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Preparing Our Hearts

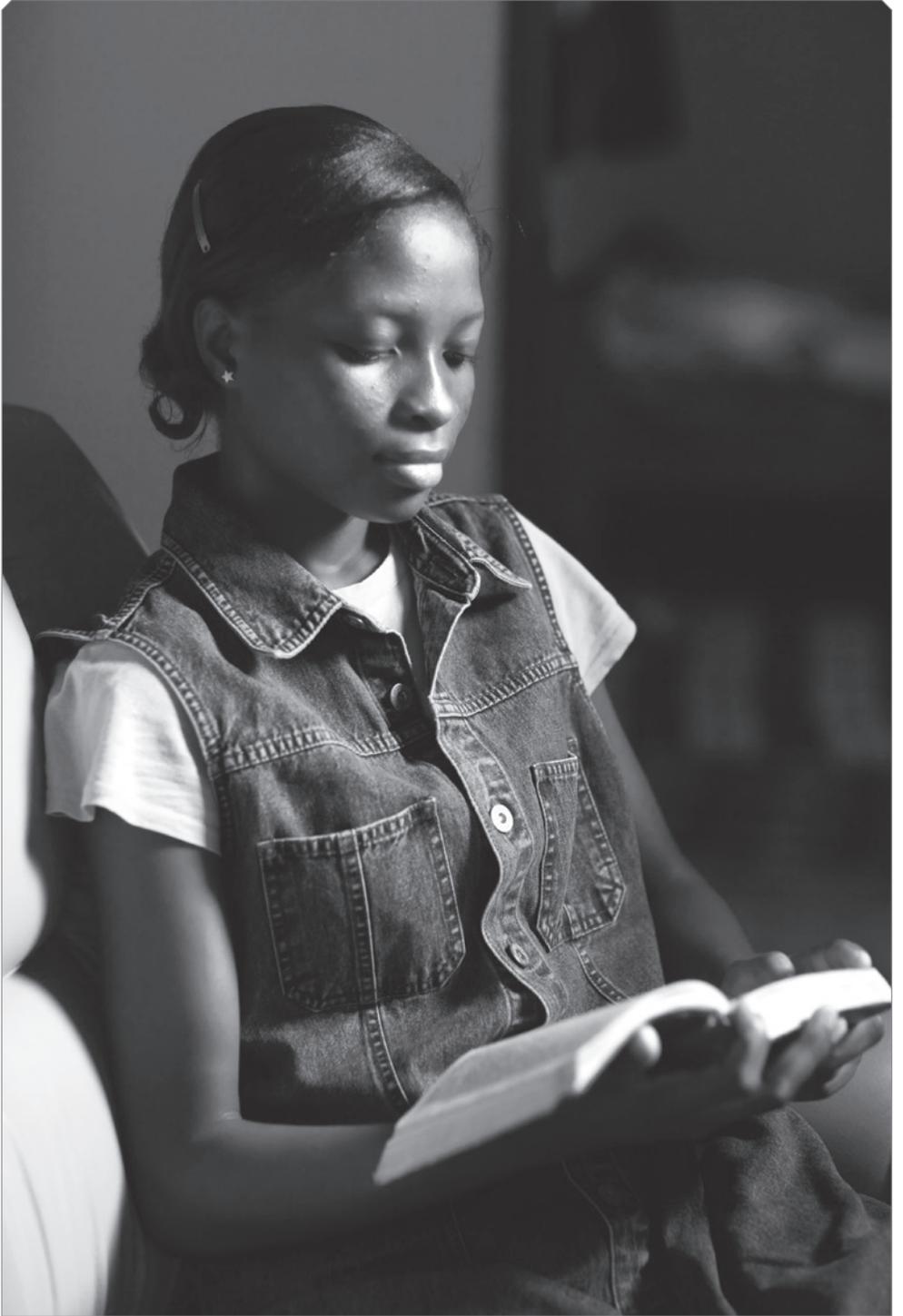
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After studying lesson material, a good teacher ponders it, asking, What experiences have I had with this doctrine?

Preparing Our Hearts

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Religious Educator (RE): *Can you please share an experience where you saw an example of a teacher connecting with a student when they were able to really make a difference?*

Tyler: Yes. When I was working up in northern Idaho, I remember a teacher who taught an early-morning seminary class. He was a wonderful young husband and father. He was not an enthusiastic teacher. He had a monotone voice and would just walk through the material. I visited his class several times and saw that he had no discipline problems. The students always followed him perfectly, and you could tell they loved and respected him. After one particular class, I noticed that as each of the students left he took time to connect with them personally. You could tell that they had a good relationship with him. I still remember one boy coming up to him after class, saying, "This is the project I am turning in today in my class." The teacher looked it over and gave him a compliment, and the student then strutted out of class, feeling confident about turning it in. Another student talked about his motorcycle not working, and the instructor said, "I'll come over after work and look at your bike." I later learned that the man went over later, looked at

the bike, and made just a minor adjustment. It was this teacher's personal connection with each student *outside* of class that allowed him to connect with them in class. It wasn't his energy or enthusiasm or skill that made him a good teacher. It was his caring interest in each student as an individual. He was able to help them develop an understanding of the gospel because he cared about them and they knew it. That is such a vital principle of teaching.

