day maybe even training on it. And that's really well intentioned. But it's not going to work. And here's why. So van horn Russell skew. And this really was one of the first studies I ever read in my doctorate studies. They went in and on the first day they had a whole class of college students. They gave them all access to eat textbooks. And said, we want you to use it. They did use it. They were logging in and reading. And they brought in a graduate student trained on how to use all the advanced sanitation features. And then they sat back and waited for the data to pull in. And they were pretty shocked to find that it took them even though they were reading it took them 28 days on average to make their first annotation. Even though they had all the training on it and it was highlighting was their first and it highlighting was the only tool that reached a mean or a median days of annotation or median days to annotation because it was the only one that at least 50% of the subjects ended up using. So when you say annotation, you're talking about some way of marking or writing a scribbling in the margins or something. Yeah, annotation in this case will include anything that you're doing to interact with the text in a way that helps you understand it better. So for gospel library, tagging, highlighting underlining notes in the margins, all of that linking would all be considered annotation. Okay. And so this was a classroom. They only were doing electronic textbooks. And so it took 28 days before they actually made a highlight or anything. They're reading, but they just aren't using the features. And it's interesting when you pull people, they're just way more uncomfortable, annotating digitally. And sometimes they'll say I wish I knew. It's not hard, and frankly, any of the digital apps. You usually just hold your finger down and you make a highlight. They just don't quite grasp it. It's a little different in their minds. So part of the problem is they're not getting the bigger schema of things. Because when we do these trainings on technology, we focus really heavy on the how. And we tell people, here's where you're going to go and you're going to click and you're going to tap here and do this and it's really dry and monotonous. And if it doesn't work, then we just double down and we say how we train them on the same thing again. And we don't ever teach them on the when to tag or when to annotate or where to do it or why we do it.
And that seems to be the problem that people are having making the jump into effective digital scripture study. It's not that they can't figure out how to click the button. They don't have a schema. They don't have a concept of when to do it. I'm talking a lot. I hope I'm doing all right here. You're doing great. No, I'm engaged here. So as they do in chrome, I get all excited about this. I say this might feel and so. Yeah, yeah. They go in and they do this study with these students, study on the circulatory system. And they haven't completed free tests on the circulatory system. Half the students had a training on how to read digital text. Things like the importance of making connections to prior learning and understanding when to use a hyperlink to go check things out and how to identify key concepts and things like that. How to read. And the other half didn't receive the training. They found at the end that students who received the training scored significantly higher on the test, the post test. And they demonstrated significantly deeper understanding on short answer questions. They didn't get any train on the circulatory system. It was just, hey, let me show you a concept of how you can make more out of this reading. So let's talk specific to us in the gospel here. And I've got these little slides where I'm going to show you some power phrases that we can use that we can actually implement. We're going to call this sister sister jorgenson here. And we're going to assume that she's a seminary teacher. And she's trying to help her students grasp why and when to tag. So she might use some phrases like this in her training. Again, beyond just saying, push this button to do it. If you tag that quote as Faye, it'll be really easy to find if the bishop ever asks you to speak in church. So do you see how she's taking this and showing them why would you want to do this? What's the value in doing this annotation? If that verse confuse you this time, make a note in the margin so that it doesn't confuse you next time. Why do I want to make a note? Well, so the next time I read this, it's going to make sense. If you highlight each item in this list will make it easier to find the next time you study this. And this is my favorite. I use this with my students all the time. Especially when we're coming up on Sunday school week. If you want to impress your family during come follow me, link this quote versus 16. And I'll tell them all the time and we're in seminary, I'll say, you guys, do you want to be the smartest kid near Sunday school class this week? Your teacher's going to be super impressed. Link this quote in there, just drop that during Sunday school. Raise your hand and be like, during my studies this week, I was looking at this. I noticed this quote from other Ballard. And they love it. And all of a sudden it clicks. Oh, now I get why I'm supposed to be doing this. It's way beyond just how do I click a button when am I doing this? Where am I doing this? Why am I doing this? That's what our training needs to focus on. That's what we've been really lacking. In our trainings. So the temptation may be, you get excited about some of these features in the gospel library. And so 5th Sunday's coming up and we're going to do a whole 5th Sunday where we're all practicing tagging and highlighting and things where it's better to maybe just weave this in throughout your lessons, just naturally. It's got to be more than just a one day thing. It's got to become a part of who we are. We need to be
thinking about that. And if you can, can you imagine if we could help our students not just learn
the gospel but learn how to have meaningful experiences on their own when they go home,
that's the dream. Yeah. As a seminary teacher, I'm not going to be there with them every day.
