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Teaching in the Book of Mormon

R. Mark Matheson

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The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion. It also contains a wealth of teaching principles and examples that could become the keystone of our gospel pedagogy. Many well-known verses focus on teaching, such as the opening lines in 1 Nephi: “I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). Also, the sons of Mosiah “had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; . . . *and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God*” (Alma 17:3; emphasis added).

Verses like these inspire us, but we can learn even more about improving our teaching from the other 175 verses employing some form of the word *teach*. This paper will discuss some of these less familiar verses and illuminate more teaching wisdom from the Book of Mormon.

In the *LDS Guide to the Scriptures*, the definition of *teach* is “to give knowledge to others, especially about gospel truths, and guide them to righteousness.”¹ To accomplish these purposes, we can identify several themes in the Book of Mormon:

1. Teaching requirements and teacher qualifications
2. The teacher-student relationship
3. Teaching perspectives and approaches
4. Specific constructive teaching techniques
5. Incorrect teaching methods

Teaching Requirements and Teacher Qualifications

Book of Mormon authors expounded on many requirements of effective gospel instructors. This section offers some important characteristics and qualifications that provide a foundation for teaching.

1. *Be worthy.* Book of Mormon teachers were expected to be just, honorable, upright, and conscientious. “The Lord their God . . . had appointed just men to be their teachers” (Mosiah 2:4), and “none were consecrated except they were just men” (Mosiah 23: 17; see also Enos 1:1).

Before training the people, Book of Mormon teachers lived the gospel and cleansed themselves through Christ’s Atonement. Mosiah 18:1 reads, “Alma . . . repented of his sins and iniquities . . . and began to teach.” The leaders were concerned about the worthiness of their teachers: “Trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments” (Mosiah 23:14).

2. *Be diligent.* Book of Mormon teachers realized the importance of diligence in their callings. Alma “walk[ed] in all diligence, teaching the word of God in all things” (Mosiah 26:38). Teachers were to be steady and earnest, not excessive or extreme. “Now, as ye have *begun to teach* the word even so I would that ye should *continue to teach*; and I would that ye would be diligent and temperate in all things” (Alma 38:10; emphasis added).

Even when we work diligently, there are going to be some teaching days when we feel less effective. Some days will require much more effort to achieve a level of spirituality or enthusiasm than others. King Mosiah knew that giving our best, albeit imperfect, exertion was the requirement: “I myself have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed, to teach you the commandments of God” (Mosiah 29:14).

3. *Be consecrated or appointed to the call.* The starting point for gospel instruction is teaching according to a calling or command of the Lord. Nephi states he was “their teacher, according to the commandments of the Lord” (2 Nephi 5:19). And “none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God” (Mosiah 23:17). The Book of Mormon repeatedly states that teachers were often “consecrated” for this important function (see 2 Nephi 5:26; Jacob 1:18; Mosiah 23:17; Alma 15:13; 23:4) or appointed (see Mosiah 6:3; 24:1; 24:4; Alma 45:22; 45:23).

Some teachers in the Book of Mormon were called by the Holy Spirit and were assisted by the gifts of the Spirit in their teaching. For example, in Alma 18:34 Ammon described his role and its divine origin: “I am called by his Holy Spirit to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true.”

4. *Represent God.* In many cases teachers are not only following God's will in teaching but are also representing God to the students. Striking evidence of this is found in Mosiah, where teachers and God are associated three times in one verse: "They were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God" (Mosiah 18:26). Students will be accountable for the truths about God that we teach them. The Book of Mormon says of the rebellious people in the time of Lachoneus: "They did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did wilfully rebel against God" (3 Nephi 6:18).

5. *Minister beyond the classroom.* A teacher's role can extend beyond classroom boundaries. In 3 Nephi 26:19, we learn that "they taught, and did minister one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another." Ministering to each other implies teaching with service. I recently received a letter from a full-time missionary for whom I was a deacons quorum adviser. He did not mention any doctrinal lessons I had taught, but he thanked me for taking him one-on-one to buy a hamburger.

The Teacher-Student Relationship

The Book of Mormon instructs that the eventual millennial goal is that "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord" (3 Nephi 22:13). Our charge is to see our students as children of God and to recognize their divine right to be taught the things of God. Teachers are heavily accountable to their students in this regard. This section highlights five facets of the teacher-student relationship portrayed in the Book of Mormon.