RE: *Do you ever see counterfeit attempts to make that connection?*

Tyler: I hear a lot of stories that teachers use to manipulate listeners' emotions. For instance: "The poor little boy in the snow, without shoes on his feet, walked up and pressed his nose against the glass of the candy store. With tears running down his eyes, he longed to have. . . ." I have observed and studied how we sometimes use such stories, phrases, and clichés in our talks and lessons to manipulate our listeners' feelings. This fabricated emotion can become a substitute for the feelings of the Spirit. When we bear testimony of truth and tell how we gained that testimony, the Spirit will stir our hearts and minds and prompt a variety of feelings. Teachers sometimes use tearjerkers or humorous stories in an attempt to manipulate emotion. Sometimes teachers try to entertain their students, and their charisma becomes a substitute for the Spirit. When we talk about serious, sacred matters, as the scriptures encourage us, we should be cheerful, yet sober, calm, and proper. We must be careful not to use manipulative methods to generate emotion. The Lord asks the question in Doctrine and Covenants 50:17, "[Do you] preach the word of truth . . . by the Spirit of truth or some other way?" I have studied what the Lord's ways are and what "some other ways" are. I try not to judge when the Spirit is present by when people have tears in their eyes but by when they feel very deeply about the message. People will understand what we teach. We do not need to manipulate them to start crying.

RE: *If you were to offer counsel to new teachers, what counsel would you give them?*

Tyler: At this stage of my life, I've learned the importance of Ezra 7:10 for teachers: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel." We talk about the spirit of Elias, the spirit of preparation. John the Baptist was an Elias who prepared the way for the Savior. Teachers are Eliases who prepare the way for the Spirit to teach their students. I have discovered that preparation does not just refer to preparing *material* or to outlining all the information you want to cover, though that is part of it. The Lord says, "Study it out in your mind" (D&C 9:8). He tells

us to search, ponder, and treasure the scriptures. So although a teacher must go through that process of preparing material, his main priority should be to prepare his own heart.

You have outline information, and you know what you want to talk about, but in the Church there is no way you can cover all the material in a block of scripture. For example, Nelson Dibble was teaching a Continuing Education class for BYU. He was going to be out of town, so he asked me if I could teach a class about Isaiah for him. I went to the classroom, and only one student showed up. She said, “I am struggling with Isaiah.”

I asked what she was struggling with, and she said, “For example, these three verses I read this morning—I don’t understand them.”

I said, “Let’s turn to those verses.” We reviewed them for the entire class period. I did not go prepared to microscopically dissect three verses in Isaiah, but we pointed out doctrine, history, and ways to liken and apply the verses to ourselves. We followed the cross-references to what other prophets had said, and we read Nephi’s ten-verse commentary about those verses. We ended up spending an hour and a half on three verses. I was amazed at the experience.

Another example also illustrates the point. I have been teaching a class at a local retirement home. My students there are in their golden years, and they have no semester schedule to worry about, so we have gone through the Doctrine and Covenants verse by verse. It has taken us four years, one night a week, three or four weeks a month, to get from section 1 through section 84. I go home without even covering everything that comes to mind about some verses. I talk about ideas that relate to those verses and that these older people may be able to apply in their lives. We could spend an entire hour on one verse and look at all the ramifications of four principles the Lord listed there.

RE: How do you know what subject matter to cover in class?

Tyler: First, let’s go back to preparing your heart. Part of preparing your heart is being familiar with the material and understanding the meaning of the assigned content. You want to know what the Church curriculum includes. The Church understands that you can’t cover all the material, but you have to familiarize yourself with it. A teacher then, after becoming familiar with the content, ponders it. He asks himself, what experiences have I had with this doctrine?

Preston Gledhill was a speech professor at BYU in the 1960s. He said that the keys to preparing to speak were to (1) think yourself empty, (2) read yourself full, and (3) speak yourself clear. Think yourself empty—ask yourself,

What do I already know? What do I already have in my mind about this material and information? So you go back and review. You think, “Oh yes, my mom used that scripture when I was a teenager. My mission president talked about that verse. You know, my seminary teacher talked about this passage.” After you think yourself empty, you read yourself full. What does *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* say about that word? What does it really mean to “stand in holy places”? (D&C 45:32). On one occasion I looked up the word *stand* in Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary to see what the word meant in the Prophet Joseph’s time, and the dictionary listed thirty different meanings—twenty-eight of them applied to that verse. That one word provided an entire sermon. I have never gone through all the definitions in a class, but I present the idea to my students by asking, “What two or three different definitions of the word have meaning to you?” I try to look a little deeper into what the verses could mean.

Likening the scriptures to yourself is also part of the deliberation process of preparing your heart and mind. As part of that process, I try to study lessons well in advance. I teach a priesthood class once a month. When I get home from priesthood meeting on the fourth Sunday, I look at the material for the coming month’s class so that I have a month to let that information incubate. When I am driving around, I think, “What did Elder Dallin H. Oaks say about testimony? Do I have a testimony of this? Yes, I do,” and I reflect on that principle, in gratitude for that witness. You cannot go into a classroom and bear testimony of something that you do not know is true. Maybe part of preparing my heart is getting on my knees and saying, “Heavenly Father, I have not personally dealt with this principle before”—and then being prepared for a trial of faith the next day.

Another aspect of preparing your heart is asking yourself about the nature of your class. What are the students dealing with? If we are going to talk about eternal marriage and 40 percent of my class comes from broken homes, how am I going to deal with that? What are they going to struggle with when they learn the principle and find out that their parents haven’t lived it? I pray to Heavenly Father to help me understand that. You go through a lot of that kind of deliberation in preparing the lesson.

