

Second and Third Sunday: *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have established the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series to help Church members deepen their understanding of gospel doctrine and draw closer to Jesus Christ through the teachings of the prophets in this dispensation. Relief Society instruction on the second and third Sunday of each month is a study of the doctrines of the gospel as taught by latter-day Presidents of the Church.

Each sister should receive a copy of the current book, which becomes part of her permanent gospel study library, and each should be encouraged to read the designated chapter prior to class. When sisters have read a chapter in advance, they will be prepared to teach and edify each other. Since these books are designed for personal study and gospel reference, many chapters contain more material than can be fully addressed in Sunday meetings. Therefore, study at home becomes essential to more thoroughly benefit from lessons in the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series.

- Teachers are to focus on the content of the book.
- Teachers should honor the sisters' preparation by teaching from President McKay's words.
- The lessons should be taught in the order presented in the book.
- Leaders and teachers are encouraged to study and prepare well to ensure that gospel doctrines and principles are taught and discussed, and instruction time is used effectively.
- Teachers should focus on the content of the text and related scriptures and should apply these teachings to circumstances with which class members will be familiar. They may draw from the questions at the end of each chapter to encourage class discussion.
- As appropriate, members should bear testimony and share personal examples that relate to the lessons.
- It is not necessary or recommended that members purchase additional commentaries or reference texts to supplement the material in this book. For further study of the doctrine, members are encouraged to turn to the related scriptures that are included at the end of the "Suggestions for Study and Discussion" section of the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* lessons.

When teachers humbly seek the Spirit in preparing and directing the lessons, all who participate will be strengthened in their knowledge of the truth.

Sources:

Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay, Introduction, v
<http://www.lds.org/> - Serving in the Church, Relief Society, Gospel Instruction, Sunday Curriculum, Second and Third Sunday: Teachings of Presidents of the Church

Instructions for Teaching from the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church Series*

The following suggestions illustrate one possible approach to help teachers prepare and present lessons from this book (these guidelines can also be used by parents in preparing family home evening lessons):

1. Prayerfully study the chapter. Consider marking passages that are particularly inspiring to you.
2. Determine what should happen in the lives of those you teach as a result of the teachings in the chapter. Seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost as you ponder the needs of those you teach.
3. Decide what to teach. Read the chapter again, selecting the passages that will be most helpful for those you teach.
4. Decide how to teach. Plan ways to teach the passages you have selected. Some suggestions follow:
 - Plan a way to get members' attention at the beginning of the lesson. For example, you may share a story from the chapter's introduction, write a thought-provoking question on the chalkboard, or use an object lesson.
 - Use hymns and Primary songs to help members prepare to feel the Spirit.
 - Bear testimony whenever the Spirit prompts you, not just at the end of the lesson.
 - Conduct discussions based on the questions in "Suggestions for Study and Discussion" at the end of each chapter.
 - Discuss selected scripture passages from the related scriptures listed at the end of each chapter.
 - Invite one or two members to come to class prepared to bear brief testimony of the principles in the chapter.
 - As appropriate, share experiences relating to the principles in the chapter. Invite others to do the same.
5. Organize your ideas. You may want to write an outline to guide you during the presentation of the lesson.

For suggestions on how to use these and other teaching methods, refer to *Teaching, No Greater Call* (36123); the *Teaching Guidebook* (34595); and "Gospel Teaching and Leadership," section 16 of the *Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* (35903). Also, to help you succeed in your calling, you are encouraged to participate in the 12-week Teaching the Gospel course in your ward or branch, as well as the quarterly teacher improvement meetings.

Conducting Meaningful Discussions

Whether in a family or classroom setting, the chapters in this book provide a wonderful opportunity for individuals to strengthen each other by participating in gospel discussions. The following guidelines may help you conduct meaningful discussions:

- Ask questions that require thought and discussion rather than questions that can be answered *yes* or *no*. Questions that begin with *what*, *how*, *why*, *who*, or *where* are usually most effective for encouraging discussion.
- Encourage others to share experiences that show how gospel principles apply in everyday life. Also encourage them to share their feelings about what they are learning. Listen sincerely and show appreciation for their contributions.
- Be sensitive to the influence of the Holy Ghost. He will help you know what to ask, who to call on, or how to include others in the discussion. If you feel that comments are straying from the topic, politely redirect the discussion.
- Be careful not to end a good discussion too soon in an attempt to cover all the material you have prepared. What matters most is that participants feel the Spirit, increase their understanding of the gospel, apply gospel principles in their lives, and strengthen their commitment to live the gospel.

