Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Following our past tradition with the Religious Educator, this volume includes several essays written for and by Seminaries and Institutes faculty. In addition to those published by our colleagues at Seminaries and Institutes, there are several gems that will provide new insights into important historical events. Anthony Sweat’s article, “The Role of Art in Teaching Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine,” arose from work that was done in connection with our recent book From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon (RSC and Deseret Book, 2015). The article offers fresh insights into the interplay of religious art and the teaching of Church history. Another important contribution in this issue of the journal is the article written by Sharon Black, Brad Wilcox, and Spencer Olsen, “Preparation for a Classic Sermon: President Benson’s Study Materials for ‘Beware of Pride.’” This article presents a study drawing upon the archival materials that were used by President Ezra Taft Benson as he prepared for his influential talk on pride. I was particularly interested to learn of the diverse materials that he drew upon as he wrote that talk.

As with past issues of the Religious Educator, I have enjoyed working closely with the authors and helping them express their important research in ways that will touch lives and shape understanding. I think this issue achieves that, and there is something in this issue for nearly everyone. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed shaping it.

Thomas A. Wayment
Editor
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Let Your Light Shine</td>
<td>Elder Robert C. Gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Lift Where You Stand”: A Conversation with Elder Paul V. Johnson</td>
<td>Interview by Barbara Morgan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>BYU–Hawaii: A Conversation with Steven C. Wheelwright</td>
<td>Interview by Fred E. Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>The Role of Art in Teaching LDS History and Doctrine</td>
<td>Anthony Sweat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Communicating with Parents in Today’s Digital World</td>
<td>Ponien (Felipe) Chou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Understanding and Teaching Correct Doctrine Correctly</td>
<td>J. Jarlath Brophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Teaching for Conversion: Recent Refinements in Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>Adam N. Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>Using Elements of Narrative to Engage Students</td>
<td>Stephan Taeger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>The Allegory of the Olive Tree: An Instructional Model for Leaders</td>
<td>José Bambio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>“Beware of Pride”: Prophetic Preparation for a Classic Address</td>
<td>Sharon Black, Brad Wilcox, and Spencer Olsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>Human Anatomy in the LDS Standard Works</td>
<td>Heather M. Seferovich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192</td>
<td>New Publications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>196</td>
<td>Upcoming Events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197</td>
<td>Staff Spotlights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let Your Light Shine

BY ELDER ROBERT C. GAY

Elder Robert C. Gay is a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on April 10, 2015.

You are an inspirational sight not only because of what you have accomplished but also because of how you’ve chosen to conduct your life by attending BYU–Idaho. This makes your degree doubly impressive. You offer hope to an ever-darkening world. You are those who the Savior referred to as “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) and those He then challenged to “shine before men” (Matthew 5:16).

At the time of my graduation from Harvard, I was particularly reminded of this special charge for each of us to shine as a light before this world.

I was in the office of my thesis adviser. He was a kind, devout Christian. We had never spoken about religion, but that afternoon he said, “Bob, I want you to stay and teach here at the business school, but I don’t want you to stay for the reasons you may think. I don’t want you here because I believe you’ll make some great contribution to the literature because I don’t believe you
Let Your Light Shine

will." He continued, "You’re smart but not that kind of smart." I said something like, "Okay."

My adviser then walked very slowly from behind his desk and circled behind me. He then walked a second time around both his desk and me saying, "Bob, I think I know you. I believe I know you. I feel I know you. I want you to stay and teach here because I want you to teach our students about God. That is what I do every day during my office hours. I need someone to help me teach them about life." I was stunned.

My vision of my degree changed. I knew that no matter what else I might do with my schooling—whether it be teaching, business, supporting a family—I needed to apply it in a way that added light to others and not myself.

Interestingly, about eight years ago, I had a similar experience. I had just returned home from serving as a mission president and began seeking advice from others as to what to do next. At that time, I received a note from Elder Dallin H. Oaks. It reads, in part: "Bob, . . . it is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions. What is important in the end is what we have become by our labors. . . . Wise are those who make this commitment: I will put the Lord first in my life, and I will keep His commandments. . . . This is the ultimate significance of taking upon you the name of Jesus Christ, and this is what we should ponder."1

As you move forward, yours too is a choice of how best to apply your degree and talents. As both my thesis adviser and Elder Oaks taught me, you can either use your training to bring light to yourself or to bring the Savior’s light to others.