Another part of preparing your heart is asking prayerfully for the Lord to call to your attention the things he knows the students in your class need. I taught a class three months ago about giving priesthood blessings, and a week or two before the lesson, I received a lot of inspiration from personal

studies, as well as from things my father had taught me and things his father had taught him, both of whom had been stake patriarchs. I wrote down those seven or eight ideas that I had been incubating, and I felt impressed to type them up as the list of key ideas. I ran into our stake patriarch the other day, and he said, “I have been pondering that list you gave to the high priests, and it has really been helpful to me.” I was glad I followed through on the prompting to type up that list. But when you receive inspiration about something that you are pondering, treasuring, searching for in the scriptures, and likening to yourself, write it down.

Next, start looking at other information. When I began teaching, I was in a five-week training program for seminary teachers, and one of the Twelve would come to instruct us every week. I was influenced greatly by something that Elder Marion G. Romney said: “When I study the gospel, I want to go to the pure spring. I do not want to get a drink downstream where the cows have been walking through it.”

RE: *What types of things should we be reading ourselves full of? What should we stay away from that would muddy the water?*

Tyler: Avoid searching for or sharing the ways of the world. In the Church, we should stay with the scriptures and the living prophets. You may want to read from some of the academic sources for background and commentary, but you should not read from them in the classroom. I go to *Strong’s Concordance* and look up the original Hebrew and Greek words, as well as their definitions in English. We should avoid books that we know are intellectually based and not spiritually based. Dummelow’s *One Volume Bible Commentary* was written by believers, men who had a great love for Christ, and it shows through in what they wrote. We have to be very careful not to introduce nonbelieving information into classes. I don’t care what the opposition has to say. In some classes, very educated abstract thinkers will teach the class using peripheral, extraneous material they found on the Internet, and they will hardly ever get to the teachings of the Prophet Joseph.

RE: *A teacher only has thirty minutes. It seems that, by using that peripheral material, we are shortchanging those who come to be spiritually uplifted or who want to be fed or confirmed in their testimony.*

Tyler: Exactly. Staying with the focus and the basic information in the lesson is vital. I attended a lesson in which the instructor talked about a principle taught by the Prophet Joseph. He then asked a man in the class who had grown up in a family of another faith to say what that church teaches about

the idea. We spent only the last three minutes of class discussing the teachings of the Prophet Joseph; the other man had spent the majority of the time telling us what other religions believed. Those points had nothing to do with the lesson or the truth—in fact, they were diametrically opposed to the truth.

RE: Are there particular questions you can ask that will help you connect with the students? How do you create a mutual respect in the classroom and encourage people to share ideas?

Tyler: I ask the question “How do you feel about that?” If these young people have been baptized and have the gift of the Holy Ghost, then the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost will be working in them. Some will be more in tune than others, but as a teacher, I want to find out what the Spirit is whispering to them. These students, particularly teenagers, are going through a period of time when they emerge into independence and begin to leave the direct influence of their parents’ telling them how to run their lives. But the Spirit does not abandon them. If they pray like every Latter-day Saint should, that they may have his Spirit to be with them, they will feel the Spirit, even if they sometimes don’t recognize it. As a teacher, I want to find out what the students understand about an idea I present from the scriptures. For instance, I will say, “Alma teaches this. How do you feel about what he said? Have you had an experience like Alma’s?” Half of the time, those students have already had a spiritual experience with a spiritual principle in one form or another.

RE: Will they answer you?

Tyler: Sure they will. Typically, you will have some students who are more open to talking than others, and you need to gently guide the discussion so they do not dominate the class. If you know your students well and you have a relationship of trust with them, you can ask questions like, “Mary, how do you feel about that? Do you have a thought about that?” We shouldn’t ask questions to prompt students to regurgitate whether or not they got the information. We want to know how they feel and what has sunk into their hearts about the lesson. The best questions are those that ask the students to liken the ideas to themselves or that invite the spirit of testimony. For example: “Do you have faith in that principle? Do you have a testimony of it? Have you seen it operate in your life? In your parents’ or friends’ lives? How do you feel about that principle functioning in your life? What do you understand that principle to be? How is it significant? How can you apply it?” We can ask these kinds of questions rather than say, “Tell me what Alma said in verse 3

about how to do x , y , and z ,” when you just want them to feed information back to you.

RE: What if they won't answer? What are some potential reasons why they won't participate?

Tyler: It can be for a number of reasons. On that day their minds may be more focused on a school football game or a school project or activity. Maybe they have had little experience with the topic. It may be that the teacher has only explained the principle vaguely, and it still hasn't registered with them. The students could be shy, or they may be nervous or hesitant to speak publicly, or they may have come from unsettling experiences at home. There can be a thousand different reasons. Generally speaking, in our classes, someone will respond to the questions, but teachers have to have a personal connection with their students. Some students need gentle nudging to respond.

RE: How do you know what to discuss in a class? How do you narrow down all the possible information?

Tyler: Generally, the Spirit will guide you to a focus or emphasis.

RE: Will that happen before class or during class?