Approved Teaching Resources for Second and Third Sunday Lessons

- Current *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* book
- LDS versions of the *Bible*, *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, *Pearl of Great Price*

Each person who teaches the gospel is required to pass on to others, in pure and undistorted form, the truths for which such great sacrifices have been made. President Gordon B. Hinckley stated: “I have spoken before about the importance of keeping the doctrine of the Church pure, and seeing that it is taught in all of our meetings. I worry about this. Small aberrations in doctrinal teaching can lead to large and evil falsehoods” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* [1997], 620).

To help us teach from the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets, the Church has produced lesson manuals and other materials. There is little need for commentaries or other reference material. We should study the scriptures, teachings of latter-day prophets, and lesson materials thoroughly to be sure we correctly understand the doctrine before we teach it.

LDS Teaching Resources Online

- <http://library.lds.org/> - Lesson manuals and conference talks, searchable
- <http://scriptures.lds.org/> - LDS scriptures and footnotes, searchable

Sources:

Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay, Introduction, v
Teaching, No Greater Call, B, Keeping the Doctrine Pure

Teaching, No Greater Call B, Chapter 11: Keeping the Doctrine Pure, page 52

It is humbling and inspiring to ponder the price people have paid for the truth. Many have been baptized despite being rejected by their families for their decision. Prophets and many others have died rather than deny their testimonies. Referring to the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Elder John Taylor declared that the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants “cost the best blood of the nineteenth century to bring them forth” (D&C 135:6).

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Your Responsibilities as a Teacher

As you prepare and present lessons, you should take the following precautions to ensure that you teach the truth as the Lord has revealed it.

Teach by the Spirit from the Scriptures and the Words of Latter-day Prophets

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “What should be the source for teaching the great plan of the Eternal God? The scriptures, of course—particularly the Book of Mormon. This should also include the other modern-day revelations. These should be coupled with the words of the Apostles and prophets and the promptings of the Spirit” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1987, 107; or *Ensign*, May 1987, 85).

Use Church-Produced Lesson Materials

To help us teach from the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets, the Church has produced lesson manuals and other materials. There is little need for commentaries or other reference material. We should study the scriptures, teachings of latter-day prophets, and lesson materials thoroughly to be sure we correctly understand the doctrine before we teach it.

Teach the Truths of the Gospel and Not Other Things

When Alma ordained priests to teach those he had baptized in the waters of Mormon, “he commanded them that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets” (Mosiah 18:19). When the Savior’s twelve Nephite disciples taught the people, they “ministered those same words which Jesus had spoken—nothing varying from the words which Jesus had

spoken” (3 Nephi 19:8). As you teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, you should follow these examples.

Teach Gospel Truths Clearly So That No One Will Misunderstand Them

President Harold B. Lee stated, “You’re to teach the old doctrines, not so plain that they can just understand, *but you must teach the doctrines of the Church so plainly that no one can misunderstand*” (“Loyalty,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed. [1982], 64).

Cautions for Gospel Teachers

As you strive to keep the doctrine pure, you should avoid the following problems.

Speculation

“In presenting a lesson there are many ways for the undisciplined teacher to stray from the path that leads to his objective. One of the most common temptations is to speculate on matters about which the Lord has said very little. The disciplined teacher has the courage to say, ‘I don’t know,’ and leave it at that. As President Joseph F. Smith said, ‘It is no discredit to our intelligence or to our integrity to say frankly in the face of a hundred speculative questions, “I don’t know” ’ [*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 9]” (Joseph F. McConkie, “The Disciplined Teacher,” *Instructor*, Sept. 1969, 334–35).

Misquoting

“The disciplined teacher will be sure of his sources and will also make every effort to determine whether a statement properly represents the doctrine of the Church or is merely the opinion of the author” (*Instructor*, Sept. 1969, 334–35).

We should not attribute statements to Church leaders without confirming the source of the statements. When we quote scriptures, we should ensure that our use of them is consistent with their context (see “Teaching from the Scriptures,” pages 54–55).

Gospel Hobbies

“Gospel hobbies—the special or exclusive emphasis of one principle of the gospel—should also be avoided by teachers” (*Instructor*, Sept. 1969, 334–35).

President Joseph F. Smith said: “Hobbies give to those who encourage them a false aspect of the gospel of the Redeemer; they distort and place out of harmony its principles and teachings. The point of view is unnatural. Every principle and practice revealed from God is essential to man’s salvation, and to place any one of them unduly in front, hiding and dimming all others, is unwise and dangerous; it jeopardizes our salvation, for it darkens our minds and beclouds our understandings” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 116–17).

