

Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Teaching and Learning

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Principles of Teaching and Learning

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Teaching and Learning

President Packer: Our theme is teaching and learning the gospel of Jesus Christ, both in the classroom and at home. All of us—leaders, teachers, missionaries, and parents—have a lifelong challenge from the Lord to both teach and learn the doctrines of the gospel as they have been revealed to us.

We will begin with a brief conversation between Elder L. Tom Perry and myself on principles that build good teaching. My assignment is to convey a few personal experiences that have taught me much about teaching and learning. If you watch and listen carefully, you will notice that to be a good teacher you must also be a willing learner.

Our conversation will be followed by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who will instruct us on preparing to teach. He will then join a classroom of students to demonstrate an example of classroom teaching.

Any of the Twelve could have effectively given this demonstration. Each would have varied his approach from the others. There is no one method that works for all teachers or situations. The Spirit is essential in guiding us to use our own preparation, experience, personality, knowledge, and testimony in any particular teaching situation.

Leaders' Responsibilities

Leaders have a responsibility to teach, whether they are in councils or interviews or worship services. They also have a responsibility to ensure that teacher development and effective gospel learning are ongoing in the lives of members.

To that end, the First Presidency issued a letter dated November 17, 2006, discontinuing the positions of ward and stake teacher improvement coordinators. Accompanying the letter was a list of "Leaders' Responsibilities for Teacher Improvement." We trust that with the principles taught in this broadcast, together with the suggestions and resources stated in the letter, priesthood and auxiliary leaders will counsel together to improve gospel teaching and learning. It should not be necessary to hold special meetings for teacher improvement other than in your councils and interviews from time to time as needed.

We pray that this training broadcast may help you become better teachers and students of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Willingness to Learn

Elder Perry: President, you wrote a book entitled *Teach Ye Diligently*. Every position in the Church requires an effective teacher. It is our most important calling. Could we visit for a few minutes and talk about teaching diligently as a requirement in our several Church callings?

President Packer: I was appointed seminary supervisor, and I didn't know anything. I was assigned then, employed, and paid more or less to go about the Church to tell seminary teachers how to teach and what they did wrong. That was very embarrassing, because I would go into a class and see teachers do something and have to correct them when I knew I did that every time I taught, and I had learned something about it.

Elder Harold B. Lee and Elder Marion G. Romney were always teaching, and they would, in a sense, go out of their way to tell me something or teach me something. I think the reason they did it—I'm not sure they ever saw me in this position or calling—is that I had one virtue: I wanted to learn, and I didn't resent it. And if you don't resent it, and if you want to learn, the Lord will keep teaching you, sometimes things you really didn't think you wanted to know.

Both of those great teachers would teach me. When I would see Brother Romney, sometimes he would say, "Kid, I want to tell you something." I knew it was coming. He was going to tell me I was doing something that I shouldn't do, and I would always thank him.

I learned early on that there is great value in listening to experience in older people. I had a stake president once who said, "I always tried to be in the presence of great people." He was in a little town in Idaho, but he said, "If there was a lecturer coming or something special, I would always try to be there, because I could learn."

I have always been drawn to associate with older people (now I am one). I remember in the Quorum of the Twelve, LeGrand Richards didn't walk as fast as the other Brethren, and I would always wait and open the door for him and walk back to the building with him. One day one of the Brethren said, "Oh, you're so kind to take care of Brother Richards." And I thought, "You don't know my selfish motive"—as we would walk back, I would just listen to him. I knew that he could remember Wilford Woodruff, and he would speak. One-on-one teaching is very powerful. Generally one-on-one teaching is what happens when you are corrected.

Another principle of teaching is to arise from your bed early (see D&C 88:124)—but the easy part of that, or the hard part, is to retire to your bed—and then reflect in the morning when your mind is clear. That's when the ideas come to teach.

I don't know how often I have had an assignment come and I didn't have a clue in my mind what to do. Yesterday I was in a meeting of the General Authorities. I knew I was going to speak first, and I thought, "What will I say?" And I was confident it would come, and it came.

Using the Scriptures

Elder Perry: What is the importance of using the scriptures in your teaching?

President Packer: I have always relied on the scriptures. The best example of teaching and how to teach, the best model for teaching methods, besides the subject matter, which is the gospel, is the Lord and His teaching. That's why I don't like to go to the pulpit or stand in front of a class without my scriptures in hand. I have got them in hand today.

Elder Perry: President, you've carried those scriptures around with you. Every time I've been with you, you've had those scriptures. You told us the story one time of how they were in the water, and that only helped them because you could turn to them faster.

President Packer: Well, I was studying outside on the lawn and was called away and left my scriptures open on the little table—I forgot them, as old men will do—and the sprinklers went on. I came out in the morning and thought, “Oh, my scriptures that I've marked up for 50 years are gone.” I found out it just loosened the pages. I think if I had to get new scriptures, I'd put them out in the rain before I started using them.

Elder Perry: People always talk to us about the scriptures and, some of them, how difficult it is to get through them. How do you make the scriptures come alive in your teaching?

President Packer: Stay at it. I remember when I determined I was going to read the Book of Mormon. I was in my teens. I opened it and read, “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1). And I went on through the chapters, and I was learning things. It was interesting, and I could follow it until I got over to the Isaiah chapters and the Old Testament prophet language. So a few months later I decided to try again to read the Book of Mormon. I read, “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,” but every time I'd hit the barrier of those Isaiah chapters, and I wondered why they were in there. Finally I decided I was even going to read them. So when I was a teenager, I just had to look at the words. I didn't understand it, but I could turn the pages and then go on through. When you get over in Alma, you will sail on through.

So you have to be determined to read them, and not just glean from them, but read them from beginning to end—the Book of Mormon, the New Testament, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price. For years I made it a practice to read the scriptures each summer when we had a little time off, to refresh the store that's there.

Pray for the Gift of Teaching

Elder Perry: What counsel would you give recent converts prior to their first calling as a teacher?

President Packer: I would tell them they can do it. Everybody can teach. I would counsel them to pray for the gift of teaching. You know, the Book of Mormon speaks of gifts and outlines several gifts, among them to teach the gospel by the Spirit (see Moroni 10:8–10). When I read that years ago, I thought, “That's a gift I want, to be able to teach by the Spirit.” I found out from the scriptures that you have to ask for it—ask and ye shall receive—so I would tell them to keep asking and seeking, “and ye shall find” (see Matthew 7:7; 3 Nephi 27:29) and that the gift has to be earned, but it can come.

Seeking the Spirit

Elder Perry: What should teachers do to ensure that they have the Spirit in their teaching?

President Packer: You have to live worthily, and you have to ask for help. You can ask for help if you are parents. And then you have to keep the commandments and pray constantly, unceasingly for the ability and the inspiration to know what to do and when to do it. The Lord won't fail you: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). "Whatsoever . . . ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive," it will be given you (Enos 1:15). Then one of the scriptures adds a little—if it's good for you (see Moroni 7:26). The gospel is very practical.

You may be an older person who thinks that your ministry is finished, you may be a young person who is frightened about everything or a mother who is so busy with the children or a father who is preoccupied, but you can teach, and you can pray, and you can be guided. And you will. You'll be blessed of the Lord—I can promise you that.

When the Lord was teaching, He always dealt with things that the people knew about. For instance, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net" (Matthew 13:47)—it isn't really a net, but it's just like unto it; and then He explained why. And "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking [after] goodly pearls" (Matthew 13:45). When He gave the parable of the sower (see Matthew 13:3–8), that was something they could relate to, and it's not only possible but quite probable, after He gave the parable of the sower and talked about seeds being thrown on hard ground and on productive ground, that a month later one of those who was hearing and out doing some planting, seeing the seeds in his hand, would relive that lesson.

If you use parables and stories and illustrations, it lives after the students are out of the class. His method was remarkably simple. He was at times fairly stern, but always His teachings were on their level.

Teaching is a sacred calling, a holy calling. The thing I think I would tell teachers is that they never teach alone. They never have to be alone. The Lord has promised that in the scriptures. Alma said the Lord granteth unto all nations, in every tongue, teachers (see Alma 29:8), and the Lord said, "Teach ye diligently and my grace [will] attend you" (D&C 88:78).