How to do this should be deeply pondered. To that end, I would like to commend two fundamental principles for your consideration. The first principle is that you hear and follow the Spirit, doing things in the Lord’s way, not your way; the second is that you embrace the marginalized of this world, or, as Christ said, the lost, the last, and the least.

First, Act According to the Spirit

Years ago at another commencement, my father said the following to the graduates: “The real challenge today is not in outer space but in inner man. To reconcile the how of our living with the why of our existence and in the synthesis to emerge the child of God that we know we are. . . . May your life bear an unalterable testimony that there is knowledge—[a knowledge that is able to alter lives and which can only be found through obedience] to the voice of the God within us.”2

The ultimate foundation of all you do in life should be to live so that the voice and integrity of the Spirit takes precedence as the powerful, necessary force in determining your actions, both professionally and personally.

You are graduates of a time that needs a profound inner spiritual rebirth. Yours is a time that calls for men and women willing to assert their birthright of choice to alter and shape lives and institutions in a way that reflects the moral and spiritual values dictated by the Spirit of God. Unless you can arrive at that point, you will idolize and surround yourself with the trivial.

Acting according to the Spirit, however, is not always easy. It often requires significant sacrifice and at times deep obedience against the purely rational mind.

Some years ago, the late Truman G. Madsen introduced me at a talk I delivered at BYU. He shared the following story:

You’ve all heard of Jesse Knight. There’s a BYU building named for Jesse. He did his successful work in mining; . . . [he] was generous in his use of what he managed to earn. When a crisis arose [in the Church] Heber J. Grant, later president, was sent out to try to raise funding just to keep the Church going.

He went to Jesse and said, “We need five thousand dollars from you.” And Jesse said, “You know, I’ve given a lot and helped a lot, and at the moment I sort of feel like I’m paid up.” Brother Grant said, “I only ask one thing. I want you to go home and pray about it. That’s all I ask. You pray about it, and I’ll come and see you tomorrow.”

Jesse promised. That night he prayed and had a strong impression, “Give my servant Heber ten thousand dollars.” And he said aloud, “Lord, he only asked for five thousand dollars!” And the message was repeated. So when Brother Grant showed up, Brother Jesse Knight had a check for ten thousand dollars. [Jesse] then said, “But (Heber) don’t ever ask me to pray again.”3

I am sure each of you has given thought to your future. For some it will be off to jobs or graduate school or other opportunities. It may be returning home to concentrate on raising a family, and for others it may be more exploring and pondering the question, “What do I do now?” More than this, most of you have probably thought, “It’s now time to become part of the real world.” Let me assure you it is not and never will be that time. Rather, this is the time to resolve forever to stand above the world—your goal must not be assimilation into the real world but to disrupt it.
Let Your Light Shine

The Lord himself has invited each of you to do so, saying, “Seek not the things of this world but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God, and to establish his righteousness” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 6:38).

To build up His kingdom, you must forsake and sacrifice to establish every needful thing of conscience. You have to stand up and bear witness and testimony in uncomfortable and even threatening circumstances. In His kingdom you can no longer say, like Jesse Knight, “I think I’m paid up.”

By the voice of the Spirit, you will be asked to walk unmarked paths, many times needing to do things that make little sense. Like Jesse Knight, you will need to pay ten thousand dollars instead of five thousand dollars. You will have to build a Kirtland Temple, like Joseph, with no money, or retrieve brass plates, like Nephi, against an army of fifty.

The Church would have never risen above its own debts if the Saints were unwilling to sacrifice what was asked by the voice of the Spirit and instead did only that which they could afford.

It is not the maximization of wealth or success that underpins the command to let your light “shine before men”; rather, it is Spirit-directed acts of sacrifice and courage that build and edify. These also are the acts that blaze new pathways that astonish this world.

The intimate and absolute test of your life will not be the job or career ahead, not even whether you marry or serve in the Church, but rather the test is will you “hear” or “hearken” and act upon the voice of the Spirit of God within you with exactness—using all the talents and gifts and education He has given you—to bring to pass His work and His glory and not your work and your glory. The great charge to Joseph Smith as he opened this dispensation was to “hear Him!”

Unless you hear and follow the voice of the Spirit, you cannot and will not survive this day and time—and you will certainly never achieve the impact your life can otherwise realize.