They graduate. I always worry. When they wake up the day after graduation, are they going to
be able to open their scriptures and have a meaningful experience on their own? I'm teaching
them about how to use these features so that they can do that on their own without me. Yeah.
The goal is to make yourself obsolete. So I want to go hand in hand with training, let's talk
modeling. Is that all right, if we move on? Yeah. Okay. President Irene, in priests of preparation,
show me counts more than tell me. We'll come back to that in just a minute. Come to find out
show me is pretty important with digital reading too. So researcher named dobber did a study 56
pre service teachers and tracked them over the course of a semester. At the beginning of the
semester, just 22% of the students said that they preferred using digital tax. They said, great,
I'm going to model it on my screen throughout the course of the semester. And we'll ask you
again at the end, at the end of this semester, 50% of the students preferred using the digital
texts and 65% said that the features of digital reading enhanced their experience.

All he did was model for. He just showed him, here's how you could do it. And in a follow-up to
that, another study found that students had great benefits from digital annotation, but the
benefits were only there if they could see how either their teacher or another peer had
annotated in the past. If they didn't have that to use as a scaffolding or a framework, they
weren't able to put together their own system of how to do it. And necessarily they did it exactly
the same, but just so they had an idea of one way they might do it. Yeah. So let me give you
some phrases here too, as you're going through, and this is a big thing for me. I'll ask you a
question after this too. If you're a librarian in the church and somebody comes in and they see
that big 55 inch screen in the back on the cart and they say, hey, I need to get the TV. What are
you assuming they're going to use the TV for? I'm going to show a clip of video. Yeah, we're
going to show a video, right? And we should, those are great. But we've got to switch our
mentality to where we're saying, no, I'm going to teach my students how to read their scriptures.
And so you walk into my class on any given day. I've got my projector up there with gospel
library. I this is the only time I ever use PowerPoint. I get my scriptures up there and we walk
through. And then I walk my students through why I did what I did. So for example, we're going
to call this guy brother alchemy. And imagine he's teaching a deacon's quorum here. And he's
got his scriptures up there on a screen. And they're looking at his highlights, they're going
through. As you can see, I typically highlight in red, but since this is a list, I chose to highlight it
in blue, so it'll really stand out the next time I read it. Now we're starting to get a schema put
together. I really love that verse. So I chose a tag as creation so I could find it later. It's just
explaining as he goes through. I really like that definition of replenish. So I chose to make a note
so it'll be in my margin next time I read it. It's not just letting them see it. You're walking them through and explaining. Here's some methods. Here's some things you might do to have a meaningful experience. One more, that quote helps me understand this passage better. So I linked it to this first. If we could get to, in fact, I proposed in my stake in my state presidents moulin it over. I'm hoping called president Thompson. But I really think that the next great thing in technology for the church is if we could get touchscreen monitors, I want to mount them vertically. On these cards. And so they aren't just movies. They are just for movies. And I want to call them scripture screens, not just TVs. And so that we can go in there and we can demonstrate and they can see our finger and show us, and we can show them how to highlight tag. I think it could really help us moving forward to teach all of our members how to handle, even if it doesn't help them learn how to do it. How great is we could really put scriptures literally front and center in all of our classrooms, right? Yeah. Yeah, that's awesome. And so I've seen a lot of wards. They've even gone so far to mount a good sized TV on the wall and relief society or the sandy school room, or there's a nice projector set up. And even that's maybe the middle ground of getting there is like, you might as well assume that they need the TV. Yeah, yeah. Let's get it set up. And that might not be practical everywhere around the world, but it probably isn't some places. Yeah, yeah, that we could do that. All right, this is my favorite one. So training to modeling obviously go kind of hand in hand. Simplify. All right, I am confident everyone is going to relate to this. We've got to do better at simplifying our navigational process with the gospel library app. So I don't know if you ever had a teacher try to teach someone how to do technology in class. It's a terrible experience. It's really terrible experience. And I have a colleague that's in my ward that did this and I had even told him about this and I just out loud was laughing at him while it was going on and gospel doctrine. Because here's what happens. First of all, there's a concept called 7 plus or minus two. And it's about our short term memory. And it's been pretty widely accepted since it was originally proposed back in 1956. And the idea is that your mind can hold 7 pieces of content at a time. And if plus or minus two, some people are at 9, summer at 5, but that's about what you can handle.