I don't know how to teach the gospel without a constancy of prayer. You can speak a prayer, but you can also think a prayer. A lot of times when I've been teaching a group or a class I've just been praying inwardly, "How can I get through?" And I don't know how to do it other than having that power available.

The Responsibility to Teach

Elder Perry: Teaching is central in all the activities of the Church. Who has the responsibility to prepare themselves to teach?

President Packer: Everybody is a teacher—the leader is a teacher; the follower is a teacher; the counselor is a teacher; the parents are teachers. So we have a responsibility to learn the principles of teaching. The Lord set up His Church so that we all do everything in the Church. There's a statement in

the Doctrine and Covenants that “every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, . . . the Savior of the world” (D&C 1:20). How blessed we are that we have a lay priesthood, as it is called, so that all of the brethren can hold the priesthood. All of the sisters are eligible for callings in the Church, and all of us will be parents. Therefore, teaching is the center of all that we do.

Elder Perry: You’ve mentioned teaching in the home. What is the difference between teaching in the Church and teaching in the home? Is there any great difference?

President Packer: In the home it’s more intimate and better and easier and less formal, and parents are teaching by example. Parents also teach some things that are kind of painful to kids when they ask “why,” and all the parents can say is “because”—because they don’t know why, they just know it isn’t the thing to do, and they teach them obedience so that they will know and understand. And at home there’s that powerful bond of love between parent and child that you won’t let go until you get it taught.

Teaching by the Spirit

Elder Perry: President, how do you get the Spirit in the classroom from the teacher to the students in such a way that it will be a meaningful experience to them?

President Packer: First, they have to know that you love them, that you want to teach them. Then you have to communicate on their level. We can’t float around above them—even in the gospel—about subjects that they cannot connect with. That isn’t what the Lord did. The Lord walked with them and talked with them in everyday life, and His teachings were on that level always.

If you have something to teach, they really want to learn. Teenagers even—teenagers especially—want to learn. They have a thirst for it.

A lot of teachers think they have to be prepared to the very sentence. Yes and no. That preparation includes having the presentation loose enough to involve the students and having them ask questions and bringing them into it. You have to leave a little room for inspiration.

We have a memory prompter in the Holy Ghost. If we have a challenge of something to teach, and we think about who we are and what we do, there’s always some little experience we’ve had or someplace we’ve been or something we’ve seen that we can bring into the lesson. And the scriptures are part of all of that. They aren’t just a book you read now and again to figure out the rules and regulations of the Church.

Quite a bit of teaching that is done in the Church is done so rigidly, it’s lecture. We don’t respond to lectures too well in classrooms. We do in sacrament meeting and at conferences, but teaching can be two-way so that you can ask questions. You can sponsor questions easily in a class.

Suppose you were teaching the Martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Here you are a Church history teacher, and you’ve studied it all, and you know it was on June 27, 1844, at 5:00 p.m. in the Carthage Jail when the Prophet was shot. If you ask them what time of day and where and so on the Prophet was shot, none of them will know. You didn’t know before you read the manual. But you can say, “What brought him to that? What do you think brought him to that?” The minute you say, “What do you think?” they have something to say. They can contribute; even the students that are the most backward

will have something to say. So there's a way to handle questions and to monitor and manage the class. Respond to questions. Feel free to ask questions in a class.

You can't give away something you haven't got anymore than you can come back from someplace you haven't been. So you have got to have the Spirit.

Points to Consider

- The presentations from this worldwide leadership training meeting can help you improve as a teacher and learner. To identify and apply the ideas in these presentations, read the information in the yellow boxes that have been placed near the beginning of each presentation. You may also want to mark scriptures and key phrases in the presentations and write impressions you receive.
- Read President Packer's opening remarks. Identify ideas that can help you become a better teacher and learner.
- Ponder the following question, and write down the ideas and impressions that come to you: What should I do to ensure I have the Spirit in my teaching at home and at church?
- What do you think helps make President Packer an effective learner?

Teaching and Learning in the Church

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

A High Priority

We thank President Packer and Elder Perry for that inspiring foundation for our subject today, and we look forward to the capstone message that will come from President Monson at the close of our meeting.

It's indicative of the high priority the presiding Brethren give to the subject of teaching and learning that we are devoting all of our worldwide leadership training broadcast this year to this subject. Perhaps the reason for that is obvious. We all understand that the success of the gospel message depends upon its being taught and then understood and then lived in such a way that its promise of happiness and salvation can be realized.

For that reason, Jesus's great final charge to His disciples just prior to His Ascension into heaven was:

“Go ye therefore, and *teach all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

“*Teaching them* to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19–20; emphasis added).

What the Savior stresses in that passage is that however much there is to do in living the gospel—and there is much we are to do to live it—none of that can be accomplished until we have been taught those truths and have learned the way of the gospel. For several years now, President Hinckley has been counseling us to hold our people close to the Church, especially the youth and the new converts. He said we all need a friend, a responsibility, and nourishing “by the good word of God” (Moroni 6:4; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 66; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 47).

Inspired instruction in the home and in the Church helps provide this crucial element of nourishing by the good word of God. And the opportunity to magnify that call exists everywhere—fathers, mothers, siblings, friends, missionaries, priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers, classroom instructors, including our wonderful seminary and institute teachers, who join us today. Well, the list goes on and on. In fact, in this Church, it is virtually impossible to find anyone who is not a teacher.

President Packer made that point in his exchange with Elder Perry. He said, “Everybody is a teacher”—the leader, the follower, the parent, the counselor. Little wonder that the Apostle Paul would say in his writings, “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers.” After that would come the broad blessing of miracles, spiritual gifts, and heavenly manifestations (see 1 Corinthians 12:28).

Underscoring the divine nature of those who were called as instructors, a young Apostle by the name of David O. McKay said in general conference in 1916, “No greater responsibility can rest upon any man [or woman], than to be a teacher of God's children” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1916, 57). That's still

true. We picked from that quote the title for our wonderful teacher's help and manual in the Church, *Teaching, No Greater Call*. That wonderfully revered Primary hymn "I Am a Child of God" has the children singing this request to parents and teachers:

*Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday.
(Hymns, no. 301)*

That is our common task in this Church. That is our shared responsibility. We are all children of God, and we must teach each other; we must help each other "find the way." That is what we are going to try to do today.

Preparing to Teach

You can see from these materials spread out on this table that I am trying to prepare a lesson. Does it look familiar? It's today's lesson—a lesson for all of you. Preparing for any class is hard work, and it takes time. In that regard, may I encourage you to start thinking about and planning early for any lesson that you are to give.

For example, if I were going to teach a class on Sunday, I would read through and begin praying about that lesson the Sunday before. That gives me a full week to pray, to seek inspiration, to think, to read and watch for real-life applications that will give vitality to my message. You won't finalize the lesson that early, but you will be surprised to find how many things come to you during the week, how much God gives you—things that you will feel to use when you do finalize your preparation.

In discussing preparation, may I also encourage you to avoid a temptation that faces almost every teacher in the Church; at least it has certainly been my experience. That is the temptation to cover too much material, the temptation to stuff more into the hour—or more into the students—than they can possibly hold! Remember two things in this regard: first of all, we are teaching people, not subject matter per se; and second, every lesson outline that I have ever seen will inevitably have more in it than we can possibly cover in the allotted time.

So stop worrying about that. It's better to take just a few good ideas and get good discussion—and good learning—than to be frenzied, trying to teach every word in the manual. In these materials lying before me, I already have three or four times the content that I can possibly say or share with you today in the allotted time period of a classroom hour. So, like you, I have had to choose and select; I'm holding some material over for another day.

An unrushed atmosphere is absolutely essential if you are to have the Spirit of the Lord present in your class. Please don't ever forget that. Too many of us rush. We rush right past the Spirit of the Lord trying to beat the clock in some absolutely unnecessary footrace.