Tyler: Both, but it generally happens before class. That's why when you have a flow of clarity of thought about a lesson you have been pondering, you should jot down the ideas. I carry a notebook with me. For example, "What it means to take upon you the name of Christ"—I might have five ideas that occurred to me while pondering the issue. I would jot these things down; I may or may not use them. As another example, I will be teaching a lesson on Sunday about testimony. As I was reviewing the material today, five key ideas came to my mind. These ideas flowed as I studied the information, so I jotted down some key ideas, questions, personal experiences, and insights I have gained to help me remember how those principles have affected me. When I go into the class and maybe write the questions on the board, there may be a student who will come into the class and say what he has been thinking about, and all of a sudden, the class is taking a different drift. Or maybe of the five questions I have written down, we end up spending two-thirds of the class on only one of them. That is why I take comfort in what the Lord says in section 100 of the Doctrine and Covenants: "For it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say" (D&C 100:6). We have to be open to fluctuating and varying our lessons. When teachers give five classes a day with the same subject matter, they have five classes with five different class

personalities. Every one of them is different, because the Spirit will be adapting each class to the circumstances of the students.

RE: That can be scary for some teachers to have their outlines ready and then have students take the class in a different direction.

Tyler: Yes, if they are too bound to the information. One thing that has helped me is that David O. McKay said that if a student leaves a class with one idea that inspires him to live a noble life that week, it's worth the class. We come out of the educational world—the culture in which we live tries to get us to absorb all the information we can. That's the focus of “covering the material.” In a gospel class, covering the material is not the purpose. The purpose is to gain knowledge and then apply it to our lives, to have our faith and trust in the Lord reaffirmed and our commitment to live the principle ignited in our hearts. We should walk out of the classroom saying, “I'm going to do that,” which is a completely different result from just the absorption of information.

Teachers can quickly become nervous if they aren't keeping the airwaves filled or if the students aren't responding immediately. We need to not be too quick to jump in and fill in the spaces. If you ask the students to think about something, give them a moment to think about it. In a Know Your Religion class or an Education Week class, you are trying to get through a lot of material, but in a seminary class, you should give the students an opportunity to ponder. Most classes you teach will have at least a couple of students who will respond. Really, in this regard, a class with three to five students may be a little more problematic than a class of ten to fifteen students would be.

RE: Are there other things you like to cover with new teachers or counsel that you would give? What are recurring themes you see that need to be addressed on a larger scale?

Tyler: I would encourage new teachers to do some pondering, to reflect on great teachers in their own lives and what made them influential. They shouldn't try to emulate or copy the certain way a great teacher did something but ask what it was that this teacher did or how they did it. Over the years I made a list of forty different ways you can approach scripture. It is a product of my paying attention to how an idea came to me. Watch how the Spirit teaches. I think new teachers ought to watch effective teachers in their own lives when they are going to Primary, Sunday School, priesthood meeting, or Relief Society. When they feel the spirit of enlightenment and inspiration, they should pause and ask, what is bringing that on? What characteristic or

method of teaching is the Spirit using to get this principle communicated to me? Was it a personal story, bearing a powerful testimony, or asking a meaningful question and making a list of answers? When my mom was an influence for good in my life, what was it that she said and did? I think we try to teach these new teachers a lot of the mechanics of teaching, but the Spirit will teach you not only what to say but also how to teach it. The Lord is just as concerned about the methodology as he is about the content. We need to pay attention to both. I think it is helpful if a teacher ponders the lessons. A teacher in the seminary program cannot just take a minute or an hour to read the material: he or she has to allow the incubation process to occur. The mind needs to deliberate and ponder. I remember Elder Carlos E. Asay told me that as a young seminary teacher, he would allocate some time on a Sunday afternoon to go through and look at the lessons he had to teach at least a week ahead so that his mind could work on them.

***RE:** It sounds like you are saying that if you are just spending a little bit of time preparing for a lesson, you are only working your intellect, just learning the information so that you can regurgitate it later. But if you are going to tap into the Spirit, it sounds like you need to provide a construct in which the Spirit can come in and operate and build the lesson for you.*

Tyler: That's right.

***RE:** So if you want to be an effective teacher, it's an investment of time and energy and not just a mental exercise you go through by reviewing your material and creating your presentation.*

Tyler: You should pay attention and give the Spirit a chance to go through the process in which the Lord says to “study it out in your mind” (D&C 9:8) and then allow time for the Spirit to awaken your understanding and give direction in what to do with the students. I find that preparing for a class or a talk isn't just sitting down at the table, opening up my scriptures, and reading through the teacher's manual—it's a matter of pondering. My mom taught Primary for eighteen years in the same classroom. She also had two other teaching assignments in the ward. While she was ironing or cooking meals, she was thinking about her teaching. When I'm mowing the lawn, my mind is going through the class I have to teach on Sunday. I watch very little TV—I'm not criticizing people who do, but I do not have time for that. You have to turn off extraneous distractions so your mind can focus and ponder—you need quiet time. I find that in early morning hours, I wake up in the morning and lie in bed for half an hour while inspiration flows about

any number of things. The Lord says, “Retire to thy bed early . . . [and] arise early that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated” (D&C 88:124). Some of the best preparation time happens in the morning while I am just lying there pondering and thinking. That’s why I don’t like to go to bed late, as a general rule. Also, keep a pencil handy so you can write down key ideas as they flow.