00:40:04 - 00:45:07

So we're going to call this brother coder, which is the actual name of the guy in my ward. So he stands out to teach another core lesson. And he starts with a joke. And then he shares a scripture and they tell the story. Maybe ask the question, it takes a couple of comments from the class. Shares a quote. All of those are combining right now in that person's head to become gospel learning. But they can only hold 7 pieces of time and we just got up to 6. Now for the code says we open with me for this week's conference talk. And the student says, how do I get there? And here's what we do. We say, go to library, right? Right. Here we go. It's really easy. Open gossip library, open a new page, choose general conference, choose 2010 to 2019, go to October 2014, select other Irene, and it's paragraph 29. It's after that third heading, when you're
in there and it's going to be starts out with this, but we're not starting at the top, forget it. And now your learners, their whole focus has switched from gospel learning to gospel library. Yeah. And you've just lost all your momentum as a teacher. That I think is the biggest hole that we haven't teaching with gospel library. But we've got a solution. Love it. So there's a couple things we can do to cut it down. Let me go back to this quote that I showed a minute ago. In priest of preparation, show me counts more than tell me. So this is going to be a little tougher for those that are just listening, but this is something that I do in my class was probably half my quotes. I just put a QR code on it. Have you got your phone with you? Yeah. I'll scan that. Scan it. And see, if you've got the library, I'll give you a link that you can use to generate a QR code. And it won't just take you to the talk. It'll take you directly to the paragraph where that's at. Yep. You have the preparatory priesthood by president hiring October 2014. Is there a specific bar graph? It should be it should have taken you down to the paragraph. You might have to scroll this down just a tiny bit to get there. Or sometimes it takes sometimes it'll take a second. Okay. Maybe I interfered with it. I'll do it again. It'll leave a little blue mark next to the line on the side of that. Yeah, that did it. I think I touched the screen and interrupted the process. So preparation show me counts more than tell me. All right, so you're a teacher. Look at what we just did right there. For me to get you to that spot instead of 7 steps, all I had to do was say, all right, open your phone and scan the code. One staff. And now we can keep some of that momentum we've got in class. Yeah, that's awesome. So I want to show you if it's all right how to do it. I put together a slide on how to do this. This is a president of quote from his talk waiting on the road to Damascus. Similar to president Irene, he said, the most effective way to preach the gospels through example. So if you want to make a QR code for that, you're just going to tap on your highlight. You're going to click that share button. And when you click the share button, a dialog box will open up. You can click the copy link button, I like to use the mail button because it lets me see the link. And then it'll open up an email. And you can see the reference there. The link that it drops yet, the key to having it is that little P 34 at the end. That number is the paragraph number. So that will take you to the specific paragraph. If you got a link with that paragraph number, it'll take them right to where you're going. And then all you got to do is take that link and you drop it into a QR code generator. There's a hundred of these that are free on the Internet. The one I use is called the QR code generator dot com. All you do is you go in, it says enter URL. Right there, you're going to drop the link into there, paste it in. You don't even have to hit enter. It just automatically creates it for you. You can see there's the P 34. And if you scan that right now, it should take you right to that paragraph where we were. Nice. And so you would just download that or there's even a copy image. You can then paste that a PowerPoint, right? Yeah, you can put it into a PowerPoint. You can put it in, sometimes I'll put them into word documents and hand it out because there'll be people that will say, yeah, I don't use my phone. I use paper still. I'm really pushing and we'll see what gospel library and they're considering things right now to have an embedded QR code generator in the app in the future. Yeah, that'd be great. And so it would make it so that you could just tap on it, you'd tap on presentation mode. It pop up and show the whole quote with the reference right there at the bottom and so that you could just say to your whole class hey everybody scan that code and let's go there.