Teaching Demonstration

Well, let's return now to that wonderful discussion between President Packer and Elder Perry to find

some of the key points for success in this great task of teaching and learning. To do that we are going to enter a classroom here at Church headquarters where we are going to interact in something of the same way we hope you will do in your classroom, wherever that may be in the world. This is unrehearsed and spontaneous, just the way your classes are. The teacher has done his best to prepare and pray—I reassure you that I have done that—and so have the students. Now, having had an opening prayer for our class, we are going to trust in the Spirit of the Lord to guide us in our teaching experience.

Welcome to class. This is intended to be something of an average class size, *más o menos*. Some of you will have more, and some of you will have less, but the principles for teaching will be essentially the same whatever the size of the class. Here we have 15 absolutely perfect and beautiful people in our audience and a 16th that includes you, out in that worldwide audience we're reaching to.

Listen for new ideas, things that may come to only you. They may not have anything to do with what we are saying. But that is how the Spirit works. Be open to promptings about how you can teach. And remember, you can teach! You can do this!

Everybody Can Teach

Elder Perry posed a question for President Packer midway in their conversation: “What would you say to a new teacher?” If someone were newly called, what would you advise him or her to do? What would you say to help this teacher take courage and be able to accept the call and fulfill it and enjoy it?

Brother Charles W. Dahlquist II: You can do it.

Elder Holland: You can do it. Everybody can teach. And that is what President Packer said when he answered that question from Brother Perry.

He referred to scriptures that promise you that you can do it. The scriptures always provide an extra reassurance. Do any scriptures come to mind?

Elder Jay E. Jensen: Moroni 10:17.

Elder Holland: Moroni 10, the last chapter in the Book of Mormon, is a great summary statement about gifts. Do you want to read that, Brother Jensen?

Elder Jensen: “And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally.”

Elder Holland: That's wonderful.

Elder Jensen: It excludes no one.

Elder Holland: No one is left out of that. Sometimes we think it means, “Everybody but me, everybody can teach but me, or everybody can lead but me.” Well, that's not the case. These are gifts to everyone. Note a little warning on that, as long as we are in the subject. Brother Jensen, read the first couple of lines of verse eight.

Elder Jensen: “And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God” (Moroni 10:8).

Elder Holland: I think there is a little temptation for us to “deny.” We kind of hang back. When a call comes, or we’re to face a classroom—and that is a pretty intimidating experience for any of us—I think there is something in us that says, “I can’t do this, and I’m going to deny. I’m going to deny that the gift can come; I’m going to deny that the gift is mine. I’m going to, in a sense, deny the authenticity of the call.” In a way, that is what we’re saying. And what Moroni says here is “Don’t deny”: “Deny not the gifts of God, for they are many.”

“Ask and Ye Shall Receive”

I’m thinking of something the Savior Himself said directly to His disciples in the New Testament, and I am told that it is the scriptural promise and declaration repeated more than almost any other in all of scripture. Someone said that some variation of this appears a hundred times in the scriptures. Now, if it appeared only once or twice, I guess we could embrace it once or twice, but something repeated 20, 40, 60, or 80 times obviously has great significance for the Lord.

Does anybody have any idea what this promise is?

Sister Vicki F. Matsumori: I would think it is the scripture that says something about ask and knock and you shall receive.

Elder Holland: That’s it. Sister Matsumori, as long as you’ve led us into that, would you read Matthew 7:7? This is from the Sermon on the Mount and one of many places where this promise is expressed.

Sister Matsumori: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

Elder Holland: Thank you. I love the crisp, clear, declarative spirit of that promise. If we ask, we will receive, and if we knock, it will be opened. We can do this.

Now at this point we are starting to accumulate some ideas. I am going to ask Sister Kathy Hughes of our general Relief Society presidency to be our scribe. We have a theme developing, given to us by President Packer in his exchange with Elder Perry. And that would be “The Gift of Teaching.” Would you write that up on the board as a heading for us, Sister Hughes?

We are going to list some of the things we want to remember about how to pursue the gift of teaching. The one that Sister Matsumori just gave us would be number 1: “Ask, seek, and knock spiritually”—perhaps the most fundamental requirement for a teacher in seeking this gift that God has promised us.

Elder W. Rolfe Kerr: It seems to me that it’s very important to put the concluding piece to this and even maybe have it in front of us. What comes from asking is that we receive. What comes from seeking is that we find. We knock, and it is opened.

Elder Holland: Let’s write that on the board, Sister Hughes, that we are going to receive. There is a promise in this.

Brother Orin Howell: Along with that, I like Luke 12:12, where it says, “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

Elder Holland: That starts to open up a wider world, because we are always talking that way to the missionaries. We are forever talking to the missionaries about opening their mouths, telling them that if they have prepared and done the best they can, God will give them what to say in the hour of their need. That is a wonderful, broad, whole new idea about asking and receiving at the appointed hour. That’s a terrific verse, Orin.

Sister Tamu Smith: I think that sometimes when I am in situations where I feel overwhelmed, being a convert to the Church and being asked to teach a class where people come from pioneer heritage, the Spirit does touch you to say something that you don’t feel inclined to say. In Exodus 4:12, it says, “Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.” I think that if we are willing to allow the Spirit to move us to say those things, even though we may not feel like we have all the answers, we let Heavenly Father do His job in speaking through us.

Elder Holland: What a wonderful verse. In all of my years of discussing this subject, I don’t know that I have ever heard that one used, so thank you, Sister Smith. And the context there, of course, is this overwhelming task that Moses had to help the children of Israel extricate themselves from life’s problems. That’s what all of us face. That’s a terrific verse to say, “Just don’t worry; it will be given to you.” Thanks for that reference.

Well, keep these citations in mind if you are going to teach such a subject. You can use these or many, many more.

Teach from the Scriptures

Elder Steven E. Snow: Many of us when we are called to teach are just overwhelmed with the enormity of the assignment and feel inadequate and unprepared. But you know, if we will do our best to study the resources we are given and get into the scriptures and then just trust in the Spirit, we will be helped through the process. I think sometimes we just are overwhelmed because we don’t know enough.

Elder Holland: Absolutely. We all feel that way; every teacher who has ever taught has felt that way. I think it’s fair to say that all of us here represent the collective effort of the Church to put good material in people’s hands. We really do have good curricular materials. We have good lesson manuals. They don’t teach themselves, but there is a great reassurance there that we are not in this alone, and we don’t have to reinvent the wheel. We have wonderful resources, and we are going to talk about those throughout the day. That helps us not feel quite so overwhelmed.

When President Packer was talking with Elder Perry, he said, “I always relied on [blank],” whether at the pulpit or standing in the front of the class. He said he never wanted to go anywhere without them. To what was he referring?

Sister Julie B. Beck: The scriptures.

Elder Holland: The scriptures, absolutely. Would you write number 2, Sister Hughes: “Teach from the

scriptures.”

I don't think that we can overstate this or overestimate this in our role of teaching in the Church. Obviously, the very substance of the gospel, the scriptures themselves are the things that we are being called to teach, whether it's Primary or our adult groups or our teenage groups, at home or in the Church. I am reminded of a powerful thing said in Alma 31—a favorite verse that I think says this about as well as any verse that I know of in the scriptures.

Alma had taken on a very serious mission, a very difficult mission—the mission to the Zoramites—and he had just had his exchange with Korihor. He finds what works for him, and he finds what doesn't work in this challenge to teach and to testify.

Brother Wada, would you read Alma 31:5?

Brother Takashi Wada: “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.”

Elder Holland: Thank you very much. Somehow over the years, this has become a favorite scripture for me. We all have verses we return to time and again, and I have returned again and again to this one. “The preaching of the word”—the power of the word—“had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just,” it had a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword,” and they have had plenty of sword in this book and in life, “or anything else,” all the other battlegrounds, conflicts, and challenges. “Therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.”

Another word for *virtue* is *power*. When the woman came to touch the hem of Christ's garment, in the scene in the New Testament, He said, “Virtue [has] gone out of me” (Luke 8:46). The original Greek New Testament language for that is *power*.

So Alma is saying we should try the power of the word of God, since it has such a powerful effect.

Brother Wada: I think that everybody comes to church to learn something and wants to be nurtured. One phrase from the book of Jacob, Jacob 2:8, says, “It supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word [of God] healeth the wounded soul.” It is satisfying when just after I teach a class somebody says to me, “This is exactly what I wanted to hear. I needed it.”