Sensational Stories

“Perhaps the greatest temptation of the teacher struggling to maintain the attention of [a] class is the use of the sensational story. There are a number of these, of very questionable origin, continually being circulated throughout the Church. ... These are not teaching tools: stability and testimony are not built on sensational stories. Direction for us from the Prophet is dispensed through proper priesthood channels. Careful attention should be paid to the messages of the General Authorities in stake and general conferences, and Church publications should be read regularly. Meaningful attention will be accorded the teacher who establishes the reputation of being orthodox and sound in doctrine” (*Instructor*, Sept. 1969, 334–35).

Reshaping Church History

President Ezra Taft Benson cautioned: “There have been and continue to be attempts made to bring [a humanistic] philosophy into our own Church history. ... The emphasis is to underplay revelation and God’s intervention in significant events and to inordinately humanize the prophets of God so that their human frailties become more apparent than their spiritual qualities” (“God’s Hand in Our Nation’s History,” in *1976 Devotional Speeches of the Year* [1977], 310).

Speaking of these attempts, President Benson later said, “We would warn you teachers of this trend, which seems to be an effort to reinterpret the history of the Church so that it is more rationally appealing to the world” (*The Gospel Teacher and His Message* [address to religious educators, 17 Sept. 1976], 11).

Private Interpretations and Unorthodox Views

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, “Only the President of the Church, the Presiding High Priest, is sustained as Prophet, Seer, and Revelator for the Church, and he alone has the right to receive revelations for the Church, either new or amendatory, or to give authoritative interpretations of scriptures that shall be binding on the Church, or change in any way the existing doctrines of the Church” (in *Church News*, 31 July 1954, 10). We should not teach our private interpretation of gospel principles or the scriptures.

Elder Spencer W. Kimball stated: “There are those today who seem to take pride in disagreeing with the orthodox teachings of the Church and who present their own opinions which are at variance with the revealed truth. Some may be partially innocent in the matter; others are feeding their own egotism; and some seem to be deliberate. Men may think as they please, but they have no right to impose upon others their unorthodox views. Such persons should realize that their own souls are in jeopardy” (in *Conference Report*, Apr. 1948, 109).

Moroni chapter 8 contains a letter written by Mormon to his son Moroni. The topic of the letter is infant baptism, which was being practiced by some in the Church. To help his son correct this false teaching, Mormon restated the correct doctrine of accountability and instructed Moroni to teach it throughout the land. Read Moroni 8 as an example of the need to keep the doctrine and principles of the Church pure and undistorted.

***Teaching, No Greater Call*, Chapter 31: Preparing Lessons, page 98**

The short time you spend teaching a lesson at home or at church can have an eternal effect on those you teach. Each lesson can help them feel the influence of the Spirit, grow in their love for Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, and increase their dedication to live the gospel. Keep this in mind as you prepare lessons. Your success in representing the Lord and teaching by the Spirit will be influenced by the care you give to lesson preparation.

Beginning Lesson Preparation Early

Planning a lesson takes time and attention. Soon after you finish one lesson, begin preparing for the next. You will probably be most aware of those you teach and their needs and interests immediately after you have been with them. You will also be most aware of their response to your teaching.

Three Questions to Guide Your Lesson Preparation

As you begin to prepare a lesson, prayerfully review the lesson material, considering the needs and interests of those you teach. Then ponder the three questions listed below. These questions should guide you throughout your lesson preparation.

1. What should happen in the lives of those I teach as a result of this lesson?
2. Which specific principles should be taught?
3. How should these principles be taught?

Following are some specific ways to use these questions to begin lesson preparation. As you review a lesson in this way, write down ideas that occur to you. This will give you a structure for your continued prayerful pondering of the lesson.

1. What should happen in the lives of those I teach as a result of this lesson?

Study and ponder the lesson material and the accompanying scripture passages. Consider what those you teach should understand, feel, desire, or do as a result of the lesson. For example, in preparing a lesson about prayer, you may decide that learners should understand the importance of prayer and that they should resolve to pray each morning and night. In preparing a lesson about family responsibility, you may decide that as a result of the lesson, family members should be more diligent in completing household duties. In teaching a lesson about scripture study, you may decide that the lesson should inspire those you teach to study the scriptures daily.

Many lessons in Church-produced manuals include purpose statements. These statements can help you determine how each lesson should influence those you teach.

2. Which specific principles should be taught?

Always keep in mind the needs and backgrounds of those you teach. Ask yourself, “Which principles in the lesson will help those I teach meet the challenges they face?”

Often a lesson will contain more material than you are able to teach in the time you are given. In such cases, you should select the material that will be most helpful for those you teach.

The amount of material you cover is less important than its influence in the lives of those you teach. Because too many concepts at one time can confuse or tire learners, it is usually best to focus on one or two main principles. Then you can identify additional, supporting ideas from the manual.