1. *Adapt to differing levels of teachability.* Among the Book of Mormon teaching situations there were many different kinds of learners with varying degrees of openness to instruction. In Mosiah 18:3, Alma the Elder recognized the different needs of his people. "*And as many as would hear his word he did teach. And he taught them privately*" (emphasis added). He made arrangements for specific groups to be spiritually fed a diet appropriate to their appetites. Christ Himself didn't force learning, and His disciples followed His example. "The disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them" (3 Nephi 26:17).

Our students have various difficulties to overcome. Each has individual concerns and questions. Teachers have to be responsive to the students' unique needs, and those needs can be discovered through perceptive interaction. For example, I recently had a change in institute

teaching assignments where I went from instructing all male classes to all female classes. I quickly cut down on my prepared lesson material as this new group of students asked more questions. I also invited several strong students to help teach principles to the weaker students.

2. *Realize deep emotional involvement.* Teaching often touches the heart where emotions run deep. Book of Mormon teachers experienced both joy and sorrow because of their students' behavior. "Now this was the cause of much affliction to . . . many of the people whom Alma had consecrated to be teachers, . . . yea, many of them were sorely grieved for the wickedness which they saw had begun to be among their people" (Alma 4:7).

The flow of teaching is not just one-way. In Alma 1:26, the Book of Mormon explains, "Neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength." As teachers, we should evaluate our position in relation to students, remembering that we can learn from our students, each individual's emotional and spiritual gifts lifting others.

3. *Let teaching successes motivate.* Successful teaching can inspire us to teach more. Such was the case when King Lamoni's heart was touched and he "did rejoice over [his people], and he did teach them many things" (Alma 21:21). Many times students exceed their teachers' expectations and set an example for their instructors. In Helaman 3:25, "so great was the prosperity of the church, and so many the blessings which were poured out upon the people, that even the high priests and *the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure*" (emphasis added). God is patiently waiting to bless His children and can pour out great blessings in our classrooms.

4. *Recognize the future impact of current teaching.* Each of our students has multiple spheres of influence. Our teaching can affect their testimonies and in turn affect their families, their neighbors, friends, and possibly generations unborn. King Benjamin spoke of his forefather Lehi who "could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God, even down to this present time" (Mosiah 1:4). In effect, we are teaching *now* for the benefit of *future* students.

5. *Evaluate our motives.* As teachers we should examine our motivation for teaching as Nephi did in a three-fold appraisal in 2 Nephi 6:3: "Nevertheless, I speak unto you again; for I am [1] desirous for the welfare of your souls. Yea, [2] mine anxiety is great for you; and [3] ye yourselves know that it ever has been. For I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you." The pattern displayed here is that

first, teachers place concern for their students' souls foremost. Next, they explain their emotional investment to their students. Finally, they remind the students to recognize the motivation of their teacher. This assessment can bind students and teachers in a lasting and uplifting learning association.

Teaching Perspectives and Approaches

The Book of Mormon presents numerous teaching methods for application in modern gospel classrooms. We should evaluate these practices to see which of them we can better implement to bless our students.

1. *Be flexible and follow the Spirit.* Book of Mormon teachers were adaptable and taught Heavenly Father's will and plan as directed by the Holy Spirit. For example, Lamoni's father wanted Ammon to teach him, but Ammon accepted a different teaching assignment: "Behold, the Spirit of the Lord has called him another way; he has gone to the land of Ishmael, to teach the people of Lamoni" (Alma 22:4). Nephi recognized that being responsive to the Spirit brings divine assistance. "I, Nephi, cannot write all the things which were taught among my people . . . for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men" (2 Nephi 33:1). Because the Holy Ghost imprints the truth of the teachings on the hearts of our students, as gospel teachers, we must humble ourselves to follow the promptings and adjust lessons to match the Spirit's direction.

2. *Correlate with priesthood leaders.* As teachers we alone are not to deal with all the problems our students face. Their individual priesthood leaders have stewardship and should be involved in their lives. In Mosiah 26:7, we read that "they were . . . delivered up unto the priests by the teachers." Alma depended on correct priesthood administration to properly teach: "He began to teach the people in the land of Melek according to the holy order of God, by which he had been called" (Alma 8:4).