Elder Holland: A profound point—thank you, Brother Wada—because people come to church for a spiritual experience. That's why they come. We come to church and gather in these settings to hear the word of God, to hear declaration, Spirit, testimony, and conviction. When tough times come, when we need to be healed, what the world offers is not going to be enough. We come to be healed by the word of God.

Sister Matsumori: For most Primary teachers, teaching from the word of God with children is a real challenge. They don't read; they don't have their own scriptures; they are not familiar with it if their family hasn't taught them. It can be challenging.

Elder Holland: Good point. Here's an experienced Primary teacher giving us just a little caution that we are going to get children at all stages of development and that we should bring them along gradually—as children need to be brought along. Good reminder, Sister Matsumori.

Brother Dahlquist: It's even the same with young men and young women. If they are going to understand it, they have to, as Nephi said, be able to apply it. They need to relate to it.

Elder Holland: They need to liken it unto themselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23).

Brother Dahlquist: They need to have the scriptures come alive.

Elder Holland: Yes, and we are talking about lots of experience here—some experiences in the home, some in seminary and institute. We are talking about something that has to grow over time in our young men and our young women. We won't be impatient if it takes a while for this to develop.

Elder Jensen: So far our discussion has concentrated on the four standard works. We do have other scripture.

Elder Holland: Yes. Do you want to say a word about the living prophets?

Elder Jensen: We do have good manuals, and we do have magazines and stories. Aren't they powerful?

Elder Holland: We do have great material, to say nothing of the whole world of the living prophets and semiannual general conference broad-casts and publications that go to the Church. We have a wealth of the word of God available to us, and we ought to use it.

Sister Kathleen H. Hughes: This raises in my mind a question. We frequently see, as Elder Oaks pointed out in another talk that he gave, that there is just cursory acknowledgement that the manual is even there, and then we go off on our own. Why do we do that? How can we help our brothers and sisters understand that the handbooks and the manuals are for our edification?

Elder Holland: Yes, that's a good reminder. It fits with Elder Jensen's comment. In the spirit of the wonderful comments you've made and the insights you've given me—new insights about the power of the word and the healing, the help, and the light that comes from it—I am reminded of a story President Packer told the Quorum of the Twelve some years ago. He talked about a severe winter in Utah when the snow was excessive and had driven the deer herds down very low into some of the valleys. Some of them were trapped by fences and circumstances as they were taken out of their natural habitat, and well-meaning, perfectly responsive, capable agencies tried to respond by feeding those deer to get them through the crisis of the winter. They brought in hay and dumped it everywhere; it was about as good as they could do under the circumstances. Later an immense number of those deer were found dead. The people who handled those animals afterward said that their stomachs were full of hay, but they had starved to death. They had been fed, but they had not been nourished.

Every teacher needs to remember that we have to “nourish by the good word of God.” We can be fed too—that can be part of the fun of it—but the significance of teaching is nourishment anchored in the word of God.

Teach by the Spirit

Sister Hughes, would you write point number 3: “Teach by and with the Spirit.”

The Spirit of the Lord is the real teacher, and that’s why I said earlier, “Listen.” Listen with your heart. Listen with your soul, and you may have feelings or promptings that don’t have anything to do with what we are saying. It may be something very personal, it may be related to something at home, something in a marriage or with a child, but that’s the Spirit, and He’s the real teacher.

There’s a line from Doctrine and Covenants 43:16 that says you are to be taught from on high. We’re instruments, we’re tools, and it’s our tongues and our lips, but the teacher is on high.

Now, it’s a good teaching practice to have the class get to know each other and become a little better acquainted, so we’re going to do that for a minute with Orin Howell.

Orin, when did you join the Church?

Brother Howell: I joined the Church in June 1996.

Elder Holland: Where did you join the Church, Brother Howell?

Brother Howell: In Bosnia.

Elder Holland: What were you doing in Bosnia, Brother Howell?

Brother Howell: I was in the military at the time.

Elder Holland: Where and in what in Bosnia were you baptized?

Brother Howell: I was baptized in Tuzla, in a Russian bar that had been converted to a chapel. We got a used cover of a tank, turned it upside down, brought it into the chapel, and used that as a font.

Elder Holland: This is a wonderful young man in the military, who is touched by the lives of other Latter-day Saints in the military, and he receives a testimony of the gospel and wants to be baptized. So in the converted chapel in wartime conditions, the engine cover of a tank was tipped upside down to form a basin-like structure and filled with water, and Orin filled the basin. He was baptized. Orin, who confirmed you a member of the Church in that setting?

Brother Howell: You did, Elder Holland.

Elder Holland: I had the wonderful privilege in the summer of 1996 to confirm Orin Howell a member of the Church in Tuzla, Bosnia, under wartime conditions, where we were scrambling for our lives. This wonderful young man is now a high priest serving the Church faithfully here in the Salt Lake Valley. He’s a very distinguished member of our class today. Thank you, Orin, for that little bio. It lets the class get to know each other a little better.

I am going to have Brother Howell develop the theme “Teaching by the Spirit” with us. Turn to section 50, part of a series of verses that we regularly and urgently use with the missionaries. But we should use it equally with everyone. Brother Howell, would you read Doctrine and Covenants 50:13?

Brother Howell: “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?”

Elder Holland: To shift the emphasis a little for broader purposes here, let’s substitute the word *called* for *ordained*. *Ordained* would be priesthood language, and we are going to talk about the general call to teach. So, “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye [called]?”

Now, Brother Howell, read the Lord’s answer in verse 14.

Brother Howell: “To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.”

Elder Holland: That is a scriptural assertion to underscore what we are trying to develop and have already said—that the real teacher is the Spirit. I am not the teacher, and you are not the teachers. We all need to be receptive to the Holy Spirit, to the guidance of heaven, which is the teacher. We are “to preach [the] gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.”

Now, a caution: What if we try to do it in some other way? What if we try to teach without the Spirit or are unmindful of or unreceptive to the Spirit? What is the Lord’s verdict on that kind of teaching?

Sister McKee, do you want to read verse 18?

Sister Maritza McKee: “And if it be by some other way it is not of God.”

Elder Holland: Say it one more time. That is so powerful.

Sister McKee: “And if it be by some other way it is not of God.”

Sister Beck: So does this mean that if I sit down and study my books and manuals and I write up an outline and have my plan, I can’t teach that? I prepare, but do I have to be ready to set it aside and be directed by the Spirit with the preparation I have?

Elder Holland: Are there any comments on that question before I offer my own response? It’s a legitimate question.

Brother Dahlquist: It’s not that the Spirit whispers just when you are standing up not using your notes. I think the Spirit can whisper beginning with the preparation and when you are putting together the lesson. It’s much like general conference. General conference has a marvelous way of touching our lives, but there’s a lot of preparation.

Elder Holland: OK, let’s have some more comments about this. What is the role of the teacher, and what is the role of the Spirit?

Sister Beck: I prepared; I worked on it. But then, if someone in my class has had a challenge that week,

that changes the dynamic of the lesson. Help me understand how I know where the blend comes of being prepared and being guided and directed to say what comes into my heart at that time or to use a different scripture.

Elder Holland: That's a terrific question, and every teacher will face it.

Elder Kerr: I think the key—beyond the preparation and treasuring up—is to not be bound by the lesson plan, but let that be just the background and then be open to the prompting.

Elder Holland: It wouldn't be fair to just walk into a class and say, "I haven't prepared, but the Spirit is going to guide us." On the other hand, to be so locked in to preparation that we are not going to entertain any prompting we get along the way would be the other extreme.

I think Sister Beck is steering us toward some combination of these. We have prepared, but we are open to the Spirit, and we have that freedom to move where we should go at that given hour, in the moment of our delivery.

Elder Snow: We have to understand that every member of that class may go home with a slightly different prompting from the Spirit, and it's just so important that the Spirit be present. But how many of us have been in a class when there has been a wonderful discussion going on, and the teacher has said, "This is a very good discussion, but I must complete the lesson."

Elder Holland: Yes, we have all heard that.

