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Elder Neil L. Andersen

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## *A Classroom of Faith, Hope, and Charity*

ELDER NEIL L. ANDERSEN

Elder Neil L. Andersen is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

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*The following address was given to Church Educational System religious educators on February 28, 2014, at the Salt Lake Tabernacle.*

**T**he seminaries, institutes, and schools of the Church are amazing blessings from heaven. You are a remarkable army of faith-filled, devoted men and women, unified in the great purpose of teaching and preparing our youth. This broadcast, translated into twenty-five languages, will reach more than 45,000 teachers and associates in 137 countries. There are 725,000 students enrolled in seminaries and institutes around the world. There are also more than 40,000 students enrolled in religious education classes in the Church schools of higher education.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is fulfilling its prophetic destiny—growing and strengthening to include every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. You are a most important part of the stone, cut without hands, rolling forth to fill the whole earth.

The First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, and mothers and fathers across the world are so very thankful for you. We know the goodness

of your lives. You keep the commandments; you pray and seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Your righteous influence leads young men and women to privately go to their knees and sincerely speak to their Heavenly Father. You diligently reach out to students who are not quite listening or whose decisions are leading them into treacherous waters. We love you, we pray for you, and we thank you for your noble work. The Lord calls His very best to teach the rising generation.

In my talk in October general conference, I mentioned Kathy's call to be an early-morning seminary teacher. We had been married only four years and were living in Clearwater, Florida. We had two children, ages three and one, and I had just started a new job only two months earlier. The community high schools were on double session, requiring seminary to begin at 5:00 a.m. We lived thirty minutes from the ward chapel.

As the member of the stake presidency talked to me about extending a call to Kathy as the early-morning seminary teacher, I raised these issues with him. He assured me that the stake presidency had been thoughtful in their decision, so I raised what I considered an impossible obstacle.

"With me serving as the ward Young Men president," I explained, "I am often with the youth at night, making any thought of her early-morning service difficult to imagine."

The stake president's counselor smiled, not hesitating for a moment. "That will be no problem, Brother Andersen," he explained. "We will release you and call her." And that's exactly what they did.

We live in an important time in the history of our planet. Let us remember that those who sit in your classrooms are some of the most spiritually sensitive sons and daughters of God that have ever entered mortality. I like these words from President George Q. Cannon, who served in the First Presidency: "God has reserved spirits for this dispensation who have the courage and determination to face the world and all the powers of the evil one, visible and invisible, to proclaim the gospel and maintain the truth and establish and build up the Zion of our God fearless of all consequences. He has sent these spirits in this generation to lay the foundation of Zion never more to be overthrown, and to raise up a seed that will be righteous, and that will honor God, and honor Him supremely, and be obedient to Him under all circumstances."<sup>1</sup> The young men and women in your classes are these spirits. They are the hope of the future.

As you know, education in Korea is very important, and many students attend school or study classes from 8:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night. Even with that schedule, students attend early-morning seminary at 6:00 a.m. Their motto: "We will not be defined by our education but by our faith in Christ."

Aren't they exceptional! Your students are exceptional too!

One student in Tonga said about her seminary teacher: "Brother Solomoni is a great man of God. He has taught me that how much we learn is not as important as applying what we know. The amount of knowledge is less important than what we do with the knowledge we have."

You have enormous influence on the lives of the youth. We were in Fiji with Elder O. Vincent Haleck and Sister Peggy Ann Haleck. Elder Haleck is a General Authority serving in the Pacific Area Presidency. He told us of his first experience with a seminary teacher. He was born and has lived his life in American Samoa, but before he was a member of the Church and while attending high school in California, he was invited to attend seminary. He described his first impression of the seminary teacher who taught that 5:30 a.m. class: "The man was dressed in a nice suit and was very engaging. He was so excited, and it was so early in the morning, I asked my friend if the teacher was on medication or some other stimuli. It was my first exposure to the Book of Mormon, and I was captivated by the power of his teaching. I began from then on to attend each morning. Later, when I began taking the missionary lessons, reading the Book of Mormon was very natural because of the lasting impression left by my seminary teacher."