Avoid trying to teach all that could be said on a particular subject. Those you teach will likely already have some understanding of the subject. Your lesson should supplement, clarify, and confirm what they know. Remember that your lesson is not the only time they will learn about the subject.

3. How should these principles be taught?

You should select teaching methods that will help learners understand and apply the principles you teach (for information about selecting appropriate and effective methods, see pages 91–92).

In selecting methods, you should first review the discussion questions, stories, and other learning activities that are suggested in the lesson manual. If you feel that these methods will help meet the needs of those you teach, familiarize yourself with the methods. If you feel that you should use other methods, begin early to determine how to teach the principles. Consider using examples, illustrations, comparisons, or personal experiences that will help teach the main principles of the lesson.

The methods you decide to use may require that you obtain materials from the meetinghouse library, such as pictures, objects, hymnbooks, or videocassettes.

Cultivating Your Ideas

After you have some initial ideas on how to teach a lesson, you can develop and refine them. If you have begun preparing early, you will be more aware of experiences, stories, and scriptures that will help those you teach. Thoughts may come to you as you ponder the principles to be taught and the needs of those you teach. This is one way that the Spirit can guide you in your preparation. You may want to carry a notebook so you can write down ideas as they come to you.

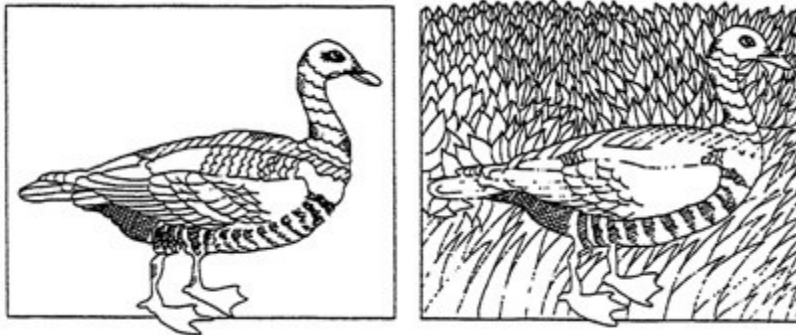
It is helpful at this point in your planning to once again study the scripture references that will be used in the lesson. This will help you better understand them and liken them to those you are teaching.

Adjusting and Revising As Needed

As the time to teach the lesson approaches, there will likely be some final adjustments to make. This is much like the pruning a gardener does to give the right shape to a tree or shrub. During this stage you should:

- Have clearly in mind what should happen in the lives of those you teach as a result of this lesson. Ask yourself, “Will the lesson bring these results?”
- Review the specific points you want to teach from the manual: the main principles and the supporting ideas. Organize a clear outline. Be sure to plan a clear beginning and a strong, focused conclusion (see “Beginning the Lesson” page 93; “Concluding the Lesson” pages 94–95).
- Finalize the teaching methods you will use. Ensure that the methods you select will help learners apply the principles you teach.
- Finalize your choices of the materials you will use.

You may be prompted by the Spirit to make changes right up to the last minute. You may even be prompted to make changes in the very moment you are teaching. Be open to all these promptings, and recognize that it is your careful preparation that allows you to receive the ongoing guidance of the Spirit.



Examine these two illustrations. Which illustration gives the better idea of what a duck looks like? Note that the first illustration includes more details on the duck and does not include other elements that detract from the duck. As you decide to focus on one or two principles in a lesson, make sure that you do not include ideas that could detract from those principles. Prepare lessons that are like the first illustration: simple, clear, and focused.

Teaching, No Greater Call, B, Chapter 28: **Beginning the Lesson, page 93**

Before a symphony begins, concert goers often hear a confusing combination of sounds. All the musicians prepare for the concert at the same time by tuning their instruments and practicing music individually. However, when the conductor walks onto the stage and lifts a baton, they all become silent, attentive, and ready to work together to play beautiful music.

Like a conductor who brings musicians together at the beginning of a concert, you should bring family members or class members together at the beginning of a lesson. Before you begin a lesson, some people may be reading, others may be sitting quietly, and others may be talking to one another. You may hear several conversations at the same time. Even after an opening prayer, those present may not be completely focused on contributing to the lesson. And although it takes more than lifting a baton, there are several simple ways to focus everyone's attention on a lesson.

Guidelines for Beginning a Lesson

Introductions to lessons should do more than get learners' attention. If an introduction does not relate to the lesson, it will probably detract more than help. For example, if a Sunday School teacher tells a joke at the beginning of a lesson, the class members may become attentive, but they also may be led to think about things that will keep them from focusing on the principles to be taught. You should avoid apologies (such as "I feel unprepared") and other expressions that do not lead directly to the lesson.