3. *Avoid excessive personal embellishment.* Teachers in the Book of Mormon taught the words of God's prophets, not their "pet ideas" or their own interpretations. Alma "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).

Gospel teachers should trust the power of the word of God without personal adornment. Students need to hear the words of the prophets, and they will be especially accountable for heeding the counsel of the current prophets; therefore, hearing, knowing, and understanding recent counsel is as imperative for our students today as it was for the

people in Book of Mormon times. In Mosiah 8:3, Ammon shared the words of their prophet for his new and uninformed students. “He also rehearsed unto them the last words which king Benjamin had taught them, and explained them to the people of king Limhi, so that they might understand all the words which he spake.”

Another excellent example of this pure teaching is King Lamoni. After his miraculous conversion, he awakened to find his people bickering over the astounding events that had just transpired. “And he, immediately, seeing the contention among his people, went forth and began to rebuke them, and to *teach them the words which he had heard from the mouth of Ammon*; and as many as heard his words believed, and were converted unto the Lord” (Alma 19:31; emphasis added). This great king, in humility, taught them the words of a prophet received from a missionary’s mouth.

Jacob 7 gives an example of the opposite of quality gospel instruction. The offending teacher Sherem eventually recanted his teaching and righted his methods: “He spake plainly unto them and denied the things which he had taught them, and confessed the Christ” (Jacob 7:17). Teachers’ plain and simple words guide students. Nephi said to his people, “I have spoken plainly unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand. And the words which I have spoken shall stand as a testimony against you; for they are sufficient to teach any man the right way” (2 Nephi 25:28).

4. *Build a foundation of the basics.* Another lesson in Book of Mormon teaching comes from Enos, Mosiah, and King Benjamin. Enos’s father taught him in his own language about the nature of the Lord as a foundation for Enos’s knowledge of the gospel (see Enos 1:1). Mosiah did likewise (see Omni 1:18). And then King Benjamin “caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding” (Mosiah 1:2). Building a foundation for gospel teaching requires exposing students to the language and works of God, preparing the way for deeper learning.

A foundation has thick walls with extra reinforcing material to withstand future shocks. Sometimes in the process of building sufficient groundwork, students complain about the repetitiveness of their lesson material. Alma astutely described it as teaching *bountifully*. He explained to his students that “I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us” (Alma 34:2). Laying a foundation is not always as enjoyable as teaching advanced material, but let us remember Paul’s counsel, “Brethren, be not weary in well doing” (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

5. *Avoid teaching harmful material.* Abinadi was very concerned with proper teaching. He incisively asked a question to the wayward teachers he was investigating that we should also ask ourselves, “Therefore, what teach ye this people?” (Mosiah 12:27). Nephi exhibited wisdom in his choice of what to teach: “I, Nephi, have *not taught* my children after the manner of the Jews. . . . I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God” (2 Nephi 25:6; emphasis added). Instead of bringing up works of darkness, he focused on the light (see 2 Nephi 25:2). Gospel teachers should likewise be selective in their instructional information and should not dwell on insignificant or detrimental material.

6. *Remember the importance of family-based teaching.* As gospel teachers outside the home, we need to respect and support gospel teaching inside of the home. One of the most tender moments in the Book of Mormon is recorded in Alma 56–57. The young stripling warriors reflected on the teachings of their mothers and on the testimonies they gained at home. “They had been taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47). Could outside teachers have guided these young men to such a deep level of faith? I doubt it.

In another example, prior teachings of parents although grown dim, provided a foundation for the powerful gospel teacher Abinadi to expand upon. “One of them said unto him: What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers” (Mosiah 12:20). Parents have monumental roles in their children’s gospel education, and we should encourage and nurture that process.

7. *Be prepared to answer questions and correct doctrine.* As students follow through on their learning responsibilities, they will have crucial moments of questioning for which teachers need to be prepared to answer. Alma and Amulek prepared themselves for the time when people came to inquire. Their students had opened their hearts and minds and began questioning. These master teachers were ready: “Many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection” (Alma 16:20).

Capturing those moments of questioning and pointing out the difference between false and correct doctrine can lead students to be able to make better choices themselves. In Alma 33:2, Alma clears up a misunderstanding and allows the people the freedom to choose the right. “And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues.