As a young business professional on Wall Street one evening, while in a lawyer’s office, I had a prominent investment banker ask me this question: “Bob, do you think I ought to buy a summer home in East Long Island New York or one in France?” I said, “You live in New York. You can drive to that home.” He said, “I know, but the traffic is so bad on the Long Island Expressway, I think I can go to the airport and take the Concorde jet to Paris quicker.” I said, “Are you serious?” He said, “Absolutely!” I then heard a voice shout inside me, “You need to leave this place and this job immediately or you are going to become like him.”

I did not doubt that voice, and while it made neither logical or financial sense, I walked out on Wall Street a few weeks later—leaving a large bonus on the table—and joined a small boutique investment company in Boston that paid me less than half of what I was then earning. It made no sense to many of my friends, and I could not fully explain it to them.

In time, though, as I followed the voice of the Spirit to walk away, doors opened that allowed me literally to become an instrument in the hand of the Lord in helping lift countless people out of poverty, disease and hopelessness. The decision to leave only made sense in hindsight, but being true to the voice changed everything.

If you understand nothing else tonight, understand this—whether you are on the farm pitching hay and harvesting potatoes, or in the home raising a family, or working as a manager in business—you will not be whole and healed and fully empowered unless you receive His voice and go and do whatever it directs. In a very real sense, it does not matter what you have studied and leave here to do. What matters is that you make whatever you do one with the Lord and His voice.

Second, Embrace the Marginalized

For better or worse, the reality of our world is that we live in a day and hour where both good and powerful evil share the geography of our time.

Incredible as this may seem, you are not here by accident. You are here by choice. You wanted the opportunity to prove yourself in this time of morally twisted opposition that calls evil “good,” and good “evil.” You elected to stand here to give service and to love.

Today we have great divisions before us. Within and without the Church there exist real stumbling blocks. Outside we are pressed daily by violence, invasion of individual liberty, discrimination, poverty, immorality, disease, and so much more. Inside the Church, many struggle to reconcile and understand same-gender attraction, the role of women, or certain Church doctrines or history. Many struggle with doubt, lack of confidence or resources, zealousness, commitment, meeting schedules, leaders who offend, friends or children who stray, prayers that seem unanswered, and broken trusts through emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.
Let Your Light Shine

Some would like to ignore or diminish these issues by contending with those that challenge our orthodoxy or by delivering dismissive sermons or by saying to those that struggle temporally or spiritually with doubt or depression to “just be patient; things will work out.” The Lord, however, expects much more of us than words. He expects our personal ministry despite discomfort or any personal rejection. He expects an outreach of charity. He expects us to go into the “highways and byways” of people’s lives and to bring them to the Sacred Grove and to Gethsemane and Calvary.

The scriptures teach us that Jesus showed forth “an increase of love” to those He rebuked and to those that denied Him (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:43). Against norms, He dined with sinners and ministered to the outcast, the grieved, and unbeliever.

There is nothing that has more power to affect our lives than the pure love of Christ, which is charity. Charity looks beyond self, choosing to “bear” and “endure all things.” If we live without charity, if we live indifferently, our Heavenly Father says we are “nothing” (see 1 Corinthians 13:2, 7). That is, we live a life of vanity.

Two of my favorite chapters in the New Testament are the thirteenth chapter of John and the fifth chapter of Mark. As described in John, the night of the Atonement began with the Savior commanding the disciples to make and renew a covenant to always remember and honor His sacrifice. He then knelt down and washed the feet of those who would in a few short hours betray Him, deny Him, or fall asleep in His most needed hour. He never condemned for this but exhorted them to be one with Him, to forgive, to wash the feet of others, and to love their neighbors as He loved them. He asked that we raise our vision to His vision.

Can you see that the great charge of the Atonement is to love as He loved? To love those who betray, who offend, who fall asleep, who deny, who doubt, who are zealous and cut off an ear with a sword or a heart with a harsh deed; to be longsuffering with those who will not hear and who will not love back.

On the night of the Atonement, Pilate did things the world’s way—he washed his hands of the matter of justice and sold out while Christ pleaded mercy. In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 5, the Savior comes to a man who is an outcast. Nobody will have anything to do with him because he is untamed and cut “himself with stones” (verse 5). The Savior, however, embraces him, heals him, and sends him home with the command to bear witness of God’s compassion.