As you teach different lessons, do not begin with the same method every time. Variety will add interest and an element of surprise. You may want to consider some of the methods described in this book on pages 159–84. For guidelines on choosing appropriate and effective methods, see pages 91–92.

Examples of Effective Lesson Beginnings

Using an Object Lesson

You can use objects to teach gospel principles (see "Comparisons and Object Lessons," pages 163–64). For example, to begin a lesson about choosing things that are of most worth to the soul, you could display a real piece of money next to a piece of play money or a plain piece of paper that is the same size as the money. Then ask those you teach which they would take as payment for the work they do. This could lead to a discussion about which teachings are genuine and which teachings are counterfeit.

Writing Questions on the Chalkboard

Questions written on the chalkboard before class will help learners begin to think about topics even before the lesson begins. For example, in a lesson about taking the name of Christ upon ourselves, you could write the following questions on the chalkboard:

- What are some things you do because you have taken the name of Christ upon yourself?
- What are some things you do *not* do because you have taken the name of Christ upon yourself?

Sharing a Story

Stories can awaken learners' interest. We can often teach a principle more effectively when we first share a story to illustrate it. This helps learners understand the principle in terms of everyday experiences.

Teaching, No Greater Call, B, Chapter 28: **Concluding the Lesson, page 94**

“Oh, my time is up, but I’m not quite finished with the lesson. Just a moment. I’ll hurry through this last part.” Nearly everyone has heard a statement like this from a teacher. Such statements indicate that a teacher has lost an important teaching opportunity: the opportunity to bring the lesson to an effective conclusion.

Qualities of Effective Conclusions

Effective conclusions do not just happen; they must be prepared as part of the lesson. Conclusions are most effective when they have some of the following characteristics:

- They are short, concise, and focused. Generally, they should not include material that you have not taught in the lesson.
- They summarize and tie together the principles you have discussed.
- They highlight important points made by those who have participated.
- They help learners apply gospel principles in their lives.
- They are uplifting, motivating, and positive.
- They include time for testimony.

Following are some examples of ways to conclude a lesson:

- Restate the lesson objective. Ask those you teach how they will apply it in their lives during the coming week.
- Before the lesson begins, assign one or two individuals to listen carefully and be prepared to help summarize a major point of the lesson or the entire lesson.
- Ask those you teach what they might say if someone wants to know what they have learned from the lesson.
- Use a work sheet to help those you teach summarize the main ideas of the lesson (see “Work Sheets,” pages 183–84).

Allowing Time for a Conclusion

To present a good conclusion, you need to be alert and flexible in your use of time. Even well-prepared lessons do not always unfold as planned. The needs of those you teach may lead you to spend more time on a particular point than you have anticipated.

When this happens, you need to be aware of the clock. Bring the discussion to a close before the time runs out. Do all you can to make a smooth transition from the subject being discussed by including it in a quick summary of the lesson. Then conclude the lesson.

Modifying Your Prepared Conclusions

At times, you may need to alter your prepared conclusions because of a particular discussion, comment, or prompting from the Spirit. The following story is an example of a teacher who took advantage of a unique opportunity to conclude a lesson:

Toward the end of an early morning seminary class, the teacher desired to bring a discussion to a conclusion. The main idea of the lesson was that we come unto Christ as we obey the commandments. The class had talked about things some teenagers do that keep them from coming unto the Savior and fully receiving the blessings of His Atonement.

The teacher had planned to conclude by referring to a list on the chalkboard. But he had noticed a painting that a student had completed for a school art project. It was a depiction of a lamb peering through a wooden fence. The teacher asked permission to show the painting to the class, and he explained what he saw in the painting. “As we discussed in class,” he said, “the Savior is the Lamb of God, who gave His life that we all might come unto Him and through Him have eternal life. The fence in the painting is like the barriers that separate us from Him.”

The teacher expressed hope that the students would remove “fences” that keep them from drawing nearer to the Savior. He testified of the Savior’s invitation: “Come unto me, ... and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). The class period ended, and the teacher returned the painting. The influence of the Spirit lingered as the students left the building.

Called to Serve

President Boyd K. Packer

Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

“It is not in the proper spirit for us to decide where we will serve or where we will not. We serve where we are called. It does not matter what the calling may be.”



The willingness of Latter-day Saints to respond to calls to serve is a representation of their desire to do the will of the Lord. That arises from the individual witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith and contained in the Book of Mormon, is true.