I want to speak to you about creating an increased spirit of faith, hope, and charity in your classroom. In the final chapter of the Book of Mormon, Moroni speaks of these eternal virtues:

Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope; and if there must be hope there must also be charity.

And except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God; neither can ye be saved in the kingdom of God if ye have not faith; neither can ye if ye have no hope.<sup>2</sup>

Faith, hope, and charity—beautiful words of heaven. I know you teach these principles, and I pray that my message tonight will help you in your teaching.

I begin with faith in God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The development of faith is principally the responsibility of each individual son or daughter of God, but one of your great opportunities is to be an important

part of this process. You encourage faith, explain faith, show the fruits of faith, and bear testimony of your own faith so that every student listening knows that you speak from the heart.

In the parable of the sower in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, the Lord spoke about seeds: some fell by the way, some fell among stony places, others fell among thorns, and some fell upon good ground.<sup>3</sup> The Savior then interpreted the parable: “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and *understandeth it not*, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.”<sup>4</sup>

Our responsibility is to help each student understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. When there is understanding, the seed is in good ground. The Savior added this verse: “He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and *understandeth it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”<sup>5</sup> From Proverbs we read, “With all thy getting get understanding.”<sup>6</sup>

Spiritual understanding rarely comes from a lecture. It comes in classrooms where questions are welcome, where doubts and fears can be expressed, and where honest opinions are never dismissed. It comes from obedience, private study, and prayer. Spiritually, the classroom of faith becomes less like a lecture hall and more like a fitness center. Students do not get stronger by watching someone else do the exercises. They learn and then participate. As their spiritual strength increases, they gain confidence and apply themselves all the more.

The Savior taught by listening and observing. After teaching and healing the multitude, He fed them.<sup>7</sup> To the woman caught in adultery, He wrote in the sand.<sup>8</sup> Before He healed the daughter of the leader of the synagogue, He asked those who did not believe to leave the house.<sup>9</sup> And to Caiaphas, the high priest, He said nothing.<sup>10</sup>

Elder Neal A. Maxwell summarized effective teaching in these words: “Do not be afraid of repetitious teaching. Ask inspired questions. Typically, but not always, two-way dialogue is better than one-way monologue.”<sup>11</sup> Use the scriptures; share simple stories, parables, and real-life examples; ask questions; invite students to teach and to share their feelings; encourage them to act in faith and to report on what they are learning. Keep your teaching centered in the doctrine. Alma taught, “Therefore God gave unto them commandments, *after* having made known unto them the plan of

redemption.”<sup>12</sup> Commandments are best understood in the context of the doctrine of Christ.

In your training and curriculum materials, as well as in the new youth curriculum, *Come, Follow Me*, the First Presidency has emphasized nine doctrinal principles. Do you know them? Let me list them: the Godhead; the Plan of Salvation; the Atonement of Jesus Christ; Dispensations, Apostasy, and the Restoration; Prophets and Revelation; Priesthood and Priesthood Keys; Ordinances and Covenants; Marriage and Family; and Commandments.

Let your teaching always be centered in the doctrine. Faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end—this is the doctrine of Christ.<sup>13</sup> If you are not sure what to teach, speak of Christ. Speak of the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of Christ, His life, His death, His Resurrection, and His magnificent Atonement. And, my dear brothers and sisters, continue to build and strengthen your own faith in Christ as you follow the same principles you are teaching to your students.

Next I turn to a classroom of increased hope. Faith in Christ brings hope. We increase hope in Christ as we help our young brothers and sisters to better see why they are on earth and what awaits them in the future. This is a wonderful time to live upon the earth. The youth you teach live at a time that has long been anticipated. The gospel is restored in its fulness. Part of their responsibility in mortality is to help prepare for the Savior’s return.

As prophesied, the times prior to the breathtaking events of the Savior’s return are to be days of deceit, iniquity, commotion, and confusion.<sup>14</sup> President Thomas S. Monson has said, “Evolving at a rapid rate has been the moral compass of society. Behaviors which once were considered inappropriate and immoral are now not only tolerated but also viewed by ever so many as acceptable.”<sup>15</sup> [He also said,] “Where once the standards of the Church and the standards of society were mostly compatible, now there is a wide chasm between us, and it’s growing ever wider.”<sup>16</sup>

Brigham Young prophesied, “It was revealed to me in the commencement of this Church, that the Church would spread, prosper, grow and extend, and that in proportion to the spread of the Gospel among the nations of the earth, so would the power of Satan rise.”<sup>17</sup>

Our days are not unexpected days, and the Lord has provided for our spiritual safety and for the safety of our students. As evil increases in the world, there is a compensatory power of revelation and spiritual gifts given

to the righteous. The Lord gives us added power as we are willing to remain righteous in a wicked world.