The Savior then passes over the sea. There a religious leader, Jairus, asks him to give a blessing to his daughter who was dying. As He begins the journey to Jairus’ home, a crowd of people walks with Him. In the crowd, another outcast, a woman who had been suffering for twelve years with an issue of blood, touches His garment.

She had been to all the doctors and could not be healed. In her culture this made her unclean and required her to live apart from her husband and children. She was completely isolated. In this humiliating situation, she touched the Savior’s garment hoping to be cured. Jesus sensed her presence, turned and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” (verse 30).

Desperate but faithful, she then falls down before Him. He then envelops her with His grace, saying, “Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (verse 34). In doing this, not only did the Savior heal her physically, He also healed her spiritually. Through His ministry she was no longer a “nobody” but now a “daughter,” a member of the family of God and once again a member of her own family and society.

While the Savior lingered, however, Jairus’ daughter died. Undeterred, He still goes forward to minister. He finds family and friends weeping over her and asks why. He tells them the young girl is not dead but sleeping. The scriptures record that they then “laughed him to scorn” (verse 40). Ignoring them, He raised the girl from the dead.

I keep in a frame on the wall in my home office these words of Elbert Hubbard: “God will not look you over for medals, degrees or diplomas but for scars.” This is the pattern that Jesus places before us as we work to do His work to lift others: we will be called upon to suffer innocently, if we are to achieve what He needs us to achieve as His light before men.

We have many who are spiritually dead around us, and you must be willing to be laughed at “to scorn.” Like Jesus, you must move forward against a world that does not believe and not “shrink” before the taunting of our secular world.

In the parable of the great supper, the Savior said, “And whosoever doth not bear [my] cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

In opening this last dispensation, He reminded us that He “partook” of “the bitter” and also “finished” the required ascent to the cross (D&C 19:18–19). God expects engagement. You are to be a finisher and not an observer in
His battle for the souls of men. Scars are more important than diplomas. This is how we show our love to Him and "shine before men" and how we receive His enabling power and grace in our own lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me share one final thought. Let me return to my friend Truman Madsen. After Truman shared the story of Jesse Knight, who gave ten thousand dollars, he then said the following, which I feel impressed to share with you:

Ann and I were present one night at the Jerusalem Center. Sitting next to us were Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, not yet in the Twelve, and Elder James E. Faust, not yet in the First Presidency.

Brother Faust turned to Jeff and said, "Talk about Abraham." And he began, as if on cue, and described . . . [how] both Abraham and Isaac had demonstrated their willingness to accept the will of God at all hazards . . . .

The footnote on Brother Holland is that he was in a meeting somewhere in a university, and from the audience, a student cried out in a mocking way, "Brother Holland! Would you give your life for Jesus?" And he thought a minute and then said, "That's what I thought I was doing."4

Truman then said, "[There] are two ways of giving our lives, brothers and sisters, one is in the emergency where we give our life in death. But the other way is to give through our lives [in the how of our living]."5

May you have the resolve to live as a witness for Christ by letting your light "shine before men." May you know that this will require you to "hear Him" and to bear with love the outcast, the enemy, the marginalized. May you understand that this is not a journey into the known but the unknown—it is a path of faith and integrity to the voice of the Holy Ghost that ultimately demands your sacrifice to be more than just good or less sinful, but to become holy and consecrated.

In all of this my prayer is that each of you may find the strength to obey and repent as needed to live a life, dictated by the Spirit within, that bears witness that He is your priority.

In Primary we learned the words and sang the song "I'm Trying to Be like Jesus." I simply ask, "Are you trying to be like Jesus?" I believe that there is no more important graduation message than that simple Primary graduation message.

I leave you my testimony that you are loved, deeply loved, as well as an invitation to leave here resolved to live beyond a career to a life of discipleship that takes upon you His name as directed by conscience with charity to all.

I also leave you my personal testimony, born of experience and His voice to me, that He lives and that He can and will lift you beyond any losses you suffer for His name's sake. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. }

© Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.

Notes
5. Madsen, remarks.
“Lift Where You Stand”: A Conversation with Elder Paul V. Johnson

INTERVIEW BY BARBARA E. MORGAN

Barbara E. Morgan (barbara_morgan@byu.edu) is an assistant professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University.