I was present at a solemn assembly when David O. McKay was sustained as President of the Church. President J. Reuben Clark Jr., who had served as First Counselor to two Presidents, was then sustained as Second Counselor to President McKay. Sensitive to the possibility that some might think that he had been demoted, President Clark said: “In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines.”

When there is a need for someone to serve, the leaders talk about it and pray about it—often more than once. They seek a confirmation from the Spirit, for calls should be made prayerfully and accepted in the same spirit. You should be given time to pray about the call so that, despite any feeling of inadequacy, you may have a settled feeling. You may be asked to counsel with your spouse.

There is another part of a call which is required by revelation: “It shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been regularly ordained by the heads of the church.” So that it will be known to the Church who is called to serve, names are presented in an appropriate meeting for a sustaining vote. That vote is not just to approve; it is a commitment to support.

Following the sustaining, there is an ordination or setting apart. The pattern was set in the early Church when the Lord promised, “I will lay my hand upon you by the hand of my servant.” He further promised, “You shall receive my Spirit, the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which shall teach you the peaceable things of the kingdom.”

When leaders set someone apart, they do more than authorize service. They pronounce a blessing. It is a marvelous thing to receive a blessing from the Lord Jesus Christ through the hands of His servants. That blessing can cause changes in the life of the one called or in the family.

One of the great influences in my life was to work closely for many years with Belle S. Spafford, general president of the Relief Society, surely one of the greatest women of this dispensation.

One day she told me that as a young woman she explained to her bishop that she was willing to serve but preferred a call to teach. The following week she was called as a counselor to the ward Relief Society president. “I did not relish the call,” she said. “The bishop had misunderstood.” She told him bluntly Relief Society was for old women. Except for the counsel of her husband, she would have refused the call.

Several times she asked to be released. Each time the bishop said he would pray about it.

One night she was seriously injured in an automobile accident. After some time in the hospital, she was recovering at home. A terrible laceration on her face became infected. The worried doctor told her, “We can’t touch this surgically; it’s too close to the main nerve in your face.”

That Sunday night, as the doctor left the Spafford home, the bishop, returning from a late meeting, saw the lights on and stopped in. Sister Spafford later told me, “In that pathetic condition I tearfully said, ‘Bishop, now will you release me?’ ”

Again he said, “I will pray about it.”

When the answer came, it was, “Sister Spafford, I still can’t get the feeling that you should be released from Relief Society.”

Belle S. Spafford served for 46 years in the Relief Society, nearly 30 as general president. She was an influence for good in the Church and was respected by women leaders worldwide. She often spoke of being tested in her calling. Perhaps the greatest test came when, as a young woman, she learned to respect the power and authority inherent in the priesthood and that an ordinary man serving as bishop can receive direction from the Lord in calling members to serve.

The spirit of service does not come by assignment. It is a feeling that accompanies a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Lord said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. For thus saith the Lord—I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory.”

I bear witness that the power and inspiration of calls is present in the Church. I bear witness that the gospel is true and say God bless you who serve, bless you for what you do, and bless you who serve, bless you for what you are! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. (excerpts from Boyd K. Packer, “Called to Serve,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 6)

Gospel Teaching

*Elder Dallin H. Oaks
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*



A national author wrote a book about his greatest teacher. At the heart of this college teacher's powerful impact on his student was the student's conviction that this teacher really cared for him and wanted him to learn and do what would help him find happiness. The author concluded his tribute with this question:

"Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such teachers, you will always find your way back." 1

Every member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, or will be, a teacher. Each of us has a vital interest in the content and effectiveness of gospel teaching. We want everyone to have great gospel teachers, and we want those teachers to help all of us find our way back, not just to them but to our Heavenly Father.

Our concern with gospel teaching is not limited to those who are called to teach in the priesthood quorums, in the Primary, Relief Society, Sunday School, Young Women, and in other assignments. In the Lord's great plan of salvation there are no more important teachers than parents, who teach their children constantly by example and by precept. Each of us teaches those around us by example. Even children teach one another. Every missionary is a teacher. And every leader is a teacher. As President Hinckley taught many years ago, "Effective teaching is the very essence of leadership in the Church." 2

Gospel teaching is universal and important. Truly, "no greater responsibility can rest upon any [one of us] than to be a teacher of God's children." 3 Our Savior's occupation was that of a teacher. He was the Master Teacher, and He invites each of us to follow Him in that great service. 4

Several years ago the First Presidency challenged the Quorum of the Twelve to revitalize teaching in the Church. The Twelve, assisted by the Seventy, accepted that challenge. Now, after years of preparation, engaging the efforts of superb gospel teachers, scholars, writers, and others, the First Presidency has just sent a letter launching a Churchwide effort "to revitalize and improve teaching in the Church." 5 This letter states, "This renewed emphasis is intended to improve gospel teaching in homes and in Church meetings and help nourish members with the good word of God."