But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; *if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them*" (emphasis added). Helping them understand the principle of worship opened the people's hearts to further teaching and true conversion.

8. *Plan for diverse teaching circumstances.* Book of Mormon teachers were prepared to teach in various situations. "We have entered into their houses and taught them, and we have taught them in their streets; yea, and we have taught them upon their hills; and we have also entered into their temples and their synagogues and taught them" (Alma 26:29). This flexibility helped them teach wherever the Spirit sent them. Such preparation can help us be ready to teach whenever and wherever the call comes. In the last few years, I have taught in a kitchen, a living room, a library, on the lawn, and in an office and other remote crannies of buildings. I did not let the less-than-ideal teaching environments deter me from my teaching commission.

9. *Deal with criticism appropriately.* Teachers are not immune from criticism. When Nehor, a false teacher, met Gideon, "one of their teachers; and he began to contend with him sharply;" how did the true teacher respond? He "withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God" (Alma 1:7). We should likewise learn to handle criticism correctly when it comes.

10. *Teach with testimony and power.* Important teaching moments are closely tied with testimony. Nephi wrote "wherefore, ye need not suppose that I and my father are the only ones *that have testified, and also taught them*" (1 Nephi 22:31; emphasis added). It is a gospel teacher's responsibility to testify of Christ and to inspire students to gain their own testimonies. We also need to allow time for the students to teach and to testify to one another.

Closely tied with testimony is the ability to teach with power. Ammon and his fellow teachers who "had been teaching the word of God for the space of fourteen years among the Lamanites . . . had much success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, by the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God" (Alma 17:4). This teaching ability comes from "the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God" (Mosiah 18:26).

Specific Constructive Teaching Techniques

The Book of Mormon can be considered a manual for teachers. Not only does it exhibit doctrine, qualifications, and teaching perspectives,

it also demonstrates specific instructional techniques that were used by exemplary teachers to help reach students.² Here are teaching practices from the Book of Mormon “for our profit and learning” as teachers (1 Nephi 19:23).

1. *Read to students.* Nephi read to his people to teach them of the Lord: “I, Nephi, did teach my brethren these things; and it came to pass that I *did read many things to them*, . . . that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord” (1 Nephi 19:22; emphasis added). Sometimes reading is like having a guest speaker, inviting greater understanding because it offers more than the teacher’s perspective. “And I did read many things unto them . . . ; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written” (1 Nephi 19:23).

Don’t feel bad if your memorization skills are not as great as you wish. Even Lehi had teaching materials and read from them to back up his instructional efforts. “For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; for he . . . could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children” (Mosiah 1:4).³

2. *Create the best teaching environment.* Teachers should observe the physical conditions of the classroom and determine what obstacles their students might encounter in their efforts to learn. King Benjamin illustrated this concern before he delivered his famous address by making specific accommodations to facilitate learning. “King Benjamin could not teach them all within the walls of the temple, therefore he caused a tower to be erected, that thereby his people might hear the words” (Mosiah 2:7). In a similar attempt to maximize teaching effectiveness, King Mosiah and Alma divided their people into teachable groups “because there were so many people that they could not all be governed by one teacher” (Mosiah 25:20).

3. *Avoid unnecessary absences.* Students need to know their teachers will consistently be there to teach them. “And there was one day in every week that was set apart that they should gather themselves together to teach the people” (Mosiah 18:25). The continual, diligent effort of teachers acts as an anchor to students. “We did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God *with all diligence*” (Jacob 1:19; emphasis added). Book of Mormon teachers took personal responsibility and interest in the righteousness of their students, giving consistent and thorough effort.

“The teachers, did *labor diligently*, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to *diligence* And *after this manner* did they teach them” (Jarom 1:11; emphasis added).

4. *Establish rapport.* Wise teachers are not always in full teaching mode. They find out about their students and speak to them, building a relationship. For example, Alma spent time “teaching and *speaking* unto the people” (Alma 32:4). This guidance is similar to what effective missionaries discover with their new contacts. Small talk at the right time can be as important as teaching doctrine, proving the adage “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

5. *Respect students’ privacy.* The teachers in Alma 35:5 understood the importance of privacy: “Their teachers did not let the people know concerning their desires; therefore they found out privily the minds of all the people.” Sometimes students are able to communicate more fully with a teacher in a personal setting. Seeking feedback privately might assist teachers in evaluating their effectiveness. Here is an example of what *not* to do. My wife was in a line to buy movie tickets when she heard a bishop behind her take a cellular phone call from another bishop apparently from another state. She couldn’t help but overhear as they discussed and coordinated, using full names and specifics about the things they were doing to help two young people caught up in transgression. Gospel teachers need to be careful with the confidence students give them.