Elder Paul V. Johnson earned a bachelor’s degree in zoology and a master’s degree in counseling and guidance at Brigham Young University. Upon graduation from BYU, Elder Johnson and his wife, Jill, moved to Chandler, Arizona, where he taught seminary for four years. Following a diagnosis of Crohn’s disease, Elder Johnson and his family returned to his childhood area of Cache Valley, Utah, where he continued to teach seminary. There, he also earned a doctorate in instructional technology from Utah State University.

After seven years in Cache Valley, Paul and Jill moved with their children to Salt Lake City, where he has worked in a variety of positions in CES, including curriculum development and administration. He served as the administrator of Religious Education for Seminaries and Institutes of Religion from 2001 to 2007. He was called as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy in 2005, and while serving as a member of the Chile Area Presidency in 2008, Elder Johnson accepted a call from President Thomas S. Monson to serve as the LDS Church’s sixteenth Commissioner of the Church Educational System. After seven years in this assignment to the day, Elder Johnson’s tenure as Commissioner will conclude,
and he has accepted the assignment to be the First Counselor in the Europe Area Presidency.

Morgan: What was your experience in being called as a General Authority and then Commissioner?

Johnson: I was in Cedar City when I got a phone call from President Hinckley’s secretary telling me that President Hinckley wanted to meet with me. I replied that I was in Southern Utah but that if I left immediately I could make it back to Salt Lake by 5:00 p.m. His secretary responded that that would not be necessary but told me to plan on coming in the morning instead. I had occasion to talk with President Hinckley in the past regarding the seminary and institute program, and I assumed that he was needing information in this regard. I went home and put together some statistics and other information I thought he might need and went into his office the next morning. It didn’t take long before I recognized that this meeting was different than what I had expected. I was the only one in his office, and his questions were about me and about my worthiness. I realized this wasn’t just out of curiosity but that there was more to it. This was the beginning of February, and he called me as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and told me I would be sustained at the April general conference.

Being called as the Commissioner was also a surprise. I had been a member of the Area Presidency in Chile for just one year. In April 2008, we were at the annual assignment meeting held in conjunction with April conference. In that meeting all General Authorities and their wives are shown the assignments for the next year. As I expected, it was announced that we would be in Chile, and this call meant changes to our life. I don’t remember all the details, but it was less about specific instructions and more about why they were having me do this. It was a very big surprise. I called my wife after the conversation and told her. We were enjoying our time in Chile, and this call meant changes to our life.

We had thought we had said good-bye to CES forever when I had accepted my new assignment just a year earlier to Chile. We weren’t expecting to come back to the United States, let alone CES, so soon. Although I had been with Seminaries and Institutes for a long time, I really had never had an inkling or thought that I was going to end up being the Commissioner. I was quite familiar with the assignment because I had worked in the Church Office Building since 1989. For part of that time I had worked really closely with the Commissioner and with the Commissioner’s office especially as the administrator for what we now call Seminaries and Institutes. In that capacity I had reported directly to the Commissioner, and I had met with him frequently and had a lot of connections with him. When Elder Rolfe Kerr was the Commissioner and I was serving as the administrator, he had me come into his Commissioner planning meetings, which was the Commissioner and the assistant to the Commissioner. Every week I attended those meetings and saw everything that he was working on and became quite familiar with the issues. In addition, I had attended the board meetings and the executive committee meetings while I served as the administrator for S&I. The Commissioner actually runs the agenda in those meetings, and so I heard every issue that came before the board and the executive committee from each of the CES entities, including all of the universities, LDS Business College, and Seminaries and Institutes for six years.

Although I was familiar with the assignment, I had my own concerns about stepping into the Commissioner’s role. I had a lot of background with Seminaries and Institutes but not so much with the higher-education institutions. I knew I was going to have to invest a lot of time and effort to get up to speed. I knew the issues that had come up on the board, but I did not know a lot of the people on the campuses. I had some nervousness too. I didn’t know how it was going to be perceived by the people I was going to be working closely with. I knew how things would go with Garry Moore, because I had worked so closely with him for years and years. I’d been colleagues with the presidents of the higher educational institutions and sat on the board with them, but I didn’t know if they were going to say, “Well, we don’t want him.” Who knew what would happen? I had these and other thoughts going through my mind and wondered if this was going to work. It turned out that all of the heads of the CES entities were very supportive and great to work with.