RE: *Is there an element of trust in being a good teacher? How would trust factor into teaching, if at all?*

Tyler: First of all, you need to trust the Lord that he is going to be with you. Don’t walk into the classroom thinking that you have to do it by yourself. The Lord said to Abraham, “I will lead thee by my hand” (Abraham 1:18). I love what the Lord says in Isaiah 30. He is the teacher’s teacher. “Thou shalt weep no more: he [the Lord] will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry”—do we plead for him to help us?—“when he shall hear it, he will answer thee” (v.19). We all have problems in life, and teaching is not an easy thing. Despite the afflictions, adversities, and anxiety associated with teaching, the Lord says, “And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, . . . yet shall not thy teachers [the Lord] be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (vv. 20–21). That applies to the classroom. The Lord is there to teach and guide you through the class period, so you have to trust him.

I remember a story about Elder F. Enzo Busche I heard from Bruce Lake, a stake president and one of the assistant administrators that I worked with. Bruce went to a regional training meeting of priesthood leaders where Elder Boyd K. Packer and Elder Busche were the trainers. Elder Busche had a file of notes in his hand of things he wanted to say. As he walked past Elder Packer, Elder Packer said, “Enzio?” Elder Busche turned around to look at him, and Elder Packer took the file folder right out of his hand and said, “Now you go say what the Spirit teaches you.”

In February 2008, Elder Packer spoke to the seminary and institute teachers for over an hour on a Churchwide broadcast called *An Evening with a General Authority*. He had pondered, prayed, and made some notes, but he had only two or three key ideas. He spoke from his heart for over an hour, and it was powerful. He was modeling something teachers need to do.

Years ago, I was teaching for Education Week and Know Your Religion, and I felt I was getting stale as a teacher. I had these outlines I had been using for years. I would adapt them and add new information for different groups, but I was following the same general outlines. I started to think that I had about used up my time, that it was time for the younger teachers to come in and take over. The Spirit said, “No, put your outlines aside and let me teach you.” Now I prepare my heart and then walk into a teaching setting with my mind and heart wide open. It’s the Lord who is the teacher; I am only the instrument. If I go into a lesson with my mind completely decided on what I am going to do, the Spirit is less able to guide. Yes, it’s good to have some questions in mind. Sometimes I have handouts that I pass out, and sometimes I don’t. Sometimes I prepare them for one class and end up using them for another class a year later. But when you walk into the class, the Lord should take over. Since I have opened my mind and heart during my lessons, I have had greater freedom—the Lord prompts you with the questions you should ask. He brings to your mind examples, experiences, and scriptures that you had not even thought of in your preparation. We need to trust the Lord more in the moment we walk into the classroom.

Another thing I have learned is that students give devotionals. It’s common practice in seminary and institute classes. I have been teaching a class for the BYU Fourteenth Stake for four years now. The class president begins with an opening prayer and a hymn, and a student will give a devotional. Most of the time those students do not come with a devotional prepared. The class president will just ask if someone has a spiritual thought he or she would like to give. As the students come into the chapel, they see that I have on the chalkboard the key topic we are going to be discussing that day, along with one or two important ideas. As they sit there, their minds are already anticipating the lesson. Probably nine times out of ten, the class president asks, “Which one of you would like to give a spiritual thought?” Typically, the class title will have triggered something in their minds, and someone will come up and give the spiritual thought. In the last four years, more times than not, the launch point for the lesson has come from bearing testimony about the spiritual thought that the student has given. I will say, “I really appreciated that thought.” Then I will testify of the same principle if I have had experience with it. Sharing my thoughts and testimony after the student devotional launches the class into the lesson with greater effectiveness. Not only do these

devotionals start me into teaching by the Spirit but they also prepare the students to learn by the Spirit.

RE: Great idea. Do you want to add anything else?

Tyler: The older I have gotten, the more I have loosened up. I am less focused on disseminating information—that’s important—but I am more interested in having key ideas of how a particular doctrine applies in everyday life. That way, we can talk more about likening and bearing testimony of this doctrine. In my later years of teaching and studying, I have noticed a temptation. While we try to stay doctrinally basic to help us gain greater understanding, we are tempted to start getting into meatier topics and speculating. This speculation garbles and obscures truth. The devil likes to complicate things. The more you complicate things, the more you get out of tune with the Spirit. Bishop Robert L. Simpson once said something that impressed me greatly: “The more we complicate our lives, the more we discourage the gifts of the Spirit.”

RE: Testimony and likening seem to be topics you focus on often.

Tyler: Let’s talk about what a testimony is, but first let’s talk about what a testimony is not. A testimony is not a travelogue merely relating personal experiences without testifying of or sharing what truths we have gained from them. It is not necessarily relating a faith-promoting story, which we get a lot of in testimony meetings, or a tearjerking story or an expression of gratitude or love, even though those are part of a spiritual process. Testimonies are not confessions or just saying that you have a testimony. Some people get up and give a sermon on doctrine, but a testimony is not a talk. When you testify you may refer to doctrine, but your point is that you know from your personal experience that the doctrine is true. The purpose of bearing a testimony is to validate or verify that something is true so that those listening are uplifted, become converted to the gospel, and change their lives.