6. *Use questions.* In the midst of his teaching, Alma questioned Zeezrom, displaying another helpful educational technique. Alma asked, “Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation? And he answered and said: Yea, I believe all the words that thou hast taught” (Alma 15:6–7). This master teacher questioned the student to ascertain his comprehension and belief, thus learning how to best continue his lesson. Effective teachers determine the level of their students and then build from that base.

7. *Connect lessons with students’ experiences.* Students enjoy and comprehend facilitated learning better when new material connects with their existing personal situations. For example, Nephi had experienced much teaching, but his effectiveness was enriched by the experience of his afflictions and interactions with God. “I, Nephi . . . was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days . . . having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God” (1 Nephi 1:1).

8. *Combine preparation with prayer.* Book of Mormon teachers balanced personal preparation with reliance on the Spirit. Teachers

need to pray for the Lord's Spirit to prepare the minds and hearts of the students, as well as to assist them in their preparations. "The Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming" (Alma 16:16). Beyond all we can do, relying on the Lord can dramatically increase our teaching effectiveness.

Incorrect Teaching Behavior

The Book of Mormon presents examples of several incorrect teaching methods in contrast to the many positive techniques. A few of these incorrect teaching illustrations exhibit blatant rebellion against God and a desire to promote wickedness and misery. For example, in 4 Nephi 1:38 the people "did willfully rebel against the gospel of Christ; and they did teach their children that they should not believe." Another case of misguided instruction is cited in Mosiah 10:17: "They have taught their children that they should hate them." Modern-day parallels of this rebellion exist, but hopefully not in Latter-day Saint gospel classrooms. However, the more subtle incorrect teaching methods found in the Book of Mormon can sneak into any classroom. The examples recorded can make teachers more aware of possible pitfalls and precarious territory.

1. *Avoid pride.* One of the great stumbling blocks to learning is pride. Whether it resides in the teacher or in the student, pride breeds contention and misunderstanding. In an extreme case, Korihor "did rise up in great swelling words before Alma, and did revile against the priests and teachers" (Alma 30:31). Nephi links pride and improper teaching: "Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up" (2 Nephi 28:12).

When pride enters a classroom, the question becomes *who* is right, not *what* is right. An example of this is found in Alma 1:3, where Nehor "had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God . . . declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular." Pride stresses the importance of the teacher more than the material, encouraging personal flourishes on gospel principles in order to promote the messenger. Nephi strongly warned about this. "Yea, and there shall be many which shall *teach after this manner*, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts" (2 Nephi 28:9; emphasis added).

Pride invites competition, comparisons, and envy, thus killing the spirit of learning. “And they shall contend one with another . . . and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” (2 Nephi 28:4). Moroni saw that this would happen in our day when “teachers shall rise in the pride of their hearts” (Mormon 8:28). By focusing on the gospel message instead of on the appearance or popularity of us as teachers, we can better serve our students and avoid pride.

2. *Teach in the light.* Gospel teachers need to keep their words and works in the light, unlike Nehor who was taught and did teach by the powers of darkness: “The devil hath deceived me . . . and he taught me that which I should say. And I have taught his words; and I taught them because they were pleasing unto the carnal mind; and I taught them, even until I had much success, insomuch that I verily believed that they were true; and for this cause I withstood the truth” (Alma 30:53).

As in that experience from Alma, the devil is constantly trying to break down the spiritual ramparts in the hearts and minds of our students. “There had been false prophets, and false preachers and teachers among the people” (Words of Mormon 1:16). Prophets warned of this falseness in teaching. “Abinadi said unto them: Are you priests, and *pretend to teach* this people?” (Mosiah 12:25; emphasis added). We need to be careful to keep the Spirit with us so we may teach in light, not in darkness.