Yeah. And so when you're teaching, is your you have your phone or tablet or something plugged into the projector? And it's projecting on the screen? Yeah, I do it wireless. I do it through an Apple TV. Oh, okay. Yeah. Yeah, I keep mine up on the monitor that way. I can walk around a little bit more at church I'll have it, I'll get like a ten foot connector cable and I'm a little bit tethered, but yeah. But yeah, so they're seeing my scriptures the whole time. The whole lesson. And so you're not necessarily preparing PowerPoints for each lesson that you're doing, but so in those moments where you have a scripture that they're seeing on your phone on the screen, do you just quickly go to this QR code generator and create it so they can go there quickly? Yeah, so that's what I'm hoping to get to with Gus library putting that feature in. In the meantime, in my classes, in my seminary classes, we have a standard. The challenge with the QR code thing is, are with helping them find it. They can use the search function to get there. And so if I can't use a QR code I just say, type in these three words. And I'll give them three words out of the quote. And as long as everything's downloaded, they'll be able to find it. The problem is if they don't have everything downloaded, they won't get there. If you don't have a downloaded and they scan a QR code, it asks them to download it and they'll go in. Oh, cool. But there's still some workarounds, but hopefully we can get to where this becomes a standard that we can use for our teaching to really make it easier for everybody to get to the same spot at the same time. So let's take a look here at sister Marshall and give some key phrases here. Remember the principle here is simplify. So along with the navigational side of things, be super redundant in your instructions. Let me give you an example of how instructions and sound when you're giving people. As you read versus one through four, use the marking feature to highlight attributes of Christ. Once you're done highlighting the attributes and versus one through four, I'll ask a few of you to share. Okay, find those attributes and versus one through four. If you can say it three or four times, you've got a shot of someone hearing you. The second one that I would recommend is clarify your purpose. We've talked about this a little bit. I'm going to ask you to come up with a tag for that. Remember, tags help you create your own customized index. And you're thinking, I already told them that. They don't remember. So every time you can remind them what the purpose is behind it, that's great. And then simplifying navigation, if you want to write that definition in your margins, just tap the icon that looks like a piece of paper with the corner fold it up. Or if I'm telling them to tag, I'll always say, click on the little icon that looks like the Best Buy logo. To help get them there. Because they're struggling. You want them to use as little as little of their computational power in their brain on gospel library as possible. And as much as possible on understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ. So maybe another approach because one thing I've shifted to doing after talking with Richard is now I'm using the search function a lot more to get to certain scriptures. So maybe instead of saying, all right, let's go to Moses one, say, why don't you hit the search bar and type in Moses one, right? Yep. Yeah, so that's anything we could do to speed up the navigation process shifts that focus away from technology and towards the savior. Technology is great. Technology hasn't hold a candle to Jesus. We want to focus on Jesus. Okay, really helpful. Let's talk direction here. And I think this is really important too. Have you ever been in a class where a teacher says read these verses? And they'll say go read versus 7 through 13. And that's all you get. And then you go through and you
read for 5 minutes. And then when they come back, they ask you wildly specific question. About those verse Brandon, okay. We've all been that teacher before. And if you've got a stellar group of students, you might be able to pull it off, but otherwise pro tip, you've always got to be given on some kind of direction when you send them to do something. And so if you can ask them the question beforehand, hey, as you're reading through here, look for the attributes of Christ. Or as you're reading through here, what are the apostles do in this verse that helped them to, then they've got a chance, they understand what they're going to do. Boy Kay packers have been almost 30 years ago. He said this, but are you need to know how to mark the scriptures? And they need to have some kind of filing system.