When I was the age of your students, there were only 13 temples in the entire world. With the upcoming temple dedication in Gilbert, Arizona, this Sunday, and in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in early May, there will be 143 operating temples. Now 85 percent of the membership of the Church live within 200 miles of an operating temple. There are 27 more temples that are under construction or in design. The blessings of the temple are one compensatory gift to this generation.

With temples has also come technology, and with technology the blessing of more fully turning the hearts of the children to the fathers. This past year, for the first time, we have been able to see our generations online. Earlier at the RootsTech conference here in Salt Lake City, I encouraged the youth to prepare as many names for the temple as baptisms they perform in the temple.<sup>18</sup> It is a noble goal. I would challenge your students to embrace this same goal to prepare as many names for the temple as baptisms they perform in the temple. I invite you to visit LDS.org and explore the RootsTech conference. There is spiritual power in tying our youth more completely to their fathers.

Another blessing we have today is the power to hear and learn from modern-day prophets. The general conference talks are instantly available. These are the words of the Lord for us in our day. My friend Marcelo Saito, who is the director of the Osasco Institute in São Paulo, Brazil, recently wrote me about how he prays to know how to link the scriptures he is teaching with the words of the prophets. This has led his students to take closer notes during general conference and to better apply the teachings to their daily lives. The words of the prophets carry faith and assurance, and their counsel and direction are sustained by the powers of heaven.<sup>19</sup> These blessings, along with many, many others, allow us to be firm and true in a world whose spiritual moorings are deteriorating.

Symbolically, you are like a force helping young trees to grow in a very windy place. In nature, trees that grow up in a windy environment have compensating strengths. As wind whips a young sapling, forces inside the tree do two things. First, they stimulate the roots to grow faster and spread farther. Second, the forces in the tree start creating cell structures that make the trunk and branches thicker and more flexible to the pressure of the wind. You, like the forces in a tree, help stimulate deeper spiritual roots and a stronger resolve to resist temptation.

As the world grows darker, the light of the truth shines brighter. As the hearts of men become colder, the warmth of the Savior's peace burns stronger. As the noise of tempting voices shout louder, the still, small voice of the Spirit comes with even greater clarity. As evil increases in the world, the Lord sends the power of revelation and spiritual gifts for the righteous.

Teach our sons and daughters that there is an important work for them to do. You will remember the Lord speaking to Moses while he was yet a young man. He said, "I have a work for thee, Moses."<sup>20</sup> The Lord has a work for each of those in your classroom. To prepare Moses for his important role, the Lord showed him "the world and the ends thereof, and all the children of men which are, and which were created."<sup>21</sup> He saw worlds without number.

We can imagine just an inkling of what he saw as we look at the beautiful images transmitted back to earth through the Hubble space telescope. In 1996, astronomers pointed the telescope to a black, empty space and opened it for ten days, hoping to capture light that had been traveling for more than thirteen billion years. When the telescope closed and the images were processed, more than three thousand galaxies were discovered. Each of the galaxies contained hundreds of millions of stars. The Lord said unto Moses, "The heavens, they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine."<sup>22</sup> When the presence of God withdrew from Moses, Moses "fell [to] the earth." It was "many hours before Moses [regained] his natural strength . . . ; and he said unto himself: Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed."<sup>23</sup>

As our students realize the greatness of God and that God is their Father, hope increases. That hope is magnified in His Son, Jesus Christ.

You will remember that Moses was left alone and that Satan came tempting him, saying, "Moses, son of man, worship me."<sup>24</sup>

But Moses confronted Satan: "I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him. But I can look upon thee [as a] natural man."<sup>25</sup>

Moses realized that while he was nothing, he was somebody. He declared, "For God said unto me: Thou art after the similitude of mine Only Begotten."<sup>26</sup> Moses realized that compared with God, he was nothing. Yet, because he was a son of God, he was of eternal value.