Elder Snow: And we miss opportunities sometimes by doing that.

Elder Holland: Yes, we do. And those are realities we will have to learn to accommodate, and we will have to be sensitive to those impressions so that we do right by the moment and seize that opportunity.

Sister Hughes: You know, this has always been a really interesting and somewhat perplexing issue for me. How do we know, and how can teachers know that they are teaching with the Spirit? I don't know. I'm not sure, when I go to teach, that I'm always confident of that.

Elder Holland: Does anyone have a response to that? What is the teacher's reassurance that she or he is teaching by the Spirit? What would you look to for an indication of that, or do you just do it in faith and hope that it's happening even though you won't always know?

Elder Jensen: I have the same question. And I'm wondering if the answer isn't, at least for me, back in Doctrine and Covenants 50:21–22:

"Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?"

"Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together."

Elder Holland: Maybe a little rejoicing, Kathy—maybe if your heart rejoices, that is at least one

indication.

Elder Jensen: Is the teacher up there, the talking head, delivering and not inviting participation? I have a little quote I carry in my scriptures related to that verse, and I think I have a new appreciation for it today as we've been talking about it. Elder Scott taught this in a CES training meeting: "Ensure that there is abundant participation because that use of agency by a student authorizes the Holy Ghost to instruct. It helps the student to retain your message. As students verbalize truths, they are confirmed in their souls and strengthen their personal testimonies" (Richard G. Scott, *To Understand and Live Truth* [address to CES religious educators, Feb. 4, 2005], 3).

Elder Holland: That's wonderful. That triggers a thought that I remember from President Marion G. Romney, who said once, "I always know when I've spoken under the influence of the Spirit because I learned something I didn't know." He's the teacher, and suddenly he's either saying things or thinking things that he had not thought before—or if he thought them before, they have come with new delight, new power. Those might be some of the ways to get an indication you are teaching by the Spirit.

In many cases, we won't know. We will do all we can do, and we hope that hundreds of things are happening in people's hearts or will happen because of this experience or other Church experiences, but we may never know.

Maybe part of the teacher's divine calling is to be an instrument and move on, to trust that we have been as spiritual and as devoted as we can, and then let the miracle of personal revelation go on and on and on. I think that is a very gratifying idea about teaching and being a teacher.

The Responsibility for Learning

Item 4: "Help the learner assume responsibility for learning."

What do you do when you come to a class cold, and there isn't much going on—where somebody says by body language, "I defy you to teach me. I am going to slump in this chair, and I am going to sit with my head down, and I'm going to look at my shoes. And when I look at you, I'm going to scowl." It may not always be that bad, but I have had some of those classes. We've probably all been in situations where it seemed like people had not come prepared to learn. How do we help people do that?

Sister Beck: Sometimes I work on crafting my questions. But I think this seems to be what we are saying: the more questions we can get from the learners about something, the more they are engaged in the learning.

And the thought that came to mind was that when Joseph Smith read a verse of scripture in James, it created questions in his mind, and he said, "How am I going to know? And will I ever know? And if I don't figure this out, I'll never know." And he was in a learner mode when he asked God. But that to me is a challenge as a teacher—not so much the questions I am asking but what is happening that is helping other people to ask questions so the Holy Ghost can teach them.

Elder Holland: One of my favorite books in the Church, written by a professorial, longtime friend of mine at BYU, Dennis Rasmussen, is called *The Lord's Question*. It's a sample of how the Lord always teaches with a question. As early as Adam, the Lord said, "Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9). He knows

exactly where Adam is. He needs to know whether Adam knows where Adam is. That is why He asks the question: “Adam, where art thou?” And so on—”Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). The Savior’s life was built around teaching by asking questions. Many of the revelations—I don’t know how many; I haven’t counted—but many, many of the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants came in response to a question that the Prophet or the brethren took to the Lord.

Sister Matsumori: I have been struggling just a little bit with this topic in relation to children, even back when President Packer said he wanted to learn. But to be honest with you, I think it’s an advanced concept to think that the learner is going to assume responsibility for learning, especially little children. And so how does a Primary teacher do that?

Elder Holland: That’s a great point. What do you do if that is what you face and you are still the teacher? You still have to perform. By the way, it’s number 4 because we do realize it is a little more mature and a more advanced concept. But it is one we probably don’t talk about enough, so let’s talk about Sister Matsumori’s question. A child, a seminary student, a 14-year-old teacher or Mia Maid—sometimes they are not very interested or at least don’t act like they are. They are probably more interested than they want you to know, but they don’t act like they’re interested. How do we deal with that? How do you help them?

Brother Wada: Learning does not happen right in the classroom sometimes. Sometimes it happens outside. When I was learning about the Church, the missionaries would teach me, and a week later I thought about it and said, “This is what it is.” So we do not need to assume that the exact learning needs to happen at that moment.

Elder Holland: Great point. I am confident that was the Spirit of the Lord working on you for a week or as long as required.

That’s the classic case of investigators in the Church. We want that Spirit working on them for hours and days after the missionaries have gone and before they come back for their next lesson.

Sister Naomi Wada: Sometimes children have so many, many questions, and I have prepared so many examples or experiences or visual aids, and I can’t utilize all of them. I’m sometimes busy answering questions. Is it all right? I have tried to simplify the lesson, and if there is just at least one topic I can focus on and just be able to teach them, at least they feel comfortable.

Elder Holland: Good. You said that better than I said it at the start. Don’t try to do too much. With a Primary child—well, maybe with any child, maybe with any of us—if we can get one thing across, one idea, one principle, something sterling and significant that Brother Wada still feels a week later, that is probably worth any good classroom experience. So be reassured. Don’t be reluctant about that.

Elder Kerr: What she just said has opened my eyes. What more exciting environment in the classroom is there than the fact that the children or the adults in the class are asking questions?

Elder Holland: Somebody is responding.

Elder Kerr: They’re thinking.

Elder Holland: What if you meet a situation where the student is not yet participating, and the burden for a while is on you?

Brother Bruce Miller: Should we forge ahead with the lesson then, or should we stop and do some of the things that invite the Spirit, even though we have had an opening song, a prayer, a scriptural thought? If it's still not there, instead of moving ahead with the lesson, do we stop and say, "OK, how can we get the Spirit here?"

Elder Holland: Does anyone want to respond to that?

Elder Snow: I think it's a long-term process. It doesn't happen the first class. I think sometimes you have to do your best, and then there's going to be a moment when it really works, when the Spirit's there and everyone's contributed to the class. And then you stop and say, "Do you see what's happening right now? Do you see the difference?"

Elder Holland: Earlier Sister Hughes said, "How do we know if we have had the Spirit?" That may be in its own way the question that Brother Miller wants to know—with this unresponsive class in front of me, how do I know how I'm doing? Somehow at the heart of that for them and for you is *how do you feel?* Can you feel that the Lord is with you, that the Lord loves you, that you have done the best you can do, that He loves them? If we can just have some feelings for the gospel, if we just love each other, I suppose that's a place to begin. And if those children are unresponsive, maybe you can't teach them yet, but you can love them. And if you love them today, maybe you can teach them tomorrow.

But I think that is totally within our power. None of that is dependent upon them. We can love them from start to finish, and miracles will happen, the kind of miracles that you're talking about.

If I, the teacher, want questions from you, the student, I may have to prime the pump a little, as we have tried to do here today. I may try to pose a question that will then take on a life of its own, and all I have to do is direct traffic in order to get the students to participate.

Now, may I pause and make an editorial comment? A teacher could know that Brother Merrill talked on a subject in conference and say, "Good. I'll go to the materials center, and I'll get that video clip. I can play it, and I can show the class Brother Merrill."

If you do that, great. We ought to do it from time to time. But audio-visual aids are just that—they are aids. They are not a substitute for a lesson. Use them in the way that you would use spice in cooking—to flavor, to heighten, to accentuate, to enrich. A map or a painting or a video clip or a key point written on the board—these can often make the difference between a good lesson and a great lesson. But no one wants a meal of spices only. So my plea to one and all is please do not overdo visual aids. They are not a substitute for the teacher, they are not a substitute for the course material, and they are not a substitute for the Spirit of the Lord. Use them when you need them.