We have just published a 10-page booklet, *Improving Gospel Teaching: A Leader's Guide*. Copies are being distributed to all unit leaders and to every quorum and auxiliary officer in the Church. As it explains, our concern with "gospel teaching in the Church" includes parents' everyday teachings in the home as well as the work of teachers in the quorums and auxiliaries.

This important effort to “revitalize and improve teaching in the Church” includes three elements. At the outset, it emphasizes leaders’ vital responsibilities to work to improve gospel teaching in their organizations. We want all leaders to encourage and help the teachers and learners over whom they preside.

Next, the effort initiates quarterly teacher improvement meetings for teachers of three different groups—children, youth, and adults—to “instruct and edify each other” (D&C 43:8) on principles, methods, and skills that will improve gospel teaching and learning.

Finally, a 12-lesson course on “Teaching the Gospel” will be taught at least once each year, generally during Sunday School. Its course material will be drawn from a new abbreviated and improved edition of *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching*. This book is being distributed to all wards and branches in the Church.

We have also reissued the *Teaching Guidebook* for use in the home and for smaller and developing units that cannot staff the entire Church program.

Some may wonder why we are making such an extensive effort to improve gospel teaching. Those who wonder must be blessed with superior teachers, and we have many of those in the Church. Others will understand why such an effort is needed and will pray for its success.

For many years I have sought to learn more about the nature and quality of teaching in the various quorums and auxiliaries of the Church. I have done this by dropping in unannounced on classes in various wards in different parts of the Church. By now I have visited hundreds of classes. I apologize if any of my visits has terrorized a teacher. My impression is that almost all of the teachers I have observed in these surprise visits have appreciated having a visitor who was there to learn and there to show appreciation for their efforts and concern for their students.

For the most part, what I have seen in these visits has been gratifying and reassuring. I have seen inspired teachers whose love for the gospel and their students was so evident that the effect of their teaching was positively electric. I have also seen thoughtful and respectful students, receptive to the message and hungry to learn.

Notwithstanding the great examples I have observed, I am convinced that in the Church as a whole—as with each of us individually—we can always do better. The challenge of progress is inherent in our Father in Heaven’s plan for His children. And in our sacred callings of gospel teaching, no effort is too good for the work of the Lord and the growth of His children.

There are many different ways to teach, but all good teaching is based on certain fundamental principles. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I wish to identify and comment on six fundamental principles of gospel teaching.

The *first* is love. It has two manifestations. When we are called to teach, we should accept our calling and teach because of our love for God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. In addition, a gospel teacher should always teach with love for the students.

We are taught that we should pray “with all the energy of heart, ... [to] be filled with this love” (Moro. 7:48). Love of God and love of His children is the highest reason for service. Those who teach out of love will be magnified as instruments in the hands of Him whom they serve.

Second, a gospel teacher, like the Master we serve, will concentrate entirely on those being taught. His or her total concentration will be on the needs of the sheep—the good of the students. A gospel teacher does not focus on himself or herself. One who understands that principle will not look upon his or her calling as “giving or presenting a lesson,” because that definition views teaching from the standpoint of the teacher, not the student.

Focusing on the needs of the students, a gospel teacher will never obscure their view of the Master by standing in the way or by shadowing the lesson with self-promotion or self-interest. This means that a gospel teacher must never indulge in priestcrafts, which are “that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world” (2 Ne. 26:29). A gospel teacher does not preach “to become popular” (Alma 1:3) or “for the sake of riches and honor” (Alma 1:16). He or she follows the marvelous Book of Mormon example in which “the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner” (Alma 1:26). Both will always look to the Master.

Third, a superior teacher of the gospel will teach from the prescribed course material, with greatest emphasis on teaching the doctrine and principles and covenants of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is commanded in modern revelation, where the Lord said:

“Teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel.

“And they shall observe the covenants and church articles to do them, and these shall be their teachings, as they shall be directed by the Spirit” (D&C 42:12–13).

Teachers who are commanded to teach “the principles of [the] gospel” and “the doctrine of the kingdom” (D&C 88:77) should generally forgo teaching specific rules or applications. For example, they would not teach any rules for determining what is a full tithing, and they would not provide a list of *dos* and *don'ts* for keeping the Sabbath day holy. Once a teacher has taught the doctrine and the associated principles from the scriptures and the living prophets, such specific applications or rules are generally the responsibility of individuals and families.

Well-taught doctrines and principles have a more powerful influence on behavior than rules. When we teach gospel doctrine and principles, we can qualify for the witness and guidance of the Spirit to reinforce our teaching, and we enlist the faith of our students in seeking the guidance of that same Spirit in applying those teachings in their personal lives.