In addition to that, if you give each one of them a framework upon which the truth they discover at random can be organized into a personal testimony, you will have served them well. And we're wanting to direct them. This is way before gospel library. So it's because one of our reasons that we're doing this is to help them have that long-term recall, right? So this is sister Cardin. We're going to say she's teaching a 15 and 16 year old Sunday school class. Here's some phrases she might use. As you read DNC 8 two and three, look for what doctrines it teaches and create a tag so you can find it later. Did you see how she's specifically given up something to do in their gospel library? It's going to take a long time before that's natural for them. They need to give they want to focus on the scriptures. So unless you give them something to do with it in the gospel library it won't come naturally for a while. The next 5 versus contains several titles for Christ. You can emphasize the list by highlighting each title. They might find the titles otherwise, but unless you tell them they probably won't highlight immediately. So you're giving up some experience here. This first teaches about the importance of faith. Consider sharing it on social media with the story of when faith has helped you in a difficult time. I love this because outside of gospel library. We can really help spread the gospel this way. And a lot of times they'll do it, not everybody. You've got a lot of them well. And this paragraph elder Holland speaks about Alma 32 21. You might create a link to that verse to ensure that you remember it next time you're reading there. So you've got to give some prompts to help them with this longtime filing system approach to things. Because that's half of the annotation process is I want to be able to find it again later. But and I think this might be more important, there's a whole second half of this outside of just finding it later. Nichols said this is a researcher that followed that there's nothing inherently disadvantageous in on screen reading, except that readers tend to approach it differently. So how are we approaching digital reading different? Well, you talked about our brains being rewired a little at the beginning. Let's hit that a little bit. This is even from the church stuff. So on this slide I took some stuff the church put out. Look at how brief this is a Facebook post in the church news. When I saw this on my Facebook feed, I didn't even stop while I was going through and I read it. I just kept on scrolling, right? This
one is, oh, this is from last year's Easter campaign. And same thing, I never even opened that text message until I took that screenshot. Because it just pop up in my little notifications bar. And I would see everything I needed to see. Look at this tweet from president Nelson. This was last year. Let us embrace the future with faith. It's just saying thing. So what's happened is our brains have become programmed and this is the theory behind why it's impairing us or a lot of people's theory. As we programmed our brains that when we read digitally, it should be fast and it shouldn't take much effort to comprehend it. So it should be, if I'm reading on my phone, it should be a text message. That fast or a tweet or a Facebook post size, something really fast and to the point. And as a result, our minds naturally exert less effort when we go into read digitally. So we have to come up with a hack to make it so that we'll put in more effort. And we call those things desirable difficulties. Let me give you an example here. Tagging. And tagging is not just a digital thing. You can do that in print as well. In one study, they had 76 undergrads complete a reading assignment. And when they had no intervention, we didn't ask them to do anything. The digital readers scored significantly lower in the perimeters. Because they were used as much target power, right? Your brains program that way. This has the theory. So they tried something different. They said, we're going to ask the digital readers to write down four words at the conclusion of their reading. That summarize what they read. And as soon as they did that, it's like flipping a switch in their mind that all of a sudden, oh, I'm going to pay attention more now. This isn't a text or a tweet. I'm actually focusing here. And all the comprehension differences disappeared. So again, we call them desirable difficulties. And you've experienced this I can guarantee it.