Sister Wada: There is a child who is really, really disruptive sometimes in the Primary class, and I try to imagine that child wearing white and being a spirit of the Lord. The bottom line is we are all children of God, and that intelligence, even though the shape is small, came here to this earth to learn something, and there is a reason for him to be there. It really helps to think that.

Elder Holland: Thank you very much. That's a sweet comment.

Brother Howell: What I'm hearing is that sometimes the teacher is the learner and the learner is the teacher.

Elder Holland: Almost always the teacher will be getting more than the class. That is one of the joys of teaching.

Testify

Let's conclude. Number 5, one word: "Testify."

May we conclude here the way that every teacher must conclude his or her class, in the Church and at home—in the spirit of testimony.

For many years, I have loved the story that President Packer has told about William E. Berrett's boyhood Sunday School teacher. An elderly Danish brother was called to teach a class of rowdy boys. It didn't seem like much of a fit. He didn't speak the language very well; he still had a heavy Danish brogue; he was much older, with big farm hands. Yet he was to teach these young, rambunctious 15-year-olds. For all intents and purposes, it would not have seemed like a very good match. But Brother William E. Berrett used to say—and this is the part President Packer quotes—that this man taught them somehow; that across all those barriers, across all those limitations, this man reached into the hearts of those rowdy 15-year-old kids and changed their lives. And Brother Berrett's testimony was "We could have warmed our hands by the fire of his faith."

Every student deserves at least that. We may not give the fanciest lesson. We may not be skillful with audiovisual aids (though we can use any we know how to use). But we can share with all students the fire of our faith, and they can warm their hands by it.

I have been painfully disappointed over the years at wonderful lessons, given by loyal, gifted teachers who, somehow, at the end of a class, say, "Well, there is the bell. Brother Jones, would you give the prayer?" And it's over. There's no closing of the books, no looking in the eye for just a minute, no settling down to say, in effect, where have we been and where are we going and what does the Lord want us to do? In some cases—I'm being a little unfair and a little extravagant, but to make a point—not a single reference is made to what this lesson was supposed to mean to the student or to the teacher. I'm left to walk away saying, "I wonder how he felt about that. I wonder what she thought about it or what it was supposed to mean to me." There is so much effort to get some doctrine, some principle, some map, some video clip across to the students, but not a hint of personal testimony about what that doctrine or that principle meant to the teacher, the one who was supposed to lead us and guide us and walk beside us.

As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. once said, "Never let your faith be difficult to detect." May I repeat that? "Never let your faith be difficult to detect." Never sow seeds of doubt. Avoid self-serving performance and vanity. Don't try to dazzle everyone with how brilliant you are. Dazzle them with how brilliant the gospel is. Don't worry about the location of the lost tribes or the Three Nephites. Worry a little more about the location of your student, what's going on in his heart, what's going on in her soul, the hunger, sometimes the near-desperate spiritual needs of our people. Teach them. And, above all,

testify to them. Love them. Bear your witness from the depths of your soul. It will be the most important thing you say to them in the entire hour, and it may save someone's spiritual life.

Say that you "speak [out] in the energy of [your] soul" (Alma 5:43). I love that phrase. I want to testify out of the energy of my soul. If we feel inclined, we could ask the congregation what Alma asked his, namely, "Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself?" He continues, "I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. . . . I say unto you, that I know of myself that [they are] true" (Alma 5:45, 48).

I know that God lives and loves us. I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. I know that this is His Church, and I know that teaching matters.

To that end I know that heaven will help us if we will teach as we have here described. And this won't be all; this will be only a beginning. Welcome to the quest for the gift of teaching. But as we search for that gift and pray for it, if we will ask and seek and knock spiritually, if we will teach from the scriptures, if we will teach by and with the Holy Spirit, if we will help the learner assume responsibility for learning, and if we will testify of the truths that we have taught, God will confirm to our hearts and to the hearts of our students the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, near and far, close at hand and around the world, the gospel of Jesus Christ means everything to me. It means everything to me. It is my whole life. It is my hope and my safety and my quest for salvation. It is everything that I want for my children and my children's children.

And I feel what I feel about the gospel because of you, because people like you taught people like me. Some-where in those little Primary classes and in those first family home evenings and in the deacons quorum and on a mission and everywhere else, somebody like you taught somebody like me. And I am not all that I want to be yet. I'm not all that I should be, but whatever I'm going to be, I owe to great teachers, starting with my own beloved parents and every other good person who has touched my life along the way, up to and including the magnificent councils and quorums in which I now sit, where I am able to be taught by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, other General Authorities, and wonderful auxiliary leaders like all of you.

I testify and I bear witness of love. I know God loves us. And I know that in part because I love you, and I love the experience of teaching. I pray that we will be better at it, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Points to Consider

- Select some ideas from Elder Holland's presentation that you can apply as a learner or as a teacher.
- Elder Holland's class discussion focuses on five principles. Consider them; then make a plan of how you would teach these principles to someone else.
- What did Elder Holland *demonstrate* about learning and teaching in addition to what he talked about?
- Inspired instruction in the home and in the Church helps provide the crucial element of nourishing by the good word of God.

Additional Comments

Some members of the Church in the Salt Lake City area were invited to form a class for this teaching demonstration. Some of their additional comments are included.

"When I was a member of the branch in Colonia Suiza, Uruguay, my first calling was as a Primary president when I was 13 years old. I was the president, and I was the teacher also. I remember being set apart and given a manual, and the assignment was to teach to the children the lessons and the gospel. I opened the manual, and I didn't know what to do, how to teach a lesson. So I prayed. I said, 'Heavenly Father, I need to teach the lesson to the children next Saturday. Wilt Thou help me?' And I received the influence of the Spirit, and I learned to teach because the Spirit taught me." —Sister Delia Rochon

"I will never forget one Sunday morning. We were in Athi River, Kenya, and there was a young man who stood and gave a sacrament meeting talk using only the scriptures. It was so powerful. He must have been only about 15—he couldn't have been more than that. I just kept smiling, and I thought, 'Oh, my goodness, I wish we could all hear this young man bear testimony and talk of Christ and preach of Christ.'" —Sister Kathleen H. Hughes

"Once I was sitting with a six-year-old granddaughter, and she said, 'I want to learn how to study in my scriptures.' And I thought, 'Well, she's only six. Can she really get anything powerful out of the scriptures?' So I said, 'Let's turn to 1 Nephi, chapter 1, and if you read anything you understand or if it means anything to you, you can underline it. And if you want to say something about it, you can write about it.' So we started with that verse: 'I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents' (1 Nephi 1:1), and she stopped and said, 'I have goodly parents.' She was getting it from the first line. She marked her scriptures, and she said, 'I'm going to finish the Book of Mormon before I'm baptized.' 'Some days,' she said, 'I don't understand anything.' But it was powerful for her to read the first verse of the Book of Mormon, the first time she tried it." —Sister Julie B. Beck

"Sometimes when you're teaching, you try to work with the Spirit, teach with the Spirit, use the scriptures. But it seems to me, in my experience, that the one who makes the connection in what we are

teaching with the need of the student is the Spirit. And for that reason, sometimes I have had a student come and tell me, 'Oh, thank you, when you said so and so,' and I was thinking, 'Did I say that? When?' I wonder if that person really heard the voice of the Lord, and all that I did was create through the scriptures, through the Spirit, the environment that the learner got the message that was needed." — Sister Delia Rochon

"Our ultimate reassurance is in the honest prompting of the Lord—the prompting that you are the Lord's instrument, this is His class, this is His Church, these are His people. Then honestly respond to that Spirit. Generally speaking, the curriculum is going to give us our framework, our course and direction during the months of the year. But at any given moment, we are less than we are supposed to be as a teacher in the Lord's hands if we aren't willing to set aside some special thing we had prepared and respond to something the Lord prompts us to do. We have to say, 'Right now is the moment. This is the teaching moment.'

"Parents face this situation all the time. Parents have to seize the teaching moment because it may not come again. We must prepare the best we can, then trust that the Lord will take us into some unexpected opportunities in a given class. We need to be prepared to go where He leads us." —Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

"I saw a wonderful example when I went teaching with two missionaries. They were teaching a fifth discussion. The one missionary was German, had the language; he had been on his mission for a number of months. The other one was really fairly new, first fifth discussion he had ever taught.