This is the hope that we must have in our classrooms. There is no need for despair. We are sons and daughters of God. His Only Begotten Son is our Savior and Redeemer. As we love Him, He will lift us above our troubles.

As we repent, He will forgive us. Because of Him, we will be resurrected. As we live worthily, we will be washed clean and return to our Father forever. As your students realize the indescribable power and greatness of God, combined with their value as sons and daughters of God, they develop spiritual balance. They recognize their dependence upon God, but also their accountability before Him, the importance of their own choices and of what they may become. In Christ hope comes alive.

We now turn to a classroom of increased charity. “Charity is the pure love of Christ.”<sup>27</sup> Moroni’s father, Mormon, twice declared, “If ye have not charity, ye are nothing.”<sup>28</sup> No matter how articulate you are, how well you prepare, and how talented you are in relating to youth, without the pure love of Christ you will not succeed. As your soul is filled with the pure love of Christ, your spiritual gifts are magnified and you are better able to reach your students.

Christ is our example, and we follow Him. We seek to love God and others as He did. In the new youth curriculum, the emphasis is to teach in the Savior’s way. I quote from the guide:

He loved them, prayed for them, and continually served them. He found opportunities to be with them and to express His love. He knew their interests, hopes, and desires and what was happening in their lives.

He knew who they were and who they could become. He found unique ways to help them learn and grow—ways meant just for them. When they struggled, He did not give up on them but continued to love them and minister to them.<sup>29</sup>

I know this is how you approach your students, and I commend you for it. Let me give you four quick examples of teachers full of charity.

As a high school student, I participated in released-time seminary at Highland High School in Pocatello, Idaho. A book was given to me by my seminary teacher, Brother Richard Clark, when I was a junior in high school. It was 1967. I had received a very small recognition in the state of Idaho. He could have given me a simple verbal acknowledgment, but he showed his love in a much more impactful way. Brother Clark wrote on the inside of the well-worn book, “We are very proud of you and of this honor [that has] come to such a fine person.” And following his name, he invited all my classmates to sign the book as a token of their friendship with me. Seventy-nine students signed the book with him and expressed their thoughts of congratulations and support. Even after forty-five years, the book continues to be an expression of love from my seminary teacher and my fellow students. You can imagine how

I listened to my seminary teacher, Brother Clark, as he testified of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mentioned Kathy’s call to be an early-morning seminary teacher. She would arise every morning at 4:00 a.m. for her seminary class that began at 5:00 at the chapel, thirty minutes from our home in Clearwater, Florida. She was expecting our third child and was often sick as she taught her students. She always picked up two or three students on her way to the chapel and taught with great devotion and faith. In the years since that time, I have marveled at the gratefulness of those young students who felt of her goodness. Their feelings toward her echo the feelings expressed about another seminary teacher: “We could warm our hands by the fire of [her] faith.”<sup>30</sup>

For my third example, let me again emphasize the First Presidency’s inspired direction in introducing the youth curriculum, *Come, Follow Me*. Sister Carole Gates, a seminary teacher in Las Vegas, Nevada, wrote me: “In using the principles from *Come, Follow Me*, our class is having amazing experiences. [My] students . . . [are] sharing their feelings and insights [much more freely]. Where we once had five who would readily share their feelings, we now have ten to twelve.”

Sister Gates then gave me this example from her class: “Our class was discussing John 18–19 . . . [how] Pilate . . . was swayed by the crowd . . . against his own feelings and . . . his wife’s warning. . . . [The students] had a rousing discussion about . . . evil crowds that influence us today [and] encourage us to change our minds . . . despite what we know to be true. . . . Even my students who never say a word had something to share. [They encouraged] each other to choose [the] right and [testified] of the power that comes with their own right choices.”<sup>31</sup>

Please use these divine principles of *Come, Follow Me* to strengthen your own teaching. They are exactly the principles you are being trained on in seminaries and institutes and at our Church colleges and universities.