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All of us that have studied the scriptures have had this before. Have you ever been reading your scriptures and you got to the end of a chapter and you realized you forgot to pay attention? A lot of things in life, Brandon. Oh no, I wasn't focusing there. And I just read the whole thing and sometimes we're like, well, whatever I got done for today, check out my scripture reading. But more often than not, we're like dang it. I really should have focused more. Annotation, these advanced features that got the library has are there to help us have a deeper experience while we're doing it, not just so that we can come back and find them later. So here's an example. Let's brother Jensen here. We're going to have him leaving his family in a company study. As we read these versus create a link between the quote we just read from elder Ballard and the best helps explain or clarify. So you can see he's focusing on how to increase comprehension right now. I want you to use these features so that you understand right now. You might never read that quote from other ballot again. It doesn't matter. I want you to make the connection between the verses. To make sure you're really understanding what is being taught, I want you to tag at least one doctrine as you read the next 5 verses. I do this to my students all the time. In fact, I had a group of freshmen a couple of years ago. They were really struggling to get their
reading done. And so I changed the expectation for them. I said for you to get credit for your reading, you have to come back and show me two things that you tagged last night. And my students loved it. They loved it. And they said, thank goodness I finally understanding the scriptures like I've never understood before because I'm actually trying to understand why I go. Yeah. And it doesn't have to be cookies, right? If you read a ring cooking class next time, right? No, they love it when they're having meaningful experiences. They want to save it. Last one, sometimes writing our thoughts helps us see things differently. Let's all take a minute to write down something we've learned in a note next to verse 22. And we talked about this concept of writing as a way of thinking. That's one of those features that we can use to help enhance us there. All right, I got one more. And I labeled it assist. Because I didn't want to call it discipline. This is going to focus more on probably the youth, because I think that it's the teachers of youth that are most frustrated with bones. And I'll be quick with it. Candela and Beau and her did a study with college students, which instructor characteristics make it easiest to text during class. Very helpful students to give us this. Number one, no policy or doesn't seem to mind. What's the number one thing that they said? You talked about, I'm so glad you brought up cell phone prisons or baskets or whatever. This is just a suggestion. And I think it'll be I'll back it up for the scripture here in a second, but I tell my students every year at the beginning of class they all come in and I say, okay, smartphones in seminary are smartphones and seminary, a good thing or a bad thing. And the younger students, especially they're a bad thing. Wrong. That is wrong. Smartphones and seminary aren't a good thing or a bad thing. It's about how you use them. My expectation for you is that you will use the format that helps you get closest to Christ. And if that's digital, I expect you to use digital. And if that's paper I expect you to use paper. And by doing that, it takes a lot of the pressure off of a teacher. And if it's a clear policy, and I'll show you how you use that later on here, but number two, they turn their back to right on the board. Number three, they stay in front of the class the whole time. If you mingle with your students, in fact, in a church setting, especially if you're sitting down in the front of the class, it's going to be way easier for your students to feel comfortable being off task. Number one thing you can do, I think. If a student is doing something on their phone, more than calling them out, just move closer to them. And they'll feel really uncomfortable really fast and a lot of times they'll say, hey, sorry, and they put it away. And you don't have to damage your relationship. The last one was the instructor doesn't require participation. I had some students in my class one time. I asked them, why do you, what do you use to read from at home? And they said, we like our paper at home and I said, why? And they said, well, because it's less distracting. A lot of them said this. And I said, so why are you using digital in class? Because it's not as distracted. So you're less distracted here and they said, yeah, and I said, why? They said, well, we know that if we aren't following along during your lesson, and you call on us, we're going to look stupid.
But that only happens if there's an expectation of student participation. But don't ever call on a kid to make them look stupid, but that'll become part of it. I'm expected to be engaged in this conversation. So if those are the things that make it easy to be off task, and we're talking policy wise, this is section one 21. It's our guide on how to be leaders, right? No power influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood. Only by persuasion by long suffering by gentleness and maintenance and by love on feigned by kindness and pure knowledge which showed greatly enlarged the soul without hypocrisy and without reproving the times with sharpness and moved upon by the holy ghost and then showing forth afterwards and increases of love towards him whom thou hast approved less the esteem lead to be his enemy. That's the standard, this is what usually happens. Her three back sister Jorgensen are 700 teacher here.