Now for what a proper testimony is. It must include three great truths: Jesus, the Prophet Joseph, and the Church are true. Those are very general, yes, but in a classroom you may teach a specific point or doctrine and bear testimony of it, like tithing. Bearing testimony is an essential point, in my estimation, of teaching in the Church. We come out of a culture of education in which imparting information or training in some skill is the primary focus of education. There are those who say that the focus of education is to enlarge or enhance our knowledge and understanding and to give substance, meaning, and enjoyment to life, and I agree with that. People read books

and novels; they search for knowledge out of the joy of learning. But in the Church the Lord makes it very clear that the purposes of education or teaching are to change lives, to help us to follow the Lord's pattern, and to help us become more Christlike. Because of these purposes, teaching is sometimes called wisdom. Wisdom is not merely knowledge but the proper application of knowledge through the assistance of the Spirit. In the Church, information dispensing is not the primary function of teaching. Teaching a truth so that people understand it, testifying of its correctness, and showing the application of that truth to our lives are the primary focus of teaching in the Church.

When our students are studying the Book of Mormon, we may have seven to ten chapters to cover in a forty-minute class period, so we need to be prompted by the Spirit to focus on a particular doctrine, one that touches the life of a student. We may appropriately briefly explain an overview of the historical content or story line. But then we focus on an applicable doctrine. For example, Alma, Captain Moroni, and Helaman with the two thousand stripling warriors were relating their experiences for a purpose. And usually they will tell you what the purpose is by using the phrase "And thus we see," or some variation of it. Those "And thus we see" statements are almost always accompanied by the spirit of testimony. When we are teaching the gospel, we seek the Spirit not just to review the storyline of that block of scripture but also to identify two or three key doctrines the scripture illustrates; we want to look first for the doctrine or purpose that the prophet had. I went through the Book of Mormon many years ago when I was traveling to and from Latin America. I read the Book of Mormon with no other purpose than to identify the statements in which the prophets explained why they were writing what they were writing. I marveled! I made a list of key phrases, and it turned out to be several pages long. Over ninety times the prophets said, "I am writing this for this reason." So first we can identify the principle the prophet was inspired to write about in that block of scripture by looking for the phrase "And thus we see."

The next stage is to bear testimony of that principle. Explain the doctrine so that it is understandable. A typical forty-minute Sunday School class gives you time for a maximum of three ideas. You can look at what the prophet said and at the storyline or the experience in which that principle was being taught to the prophet or the people. You can often explain the doctrine with what the prophet has said, and then you bear testimony that the doctrine is true. The final stage is to liken the principle to yourself by asking, "How does that

doctrine apply to me?” In the process of doing those three things, you invite class members to share their experiences, their insights, and their testimonies. It is important that a teacher understand the key point of doctrine that the prophet is emphasizing in a block of scripture. For example, in Alma 31–34, Alma is teaching the Zoramites, who have drifted from the truth that the Savior is real and that they need to trust in him. Instead of climbing up on the Rameumptum and giving a formalized prayer, the Zoramites needed to learn to know the Savior. Amulek bore testimony of the reality of the Savior, and I bear that same testimony as a teacher and help my students understand what we do to apply this doctrine. Then in Alma 34, Amulek gives a sermon about prayer: “Cry over the flocks of your fields. . . . Pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places” (Alma 34:25–26). Prayer is the application of trusting in the Savior. So that block of scripture is a very powerful example of how teachers can teach the doctrine, present the experience the prophets had while learning the doctrine, bear testimony of the doctrine’s truth, and ask if anybody else in the class wants a chance to testify. Teachers can ask questions like “Have any of you had an experience applying this doctrine in your life? Would you tell us about it?” Or when they are teaching the doctrine itself, teachers can ask the question “How do you understand this doctrine?” This question gives teachers a sense of how the students perceive the doctrine. We have a lot of clichéd and generalized notions about doctrine in the Church. Robert J. Matthews has said that “many members of the Church are content with casual and approximate explanations of doctrine.” Instead, I like to help students focus on how the prophets teach the doctrine.

One of the most rewarding experiences for me has been to examine how the doctrine of faith, putting your trust in the Lord, was taught in the Old Testament culture, how it was taught in the Book of Mormon, how the Savior taught it in the Gospels, how Paul tried to teach it to the intellectual Greeks, how James and John tried to clarify Paul’s teachings to those Saints so they understood faith more clearly as an experience of not only believing in a principle but applying that principle and acting on it, and how latter-day prophets have taught it. The teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith describe faith and trusting in the Lord in different language than do the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants. It is fascinating to see how different prophets describe the same truth. And in the classroom setting, the value of involving the students is that everyone looks at a doctrine from a different point of view because of his or her experiences. By

sharing their insights in the spirit of truth and by bearing testimony, students can expand their understanding of a principle.

I appreciate the training I had in the 1970s from Dr. Anthony Gregork. The University of Connecticut had been researching how the mind observes and absorbs and processes information and then how people act on that information. Dr. Gregork came up with four general personality types or ways the mind functions. Some years later, the seminary program came out with an editorial in one of their teacher bulletins describing in different language the same kind of personality types. When we teach the gospel, we have to realize that some people are very task oriented: they ask the practical question “What can I do to apply this principle?” Other people are abstract thinkers, and they will process the principle mentally and try to relate it to other things that their minds have worked on. Another type of student is the people person. These students are not task oriented or intellectual, but they relate to stories about people. The fourth category is those who are more artistic, who will look at the aesthetic nature of what they are learning. Though we all have all four of the personality types in us, one type tends to be more dominant.