"And I watched. The one was confident; he was a good missionary. He taught with confidence. The other had to rely a little bit on his lesson plan—but, you know, as I sat and watched those two, the Spirit came through on both of them. And so with teachers at different teaching levels, the Spirit can whisper wherever we are if we have done our part. It was wonderful." —Brother Charles W. Dahlquist II

"I think it could be boldly said that we are not successful if at the end of 40 minutes, a student walks out the door and says, 'My, wasn't that nice?' If it ends when the student walks out the door, I think we have failed in the ultimate sense of teaching, the ongoing sense of teaching. Our instruction ought to be so provocative, so spiritually sweet, so new and interesting that the students say to themselves, 'I felt so much that I will think about it this afternoon and tomorrow and next week and next month.' In that way, our lesson will take on a life of its own and bring new thoughts.

"There is a real danger of classroom performances that seem to be so self-contained or dazzling that people are entertained for 45 minutes and say, 'Boy, I can't wait to get here to be entertained next week'—and never have another thought through the week or through the month about the substance of the doctrine they have been taught." —Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

"Be patient, and above all do not lose the Spirit. We can't in any way be offended or get angry or disappointed that we've worked so hard on our lesson, and it doesn't seem the students are with us. We just have to be patient and loving. More is happening in their hearts than we think." —Elder Jeffrey R.

Holland

"I went to early-morning seminary, and I feel that my seminary teacher assumed responsibility for teaching us. He assumed that we were receiving the message that he was giving us. There were times that we arrived in seminary in pajamas; there were times where some of us brought pillows and blankets; there were times where girls would be painting their nails while they were listening to him teach, but we were blessed with a seminary teacher who assumed that we were listening to him. We were not engaging him in conversation, but there was never a day in seminary that I was not paying attention and listening with my ears and with my heart to what he said.

"I think that as teachers, if we've done everything that we need to do, we've done our part, and we have the Spirit there, then we can assume that the students are taking the responsibility to listen." —Sister Tamu Smith

Notes Written on the Board

The Gift of Teaching

1. Ask, seek, and knock spiritually.
2. Teach from the scriptures.
3. Teach by and with the Spirit.
4. Help the learner assume responsibility for learning.
5. Testify.

Examples of Great Teachers

President Thomas S. Monson

First Counselor in the First Presidency

We have heard from some of the greatest teachers in the Church, who have given us wonderful insights into many of the elements and principles of good teaching.

As has been mentioned, we are all teachers in some respect, and we have a duty to teach to the best of our ability.

I should like to share with you some examples of individuals I have known who have touched my life and have taught me important and never-to-be-forgotten lessons.

Everyone Has a Story

I have been thinking of one of our emeritus General Authorities, even Elder Marion D. Hanks, who has excelled in teaching seminary, institute, and the Church generally. He has utilized many different teaching methods.

On one occasion, Elder Hanks toured a mission, interviewing each of the missionaries laboring in that particular area. I had been on an assignment in an adjoining area and was given a ride to the airport with Elder Hanks and the mission president.

Elder Hanks told the mission president what a privilege it had been to visit with and interview each of the missionaries. He said he had felt prompted to ask one sister missionary, “Please tell me about your mission and how you felt about being called as a sister missionary.”

She told him that her humble father, a farmer, had willingly sacrificed much for the Lord and His kingdom. He was already sustaining two sons on missions when he talked with her one day about her unexpressed desires to be a missionary and explained to her how the Lord had helped him to prepare to help her.

He had gone to the fields to talk with the Lord, to tell Him that he had no more material possessions to sell or sacrifice or to use as collateral for borrowing. He needed to know how he could help his daughter go on a mission. He felt the inspiration to plant onions. He thought he had misunderstood. Onions would not likely grow well in this climate; others were not growing onions; he had no experience growing onions.

After wrestling with the Lord for a time, he was again impressed to plant onions. So he borrowed money from the bank, purchased seeds, planted and nurtured, and prayed.

The elements were tempered; the onion crop prospered. He sold the crop; paid his debts to the bank, the government, and the Lord; and put the remainder in an account under his daughter’s name—enough to support her during her mission.

Elder Hanks then told the mission president, “I will not forget the story or the moment or the tears in her eyes or the sound of her voice or the feeling I had as she said, ‘Brother Hanks, I don’t have any trouble believing in a loving Heavenly Father who knows my needs and will help me according to His wisdom if I am humble enough.’ “

Elder Hanks was teaching a most important lesson: each child in each classroom, each young man or young woman, each student in seminary or institute, each adult in Gospel Doctrine classes, each missionary—yes, every one of us—has a story waiting to be told. Listening is an essential element as we teach and as we learn.

“It Is More Blessed to Give Than to Receive”

It was my experience as a small boy to come under the influence of a most effective and inspired teacher who listened to us and who loved us. Her name was Lucy Gertsch. In our Sunday School class, she taught us concerning the Creation of the world, the Fall of Adam, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. She brought to her classroom as honored guests Moses, Joshua, Peter, Thomas, Paul, and, of course, Christ. Though we did not see them, we learned to love, honor, and emulate them.

Never was her teaching so dynamic nor its impact more everlasting as one Sunday morning when she sadly announced to us the passing of a classmate’s mother. We had missed Billy that morning but did not know the reason for his absence.

The lesson featured the theme “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Midway through the lesson, our teacher closed the manual and opened our eyes and our ears and our hearts to the glory of God. She asked, “How much money do we have in our class party fund?”

Depression days prompted a proud answer: “Four dollars and seventy-five cents.”

Then ever so gently she suggested, “Billy’s family is hard pressed and grief stricken. What would you think of the possibility of visiting the family members this morning and giving to them your fund?”

Ever shall I remember the tiny band walking those three city blocks, entering Billy’s home, greeting him, his brother, sisters, and father. Noticeably absent was his mother. Always I shall treasure the tears which glistened in the eyes of all as the white envelope containing our precious party fund passed from the delicate hand of our teacher to the needy hand of a grief-stricken father.

We fairly skipped our way back to the chapel. Our hearts were lighter than they had ever been, our joy more full, our understanding more profound. A God-inspired teacher had taught her boys and girls an eternal lesson of divine truth: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Well could we have paraphrased the words of the disciples on the way to Emmaus: “Did not our heart burn within us . . . while [she] opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32).

Lucy Gertsch knew each of her students. She unfailingly called on those who missed a Sunday or who just didn’t come. We knew she cared about us. None of us has ever forgotten her or the lessons she taught.

Many, many years later, when Lucy was nearing the end of her life, I visited with her. We reminisced concerning those days so long before when she had been our teacher. We spoke of each member of our class and discussed what each one was now doing. Her love and caring spanned a lifetime.

The Articles of Faith

Another inspired teacher in my life was Erma Bollwinkel, a member of our stake Primary board. She constantly stressed the importance of learning the Articles of Faith. In fact, we could not graduate from Primary until we successfully recited each article of faith to her—something of a challenge for rambunctious young boys, but we persevered and succeeded. I have, throughout my life, as a result, been able to recite the Articles of Faith.

For many years as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, I had responsibility for East Germany, also known as the German Democratic Republic. In this assignment, my knowledge of the Articles of Faith was most helpful. On each of my visits throughout the 20 years I supervised this area, I always reminded our members in that area of the twelfth article of faith: “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”

Our meetings behind what was known as the Iron Curtain were always monitored by the communist government there. In the early 1980s, when we sought approval from the government officials to build a temple there, and later when we asked permission for young men and women from that area to serve missions throughout the world and for others to come into their country to serve missions, they listened and then said, “Elder Monson, we’ve watched you for 20 years, and we’ve learned we can trust you and your Church because you and your Church teach your members to obey the laws of the land.”

I share another example of the value of learning the Articles of Faith. Forty-five years ago I worked with a man named Sharman Hummel in the printing business in Salt Lake City. I once gave him a ride home from work and asked him how he came to receive his testimony of the gospel.