We use lines like this. John, I've told you the rules and I expect you to obey them. That doesn't line up very well with what we just learned in section one 21. Love unfair. Trying to keep power by the fact that you're the teacher. How many times do I have to tell you to get off your phone? This is all about you as a teacher. You can't use your phone like this like that in this classroom. These aren't lining up with what we have doctrine. So here's the better approach. Section 42 versus 88. If my brother or sister offended, I'll take him or her between him or her and be alone. And if he or she confessed that shot be reconciled. So at least in a seminary setting I would think with youth and Sunday school as well, here's what it might sound like. Hey, remember our standards here? Are you getting closer to Christ? John I've noticed you've been struggling on your phone lately. Do you think it's still the best format to help you get closer to Christ in class? And I have this conversation probably 5, 6 times a semester pulling kids out. I've been blown away at how honest they'll be with me. And they'll say, no, you're right. I've got a good problem. What are we going to do? Well, I just might have a good experience. What are we going to do? Well, you know what, give me two more weeks. I want to see if I can do better. Great. Let's go for it. Or sometimes they'll say, yeah, I've tried. It's not going to get better. I'm just going to bring paper next time. But it's not me forcing them to do it. It's a whole different game. Hey, I've noticed you've been a little preoccupied with your phone lately is everything okay. Be surprised how much time the student has a valid reason to be distracted on their phone. Whether it's hey I'm texting, I've got today's my one day when I can talk with my brother who's on a mission and he's able to send me text messages today. Like that or you know what, things have been really rough at home lately. And sometimes it's hard for me to listen to lessons on the family. Sometimes they've got a reason. And if we don't ask, you can really blow things. How to experience less semester with a girl that came in and was on her phone in the back the whole time texting away or social media or whatever. And I'll be honest, I was really bugged. And I over and over again wanted to go back there and be like, come on, you know better than this. I didn't. Thank goodness. Class ends, she gets up and walks out. I wasn't thinking anything of it. About four minutes later, she comes walking back through the class the door in the back of the classroom and she says, okay, look, I need to say something. I know that I'm off task on my phone a lot in this class. And I know that it looks like I'm not learning anything. But I just need you to understand that I am learning and I'm learning more than I've ever learned before. And I appreciate you as a teacher, okay? And I was like, okay, she's like, all right, now I've said what I need to say. And I'll try and do better on my phone. Sometimes they've got reasons and they're just trying to overcome it, ridiculous, understanding with them and loving. You'll do so much better. One last find. It feels like your phone's benefit distract you lately. Do you think you might
benefit from using paper instead? All of these are placing it back on them and letting them make a decision. We've got to trust the youth a little bit. I know that they have issues. Our jobs to help them make good decisions not to force them to make the decisions that make our life easier. Yeah. Yeah, that's powerful. Well, those are 5, right? That's the 5 things.

Crane model simplified direct and assist that really helpful. Any other side that I want to wrap up before too quickly, but any other points that you want to hit before we wrap up. No, I appreciate you giving me the time. I know I get like second go and I get really excited about this stuff. But thank you for giving me a chance to share some things and hopefully there's been some benefits in there. Yeah, any questions on anything. Yeah, this has been really helpful and just structuring it in a way that's really approachable because it can feel like you don't want to be the overbearing gospel library like digital is the way to go, digital and die. And but to see that, especially this app that the church has and is working on its continuing to evolve, like you said, there's some things that are constantly working on. To see how we can improve that experience and use it. I'll share just a few things like I've noticed just own personal life. I mean, everybody has a smartphone, has to have some level of boundaries with the smartphone regardless of what you're doing. Because I can find myself numbing out on scrolling through Instagram. And an hour passes, I'm thinking, where are my children? What's going on? Yeah. And so I found that just the way I structure things I put the gospel library app really prominent. And I've done things like, I'll go through and one thing I've started to do, I created a tag called what it's called exactly, but like the locations of Christ. And I just go through each gospel. And I do a tag for the locations of Christ for the book of Matthew. And I'll just find everywhere at references that price then went to or he left here or whatever. And then I just tagged it. And it's not like this deep like doctrinal study, but it's like this kind of fun exercise. And then I'm looking at the tag page of I can see where Jesus went. In order here. And there's just like little things that if you're