In the scriptures, particularly in the Book of Mormon, prophets usually explain an idea or doctrine in a way that addresses all four general learning styles. A prophet teaches an idea, and the abstract thinker says, “Ah yes, I can understand that.” Then the prophet explains what we should do because of this idea. The task-oriented thinker says, “Now that is what I can go after.” But the people person sees the whole experience in terms of people and says, “I love the way that Alma was so kind and loving to the people.” The artistic learner listens to the story, doctrine, or idea and says, “My life will be more beautiful. Don’t you love the poetry Alma used as he expressed this idea?” Most of the Lord’s explanations in the scriptures, even in the Doctrine and Covenants, will cover all four learning styles as the Lord teaches a principle.

These different learning styles make it valuable for a teacher to invite class members to share their thoughts and feelings. The teacher may be more intellectual or abstract in nature and may not present a principle in a way that connects with a people person. But another student attending the class may understand what the teacher is saying and bear testimony of that principle if he has had experience with it. When that student likens the principle to himself and shares his experiences, he then identifies with the doctrine more clearly because of that testimony’s orientation around people. So it’s vital that we teach and share in a classroom setting. Ever since I learned about different

learning styles and the seminary program taught us the same principle with slightly different labels, I have tried to consciously address all four learning styles in the course of a lesson. I present the doctrine, bear witness that it is true, and then explain it to the students. The abstract thinker begins to understand what I am teaching when I cross-reference the doctrine to the way three other prophets explained it. Then I show how Alma applied that principle to the people, and the people person then sees how the doctrine makes sense. Then I tell the students how we can apply this doctrine and the lesson now makes sense to the task-oriented person. Then toward the end of my explanation, I show a little poetic style, or I explain that as we apply the doctrine, it beautifies our lives. The artistic person loves the power and beauty of that part of the lesson. In this way I cover all four general learning styles in the course of the lesson.

We can also use those four learning styles as we bear testimony by following this pattern: “Here is the doctrine and here is what it means. I know it is true. I have had this experience. This is how it has affected or blessed my life.” By sharing experiences or by pondering, studying, and receiving spiritual insight, we can bear testimony in a way that applies to all four general learning styles.

Another principle I have found to be vital is learning to liken appropriately. Nephi said, “I did liken it unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). In verse 24 he repeats the idea by saying, “Liken them unto yourselves, that ye may have hope.” I had the experience of going to a sacrament meeting once in which the bishop had asked his two counselors to speak on the doctrine of repentance. It was one of the most disheartening, hopeless, and despairing sacrament meetings I have ever attended. By the end of the sacrament meeting, I knew I would never make it to the celestial kingdom. I was not feeling uplifted and edified as I should have been after hearing about the doctrine of repentance. I noticed there was a despairing sense to the whole congregation. The closing hymn was sung almost like a funeral march. On the way home, my wife asked, “Why am I so depressed? I go to sacrament meeting to be uplifted.” I pondered and prayed about why that sacrament meeting had been so negative. I looked at the scriptures that the counselors in the bishopric had used. The congregation was composed of faithful, tithe-paying, striving, temple-attending people, but every scripture about repentance the counselors used was directed toward rebellious, wicked,

and apostate people. That experience was an eye-opener to me about how to liken properly.

As I have looked through the Book of Mormon, I have found that prophets identify the people they are speaking to. In Jacob 2, Jacob is at the temple, by assignment of the Spirit, to call a number of men to repentance who were getting involved in greed and not being morally true to their wives. Jacob says, “Also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God; and it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul” (Jacob 2:7–8). But he says later in the chapter, “It burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained . . . to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded [by your wickedness], instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds” (v. 9). Jacob knew exactly the audience he was addressing.

Then in chapter 3, Jacob says, “But behold, I, Jacob, would speak unto you that are pure in heart. Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction. O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever” (vv. 1–2). That scripture is an example of the tone of voice used when speaking to the righteous.

In section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith writes, “What do we hear in the gospel which we have received? A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from heaven; and a voice of truth out of the earth; glad tidings for the dead; a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad tidings of great joy” (v. 19). He uses the words *glad* or *gladness* four times in that verse. Then he talks about the angels that come, “giving line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little; giving us consolation by holding forth that which is to come, confirming our hope! Brethren, shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward not backward. Courage, brethren; and on, on to the victory! Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (vv. 21–22). We do not have enough of that uplifting spirit in our teaching. I discovered in

that sacrament meeting many years ago that we can be overly negative when we read a scripture and do not pay attention to the context or the audience that the prophet is speaking to.

I have found that there are five categories of people the prophets speak to. The first group is the righteous. The prophets speak to them with a voice of hope and a voice of gladness, with encouragement and mercy.

The second group is those who are wandering and straying from their covenants. The prophets speak to them in a positive tone of exhortation. We would call it encouragement with the invitation to return. To this group Alma bore down in pure testimony when he stirred up the Zoramites in remembrance of their duty. Then he observed that the preaching of the word had a more powerful effect than the sword as they used the virtue of the word with those who were straying from the covenants (see Alma 3:1-5).

The third group is those who are honest in heart or who are searching for the truth and know not where to find it. The prophets simply present these people with the truth, tell them to have hope and mercy, and assure them that the truth is a voice of gladness. These people who were searching for truth find it, and because of the positive voice of gladness and hope the prophets used, they are eager to embrace it. So as a general rule, we must bear our testimonies to people in a positive, edifying, uplifting, and encouraging tone.

The fourth group is those in a deep sleep in the midst of darkness. To those people who do not know the spiritual danger they are in, we should use a warning voice: "This is the word of the Lord. This is what we need to be doing. Be careful." This tone is more direct, not as warm, positive, and encouraging as other tones are. Often, prophets use the word *woe* to warn people and to get them to wake up and pay attention.