When this charity, the pure love of Christ, is in the classroom and in our relationships, there is a spirit of trust and openness. Brother Russell T. Osguthorpe, general Sunday School president, described an experience in Oaxaca, Mexico, where he saw this spirit of charity in the classroom: “[The teacher] began by explaining the doctrine of eternal families. She asked the class to share blessings they were experiencing as members of their own families. One young woman began to cry as she expressed her gratitude for her parents. Others expressed their gratitude. Then a young man sitting on

the back row became very emotional as he said, ‘I don’t want a family like mine. My dad is an alcoholic and is drunk every morning when I wake up.’”

Now listen to what happened next as the spirit of charity filled the classroom. I continue to quote Brother Osguthorpe:

The young man sitting next to [the boy] put his hand on his shoulder to show support, and then the young man sitting on the other side did the same.

The teacher responded, “So what will you need to do to have an eternal family yourself?” He responded, “I’ll need to have good friends and keep all the commandments.” . . .

The teacher then asked the class, “If you hope to have an eternal family, what will you need to do right now to plan for it?” The class members shared their ideas. Then the teacher asked, “Do you think you might write your plan down and bring it next week so that we can talk about it?” They agreed.<sup>32</sup>

That teacher was not so concerned about following a prescribed lesson plan. She was thinking about each of those precious sons and daughters of God, and with the spirit of trust, acceptance, and openness that was in that classroom, she was helping them deepen their own conversion. This is the spirit of charity, and this is how the Savior taught.<sup>33</sup>

As parents do their part, as we do our part, and as our young brothers and sisters do their part, there comes into their soul what the prophets call a “mighty change” of heart.<sup>34</sup> They come to understand their dependence upon their Heavenly Father and upon their Savior. They recognize that they will be accountable for their lives, and they begin a lifelong adventure of repentance and accepting and keeping covenants. They become less enticed by worldly values, and they take upon themselves the name of Christ. They continue their journey of mortality as disciples of Christ, growing in faith, hope, and charity.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I invoke a blessing upon you, the teachers of our precious youth, that the principles of faith, hope, and charity will further settle upon your souls and that the Lord will bless you to increasingly be instruments in His hands. I bless you that as you humbly keep the commandments and prayerfully prepare yourself, your words and actions will carry an added measure of the Spirit and that the spirit of truth will sink into the hearts of those in your classrooms. I invoke a blessing upon your family as well, that your service might be a strength to your spouse and children, to your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, and a righteous legacy to your grandchildren and to all those you love.

I witness to you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. I know He is. I know He lives. Joseph Smith was visited by God the Father and His Son, and His prophet today is President Thomas S. Monson. I give you my love and my humble blessing and so testify in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

## Notes

1. *Deseret News*, May 31, 1866, 203.
2. Moroni 10:20–21.
3. See Matthew 13:3–23.
4. Matthew 13:19; emphasis added.
5. Matthew 13:23; emphasis added.
6. Proverbs 4:7.
7. See Matthew 15:32–38.
8. See John 8:6.
9. See Mark 5:40.
10. See Matthew 26:63.
11. Neal A. Maxwell, in David A. Bednar, *Act in Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 124.
12. Alma 12:32; emphasis added.
13. See 2 Nephi 31.
14. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Preparation for the Second Coming,” *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2004, 7–10.
15. Thomas S. Monson, “Stand in Holy Places,” *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2011, 82.
16. Thomas S. Monson, “Priesthood Power,” *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2011, 66.
17. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 72.
18. See Neil L. Andersen, “Find Our Cousins!,” LDS.org.
19. Personal correspondence from Marcelo Saito, January 27, 2014.
20. Moses 1:6.
21. Moses 1:8.
22. Moses 1:37.
23. Moses 1:9–10.
24. Moses 1:12.
25. Moses 1:14.
26. Moses 1:16.
27. Moroni 7:47.
28. Moroni 7:46; see also Moroni 7:44.
29. *Teaching the Gospel in the Savior’s Way* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 4.
30. Boyd K. Packer, “A Tribute to the Rank and File of the Church,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 62.
31. Personal correspondence from Carole Gates, February 10, 2013.
32. “Come, Follow Me,” *Church News*, December 28, 2013, 5.
33. See *Come, Follow Me*, 5.
34. Alma 5:14.