He responded, “It’s interesting, Tom, that you asked me that question, for this very week my wife, my children, and I are going to the Manti Temple, there to be sealed for all eternity.”

He continued his account: “We lived in the East. I was journeying by bus to San Francisco to establish myself in a new printing company, and then I was going to send for my wife and children. All the way from New York City to Salt Lake City the bus trip was uneventful. But in Salt Lake City a young girl entered the bus—a Primary girl—who sat next to me. She was going to Reno, Nevada, there to have a visit with her aunt. As we journeyed westward, I noticed a billboard: ‘Visit the Mormon Sunday School this week.’

“I said to the little girl, ‘I guess there are a lot of Mormons in Utah, aren’t there?’

“She replied, ‘Yes, sir.’

“Then I said to her, ‘Are you a Mormon?’

“Again her reply: ‘Yes, sir.’ “

Sharman Hummell then asked, “What do Mormons believe?” And that little girl recited the first article of faith; then she talked about it. Continuing, she gave him the second article of faith and talked about it. Then she gave him the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and all of the Articles of Faith and talked about all of them. She knew them consecutively.

Sharman Hummel said, “When we got to Reno, and we let that little girl off into the arms of her aunt, I was profoundly impressed.”

He said, “All the way to San Francisco I thought, ‘What is it that prompts that little girl to know her doctrine so well?’ When I arrived in San Francisco, the very first thing I did,” said Sharman, “was to look through the yellow pages for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I called the mission president, and he sent two missionaries to where I was staying. I became a member of the Church, my wife became a member, all of our children became members, in part because a Primary girl knew her Articles of Faith.”

I think of the words of the Apostle Paul: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16).

Just three months ago, the Hummel family came to Salt Lake City for the wedding of their daughter Marianne. They stopped by the office; we had a wonderful visit. All 6 daughters came, along with 4 sons-in-law and 12 grandchildren. The entire family had remained active in the Church. Each of the daughters has been to the temple. Countless are those who have been brought to a knowledge of the gospel by the members of this family—all because a young child had been taught the Articles of Faith and had the ability and the courage to proclaim the truth to one who was seeking the light of the gospel.

“Be Ready Always”

I love the Lord’s injunction found in the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you” (D&C 88:77–78).

Many years ago, as I was traveling by air to an assignment in southern California, a lovely young lady sat down in the empty seat next to me. She began reading a book. As one is inclined to do, I glanced at the title: *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*.

I said to her, “Oh, you must be a Mormon.”

She responded, “Oh, no. Why would you ask?”

I replied, “Well, you’re reading a book written by a very prominent member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

She said, “Is that right? A friend gave this to me, but I don’t know much about it. However, it has aroused my curiosity.”

Then I wondered, “Should I be forward and say more about the Church?” And the words of the Apostle

Peter came to mind: “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). I decided that this was the time when I should bear my testimony.

I told her that it was my privilege years before to have assisted Elder Richards in printing *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. I told her something about that great man. I told her of the many thousands of people who had embraced the truth after reading that which he had prepared.

Then it was my privilege, all the way to Los Angeles, to answer her questions relative to the Church—intelligent questions that came from a heart which was seeking the truth. I asked if I might make arrangements for two sister missionaries to call upon her. I asked if she would like to attend our branch in San Francisco, where she lived. Her answers were affirmative.

Upon returning home, I wrote to President Irven G. Derrick of the San Francisco stake and passed along to him this information. Can you imagine my delight when, a few months later, I received a call from President Derrick in which he said, “Elder Monson, I’m calling about Yvonne Ramirez, an off-duty flight attendant, a young lady who sat next to you on a flight to Los Angeles, a young lady to whom you said that it was not coincidence that you sat next to her and that she was reading *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* on that trip. Brother Monson, she has just become the newest member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She’d like to speak to you and express her gratitude.” Of course I was overjoyed. It was a wonderful call.

President McKay’s Example

An example of a master teacher was President David O. McKay, who called me to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He taught with love and with sensitivity. He was the epitome of what he taught. His heart was kind, and his manner was gracious. He was a teacher of truth after the pattern of the Savior.

I observed this trait when, long before I was a General Authority, I entered his office to review some printing proofs of a book that we were printing. On that particular occasion, I noticed a picture on the wall, and I said to him, “President McKay, that’s a lovely painting. Is it a rendition of your childhood home in Huntsville, Utah?”

He sat back in his chair and gave a familiar David O. McKay chuckle and said, “Let me tell you about that picture. A sweet woman came in to see me one autumn day and presented to me that beautiful painting, framed and ready to be placed on the wall. She said, ‘President McKay, I spent much of the summer painting this picture of your ancestral home.’ “ He said he accepted the gift and thanked her profusely.

And then he said to me, “Do you know, Brother Monson, that dear woman painted the wrong house. She painted the house next door! I didn’t have the heart to tell her she painted the wrong house.”

But then he made this comment—and here is a vital lesson for all of us. He said, “In reality, Brother Monson, she painted the right house for me, because when, as a young boy, I would lie on the bed which was on the front porch of my ancestral home, the view I had through that screened porch was of the very house she painted. She *did* paint the right house for me!”

Lessons about Serving Others

Some of the best lessons learned in life come from our parents. Mine taught me valuable lessons as I was growing up. Frequently those lessons had to do with serving others. I have many memories of my boyhood days. Anticipating Sunday dinner was one of them. Just as we children hovered at our so-called starvation level and sat anxiously at the table with the aroma of roast beef filling the room, Mother would say to me, “Tommy, before we eat, take this plate I’ve prepared down the street to Old Bob, and hurry back.”

I could never understand why we couldn’t first eat and later deliver his plate of food. I never questioned but would run down to his house and then wait anxiously as Bob’s aged feet brought him eventually to the door. Then I would hand him the plate of food. He would present to me the spotlessly clean plate from the previous Sunday and then offer me 10 cents as pay for my services.

My answer was always the same: “I can’t accept the money. My mother would tan my hide.”

He would then run his wrinkled hand through my blond hair and say, “My boy, you have a wonderful mother. Tell her thank you.”

I remember too that Sunday dinner always seemed to taste a bit better after I had returned from my errand.

My mother’s father, Grandfather Thomas Condie, also taught me a powerful lesson which involved this same Old Bob, who came into our lives in an interesting way. He was a widower in his 80s when the house in which he rented a room was to be demolished. I heard him tell my grandfather his plight as the three of us sat on the old front-porch swing of my grandfather. With a plaintive voice, he said to Grandfather, “Mr. Condie, I don’t know what to do. I have no family. I have no place to go. I have little money.” I wondered how Grandfather would answer.

We just kept rocking the swing. Then Grandfather reached into his pocket and took from it an old leather purse from which, in response to my hounding, he had produced many a penny or nickel for a special treat. This time he removed a key and handed it to Old Bob.

Tenderly he said, “Bob, here is the key to that house I own next door. Take it. Move your things in. Stay as long as you like. There will be no rent to pay and nobody will ever put you out again.”

Tears welled up in the eyes of Old Bob, coursed down his cheeks, then disappeared in his long, white beard. Grandfather’s eyes were also moist. I spoke no word, but that day my grandfather stood 10 feet tall. I was proud to bear his given name. Though I was but a boy, that lesson has had a powerful influence on my life.

These are but a few of the lessons I have learned from those who have touched my life and have taught me.

Again, I reiterate that we are all teachers. We should ever remember that we not only teach with words; we teach also by who we are and how we live our lives.

The Perfect Example

As we teach others, may we follow the example of the perfect teacher, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He left His footprints in the sands of the seashore but left His teaching principles in the hearts and in the lives of all whom He taught. He instructed His disciples of that day—and to us He speaks the same words—“Follow thou me” (John 21:22).

May we go forward in the spirit of obedient response, that it may be said of each of us as it was spoken of the Redeemer, “Thou art a teacher come from God” (John 3:2). May this be so, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Points to Consider

- As you read the experiences in President Monson's talk, what impressions come to you about learning and teaching? What experiences have you had as a learner or as a teacher that are similar to the examples in these accounts?
- How does each experience President Monson relates illustrate qualities of the Savior's teaching? Pray and ponder what you can do to follow the Savior's example.