The subject being taught in the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies of the Church during the second and third Sundays of each month is the *Teachings of*

Presidents of the Church. During the last two years we have studied the teachings of President Brigham Young. For the next two years we will be studying the teachings of President Joseph F. Smith. The books containing these teachings, which are being given to every adult member of the Church as a permanent personal library resource, contain doctrine and principles. They are rich and relevant to the needs of our day, and they are superb for teaching and discussion.

As I have visited in quorums and Relief Societies, I have generally been pleased and impressed at how these *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* are being presented and received. However, I have sometimes observed teachers who gave the designated chapter no more than a casual mention and then presented a lesson and invited discussion on other materials of the teacher's choice. That is not acceptable. A gospel teacher is not called to choose the subject of the lesson but to teach and discuss what has been specified. Gospel teachers should also be scrupulous to avoid hobby topics, personal speculations, and controversial subjects. The Lord's revelations and the directions of His servants are clear on this point. We should all be mindful of President Spencer W. Kimball's great instruction that a gospel teacher is a "guest":

"He has been given an authoritative position and a stamp of approval is placed upon him, and those whom he teaches are justified in assuming that, having been chosen and sustained in the proper order, he represents the Church and the things which he teaches are approved by the Church. No matter how brilliant he may be and how many new truths he may think he has found, he has no right to go beyond the program of the Church." 6

Fourth, a gospel teacher will prepare diligently and strive to use the most effective means of presenting the prescribed lessons. The new Teaching the Gospel course and the new teacher improvement meetings are obviously intended to assist teachers in this effort.

The *fifth* fundamental principle of gospel teaching I wish to stress is the Lord's command, quoted earlier, that gospel teachers should "teach the principles of my gospel ... as they shall be directed by the Spirit. ... And if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach" (D&C 42:12–14). It is a gospel teacher's privilege and duty to seek that level of discipleship where his or her teachings will be directed and endorsed by the Spirit rather than being rigidly selected and prearranged for personal convenience or qualifications. The marvelous principles of "Gospel Teaching and Leadership" in the new *Church Handbook of Instructions* include the following:

"Teachers and class members should seek the Spirit during the lesson. A person may teach profound truths, and class members may engage in stimulating discussions, but unless the Spirit is present, these things will not be powerfully impressed upon the soul. ...

"When the Spirit is present in gospel teaching, 'the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth [the message] unto the hearts of the children of men' (2 Ne. 33:1)." 7

President Hinckley stated an important corollary to the command to teach by the Spirit when he issued this challenge:

“We must ... get our teachers to speak out of their hearts rather than out of their books, to communicate their love for the Lord and this precious work, and somehow it will catch fire in the hearts of those they teach.”⁸

That is our objective—to have love of God and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ “catch fire” in the hearts of those we teach.

That leads to the *sixth* and final principle I will discuss. A gospel teacher is concerned with the results of his or her teaching, and such a teacher will measure the success of teaching and testifying by its impact on the lives of the learners.⁹ A gospel teacher will never be satisfied with just delivering a message or preaching a sermon. A superior gospel teacher wants to assist in the Lord’s work to bring eternal life to His children.

President Harold B. Lee said: “The calling of the gospel teacher is one of the noblest in the world. The good teacher can make all the difference in inspiring boys and girls and men and women to change their lives and fulfill their highest destiny. The importance of the teacher has been beautifully described by Daniel Webster when he said, ‘If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; but if we work upon immortal minds, if we imbue them with principles and the just fear of God and love of our fellowman, we engrave upon those tablets something that will brighten through all eternity.’ ”¹⁰

I testify that this is God’s work, and that we are His servants with the sacred responsibility of teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, the greatest message of all time. We need more teachers to match that message. I pray that we will all become superior gospel teachers, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997), 192.
2. “How to Be a Teacher When Your Role as a Leader Requires You to Teach,” General Authority Priesthood Board Meeting, 5 Feb. 1969; see also Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Teacher Come from God,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 26.
3. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (1953), 175.
4. See, generally, Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (1975).
5. First Presidency letter, 15 Sept. 1999.
6. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 533.
7. *Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* (1998), 300.
8. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 619–20.
9. See Henry B. Eyring, “The Power of Teaching Doctrine,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 73.
10. *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams, (1996), 461.

(Dallin H. Oaks, “Gospel Teaching,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 78)

Also included in packet:

- Handbook excerpts pps 300-304
 - Contact information for Relief Society Presidency, other teachers (for substituting), and RS music leaders in case they want special music or to tell them about their lesson focus.
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