drawn to your phone and you want to tap around and you're sort of bored anyways, there's just these little things that you can do with the gospel library to engage yourself in the gospel. And it's sort of fun to see what you can do with tags and notes and all sorts of things like that. There's a real rush. When as a teacher, I hope everybody gets to experience this at some point. A real rush is a teacher when a student raises their hand and says, hey, I got a question. It's a little off topic. And they say, what about, I'll give an example to the other day a student said, so can we repent in the spirit world? And to be able to say, hold on. I've got something for you. And to open up tags and say, I've got a repentance slash spirit World Tag to tap on it and they'll be like, wow, that's so cool. It is a real rush as a teacher. To have an answer form that's backed up by an apostle. Yeah. And again, that's just another example of how you've created the path to rewire your brain so that you could find that. You didn't have to say page 400 on the left column in midway down. From the April 2017 Leona, right? Yeah. Yeah. Awesome. Well, Brandon, this
has been great. Like I said, I have one more question for you, but if anybody else wants to jump into just really learning more, are there any other specific resources that you'd recommend? Obviously there's Richard Bernard, his book and things that he's put out. But any others that you could bring to our attention. Oh, you mean for learning gospel library? Yeah, your digital learning in general. Yeah. You know, and so hear me out. There's an extension on this. Usually there's not an extension when someone says no, but there is on this. The reason I'm saying no is, I think the best way to learn gospel library is not necessarily and maybe this contradicts a little bit from my modeling approach earlier. But it's not just to watch someone else do it or try to learn what someone else's system is. Is to start pushing buttons. Just start pushing things. What does this do? You're not going to screw things up. You remember in the paper days when you'd make a market and you'd be like, oh no, I went too far. And you try to erase the super thin paper and it rips your paper and stuff. Yeah. You screw it up in gospel library. Just delete it. And it can go with just start experimenting with stuff. It's kind of the Apple approach. I remember getting that first I've had I talked about at the beginning. And Paul to out of the box and being like, where's the instruction manual? And there isn't one, and there's a reason for that.

They want you to just start Tapping buttons and figure things out. Yeah. And I do think you can get some help and ask and people along the way. But I think the best thing that you could do to figure it out is to just start pushing buttons and figure and things out for yourself. Yeah. Really helpful. Well, last question I have for your brand is just reflecting on your time as a teacher, but more specifically with the gospel library digital teaching. How has how have these processes that you've discussed today just helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ? When I first started teaching, there was a guy named Dave Hershey, brilliant teacher in my first assignment, hurricane and I walked in and I had the ability to talk to people and communicate and stuff and object lessons. I was young. I was 23 and I could relate to the kids and but he had every reference to every talk ever given in this dispensation on the tip of his tongue, ready to go. The guy was just brilliant. He carry around these books that were 500 pages thick that were spiral bound. And he would and he had all this commentary, these links, I call him links. He had these cross references for every page of scripture in the entire standard words. And it was written in kinase make fun of him, because it's written in size 7 font. And he sat me down, he said, this is what I do. Don't do what I do. Figure out your system. But make sure that you find a way that you can effectively get the words of Christ to your students. And I was able to stumble on to gospel library and the church's resources on the web page. The biggest thing that it's done for me is I go in to teach and it's no longer brother comstock teaching. It's the scriptures teaching. And the scriptures are literally in the center of my class. And it's the profits that are answering their questions now. Instead of me giving my opinion on stuff and my students can walk out now confident that that's the answer and not just something that some guy in a white
shirt said at the front of class. The power in my teaching has been magnified so much more than I ever thought it would be by having a filing system and a marketing system in the gospel library. And remember to go to leading saints dot org slash teacher click the link in the show notes to access the video of this interview and many others in the teaching Saints library. And now that you've listened to this episode, go check out our top ten most popular episodes by searching T ten in the search bar. And be sure to subscribe to our weekly email leadership message by going to leading saint dot org slash subscribe or text the word lead to four 747 four 7. It came as a result of the position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the declaration was made, concerning the own only true and living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we can not shrink nor run away. And of which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.