But the final group that the prophets speak to is people like those of the city of Ammonihah, the followers of Nehor, and the people of Sherem. To these people the prophets speak as directly and firmly as they possibly can, and they conclude with their testimonies and the voice of hope. The prophets tell these people to set aside their sins and come unto the Savior, but they do not mince words. Those who have known the truth and have turned from it become more hardened than if had they never had the gospel. That is why the prophets bear down on these people so powerfully, as when Jacob spoke to the wayward brethren at the temple in Jacob 2. After I became aware of the idea of likening appropriately, I went back and reviewed the scriptures that the counselors in the sacrament meeting had used. Almost every one of those

scriptures was directed to the wayward, the rebellious, the drifting, or those who had apostatized. The counselors were likening those scriptures to a group of temple-going tithe-payers, a completely different group than the prophets were addressing.

RE: Do you think the counselors could not find scriptures that were applicable to their audience?

Tyler: I don't think they understood the audience to whom the prophet was speaking. You have to know the original audience. Instead of listening to the radio, I like to listen to the scriptures when I drive around town. Isaiah and the Psalmist, for instance, know who they are speaking to in a certain block of scripture. Though the scriptures make clear who the original audience is, we have not taught one another in the Church which one of these groups the prophets are addressing.

RE: How would the counselors have found scriptures on repentance that could have been used for the righteous?

Tyler: Alma speaks to seven or eight different groups and identifies who they are as he speaks to them. The first group he speaks to is after the order of Nehor, apostates who should know better than to be sinful. Then he goes to the people of Zarahemla, those who are wandering and starting to drift from the truth. He gives them a list of forty to fifty questions, like a long temple recommend interview, and asks them to compare themselves to the list and assess where they are spiritually. Then Alma travels to the city of Gideon, where the people are very faithful and are striving to live righteously. Alma compliments them on their faithfulness. The Spirit tells him that the people of Gideon are on the right track and are doing well spiritually, and Alma tells them so. Then he leaves Gideon and goes over to the city of Ammonihah, where there are more apostates. Then the scriptures shift to the story of Ammon and his brethren, who go on a mission to the Lamanites, those who are in a deep sleep in the midst of darkness. The Lamanites have been influenced by the false traditions of their fathers, and some of them are complete apostates. Some of them are honest in heart but do not know where to find the truth. Ammon and his brethren convert a number of people from those groups. The tone in which they speak to the people is based on where the people are.

RE: As teachers in the Church, we are teaching a spectrum of hearts and minds. If your audience is honest with themselves, hopefully they will liken our

lessons appropriately. Chances are that if they are in sacrament meeting or seminary or institute, their hearts are already right before the Lord.

Tyler: Yes.

RE: *Any additional thoughts?*

Tyler: The Prophet Joseph Smith once said, “I teach them correct principles and then they govern themselves.” Elder Jacob de Jager quoted this statement and said jovially, “That is the *Reader’s Digest* condensed version. What the Prophet Joseph Smith really said was, ‘I teach and I teach and I teach and I teach and I teach, and *finally* they begin to govern themselves.’” We have to review doctrine constantly with our students. We never arrive at a full understanding in this life, and a teacher should not feel hesitant to rehearse a basic truth that he thinks everybody already knows. Often by rehearsing and revisiting an idea or doctrine, we deepen or broaden our understanding, and we enjoy a spirit of recommitment to that idea or doctrine. Human nature tends to drift. With the pressures of life and temptation all around us, we get caught up in the things of this world. So it is very appropriate and wise to keep teaching and repeating seemingly understood doctrine. In both reading the Book of Mormon and in teaching it, some people will recognize a familiar story and sometimes tend to minimize its importance. Sometimes those who are strongly intellectually oriented want to find some new wrinkle in the scriptures, but the new wrinkle ought to be an expanded understanding of basic doctrine. We have to consistently revisit basic doctrine. Why does the Lord have us partake of the sacrament every Sabbath day? To recharge our spiritual batteries! President David O. McKay said that if a student comes away from the classroom with one idea that recharges his spiritual battery, it has been worth the effort. President Spencer W. Kimball said to BYU seminary and institute teachers in 1968, “When you look at the dictionary for the most important word, do you know what it is? It could be ‘remember.’ Because all of you have made covenants, all of you know what to do and you know how to do it. Our greatest need is to remember. That is why everybody goes to sacrament meeting every Sabbath day—to take the sacrament and listen to the priests pray that ‘they may always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them.’ Nobody should ever forget to go to sacrament meeting. Remember is the word.”¹ In the Book of Mormon, the word *remember* or some other form of it is used 220 times, on almost every other page. There are three sermons that really emphasize the idea of remembering. First, Nephi quotes Isaiah in 2 Nephi 27:6–10, provides some

commentary on this passage, and then gives in chapter 29 eight things for readers to remember, eight things that he wants us to keep in mind. Second, in Helaman 5, Helaman gives a sermon to Nephi and Lehi about remembering: “I have given unto you the names of our first parents . . . that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know . . . that they were good” (v. 6). Finally, Moroni concludes Moroni 10 with eight statements of exhortation. He exhorts us to “remember these things” (v. 27). The idea of remembering is essential. **RE**

Notes

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Circles of Exaltation,” address to religious educators, Brigham Young University, June 28, 1968, 8.