3. *Don't neglect important doctrines.* The most blatant incorrect teaching behavior is sheer negligence. “Neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi” (Mosiah 24:5; see also Mosiah 12:37). Teachers must not sacrifice the opportunity to share life-saving truths because of poor planning or carelessness.

Even before specific lesson planning, teachers need to know the gospel themselves and be living the commandments to be able to testify of them. Abinadi's condemnation is very instructive on this point. “Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people?” (Mosiah 12:27).

A teacher helps students remember the goodness and power of the Lord's deliverance. The Book of Mormon records, “Orihah did walk humbly before the Lord . . . and also taught his people how great things the Lord had done for their fathers” (Ether 6:30). If teachers do not teach these “great things,” how can our students remember them?

4. *Beware of hypocrisy.* When there are discrepancies between teaching and living, students will recognize the hypocrisy. “If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?” (Mosiah 12:29). Teachers who are

not true followers of the Savior are without the Spirit and allow men's ideas to infiltrate their teachings of God, as warned by Nephi in 2 Nephi 27:25: "Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men."

5. *Avoid misguided teaching motives.* Some religious teachers attempt to be the mediator between their students and God. This false teaching practice was highlighted in Helaman 16:21 when some worried that misguided teachers would "keep us down to be servants to their words, and also servants unto them, for we depend upon them to teach us the word; and thus will they keep us in ignorance if we will yield ourselves unto them." Wicked teachers use religion as a way to bind people and gain power over them instead of teaching them true freedom through understanding and self application of gospel principles. We should periodically evaluate our motives and teach only for the love of Christ and for those we teach.

Fruits of Superior Gospel Teaching

The goal of our lessons is to have the students remember them and take action, not hear and forget them. As Jesus taught in 3 Nephi, "Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught; . . . therefore, whoso remembereth these sayings of mine and doeth them, him will I raise up at the last day" (3 Nephi 15:1). Our teaching can preserve our students somewhat as the two thousand stripling warriors were preserved: "Their preservation was astonishing to our whole army. . . . And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith *in that which they had been taught to believe*" (Alma 57:26; emphasis added).⁴

Our joy will be full as we see our students want to do what is right. "After Alma had taught the people many things . . . all his people were desirous that they might be baptized" (Mosiah 25:17). This is the greatest fruit of a teacher's labor. But sometimes the results of our teaching will not be evident until much later when our students recall our lessons, as in this example: "Aminadab said unto them: You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, who was *taught unto you* by Alma, and Amulek, and Zeezrom" (Helaman 5:41; emphasis added).

Like these Book of Mormon teachers, God will assist those teachers who put forth conscientious effort. Ammon illustrates diligence as he preaches to King Lamoni's people. "He did teach them . . . and he did exhort them daily, with all diligence; and they gave heed unto his word, and they were zealous for keeping the commandments of God" (Alma 21:23).

The Book of Mormon contains the central doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As shown in this article, it also is full of key doctrines about teaching. As teachers concentrate on improving their teaching, the Book of Mormon can be one of their best resources. We, as teachers, can find ample answers to perplexing pedagogical problems in our classrooms throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon. As we struggle to build a sure foundation in the next generation of Saints, let us remember the counsel and blessing of Alma to his noble son Shiblon: “May the Lord bless your soul, and receive you at the last day into his kingdom, to sit down in peace. Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people” (Alma 38:15). **RE**

Notes

1. LDS Guide to the Scriptures; <http://scriptures.lds.org/gst/tchtchr>.
2. The Savior used several methods in His teaching recorded in 3 Nephi that are worthy of further study. Some of these follow:
 - He challenged followers (students) to know the truthfulness of the doctrine for themselves: “Feel the prints . . . that ye may know” (3 Nephi 11:14).
 - Jesus set the example in bearing testimony in His teaching: “I bear record of the Father . . . and the Holy Ghost beareth record” (3 Nephi 11:32).
 - He encouraged His students to do their own gospel study and not to rely on the teacher to provide all the elements for successful spiritual learning: “*Prepare your minds* for the morrow, and I come unto you again” (3 Nephi 17:3; emphasis added).
3. Lehi also exemplified fine teaching, using objects and analogies to connect his sons with the gospel of Christ (see 1 Nephi 8; 2:9–10).
4. Occasionally, an opposite result can occur: “Whosoever believed *or had been taught* to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire” (Alma 14:8; emphasis added).