Morgan: What does the Commissioner do?
Johnson: I did not receive a lot of detailed instructions when I received this assignment. I never had a sit-down meeting where I was told my duties or what was expected of me. I think that’s partly because they knew that I had a lot of exposure to the assignment. I had been closely tied to it previously because I had spent several years with my office next door to the Commissioner and had worked so closely with him. My assignment entails basically anything that has to do with the Church Educational System. Sometimes you hear that he’s the Commissioner of Education, so occasionally people incorrectly assume that includes Sunday School and other educational arms of the Church, but technically that is not right. It is the Commissioner of the Church Educational System.

There are five entities in the Church Educational System: BYU, BYU–Idaho, BYU–Hawaii, LDS Business College, and Seminaries and Institutes, which includes the Church’s elementary and secondary schools in Mexico and the Pacific. Each of those entities has a board. For Seminaries and Institutes it is the Board of Education. Each of the higher-education entities has a board of trustees. The membership of each of those boards is exactly the same. When we have a board meeting, we are actually having a combined meeting of five separate boards. So, when we have an issue for BYU–Hawaii, we are presenting that to their board of trustees. And so the board of trustees makes that decision. If the next agenda item happens to be for LDS Business College, it’s their board of trustees responding to it. It’s the same people and the same meeting. The members of the board currently include the First Presidency, who are the officers of the board; two members of the Twelve; a member of the Presidency of the Seventy; the Relief Society general president; and the Young Women general president. Years ago all members of the Quorum of the Twelve were on the board, but that is not true anymore. When I first started, they had four members of the Twelve on that board, two of whom were members of the executive committee. Then it went to three and now two. The officers of the board choose the makeup of the board and the executive committee.

The executive committee is a subset of the boards. Right now that committee is chaired by Elder Nelson, with Elder Oaks, Elder Hallstrom, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, and Sister Burton, the Relief Society general president, as members. They act as a clearinghouse or gatekeeper for the board and look at things in extensive detail. Upon their recommendation, items are then referred to the board for discussion or approval. Any item that comes to the executive committee or the board comes through the Commissioner. The Commissioner’s office creates the agendas for the executive committee and the board meetings and handles anything that comes down from the officers of the board or from the board to the institutions. For example, the Commissioner handles correspondence that may be sent to the First Presidency or members of the Twelve that has to do with education.

The Commissioner works very closely with the board as well as the five CES entities and particularly the heads of those entities. It seems the most important thing I do is help those institutions, and particularly the heads of those institutions, accomplish their objectives. So, when we are putting together an agenda for an executive committee or board meeting, Mark Woodruff (assistant to the Commissioner) and I actually have a meeting at BYU or a phone discussion with Idaho and Hawaii, and we speak with the president and the president’s council. We talk about what issues need to come up, and there is a write-up in the book that goes to the executive committee meeting and eventually the board. These topics could include anything from the naming of a building to budget concerns and the hiring of new faculty. I go through every item with them, and sometimes tell them that we are not ready to take that item to the meeting. For example, all faculty members need clearance from the board in order to be hired. We have a write-up on each individual. Before that individual is recommended to the executive committee, I read every word, including the background of the individual, the information from the university or Seminaries and Institutes interviews, and the General Authority interview. Items from my discussions with the presidents of the institutions don’t go into the book to be discussed with the executive committee unless I feel comfortable with it. There are times when I am not comfortable, so we hold the item or revise it.

In the executive committee or board meetings, they expect the commissioner to have done his homework and expect a recommendation from me. On some issues there is extended discussion, but they don’t have time to go into great detail on every issue. They have to trust that we have looked into it, weighed the options, and that what is proposed is the best way to go. They are really trusting. We in turn trust the presidents of the universities that they are doing the same thing.

When an item goes to the executive committee, the item on the paper states, “Commissioner’s recommendation.” That recommendation changes to “executive committee’s recommendation” after they have looked at it carefully.
and feel good enough about it to take it to the board. If President Monson or one of his counselors asks the executive committee how they feel about an item, they want to be able to say, "We approve of it. We think it should be done." I have had my recommendations turned down or changed at the executive-committee level, and there have been times when it’s gone through the executive committee to the board and it has been canceled or changed. It happens. It’s not too surprising. I have a certain view and background and understanding from where I sit, and that’s the scope I can see. When the item gets to the executive committee, they have a different view and set of experiences in the Church, and they may see something that I didn’t, and the First Presidency has an even broader view than the executive committee.

I try to be helpful to the heads of the CES entities by interacting with people in the Church Office Building or General Authorities and with members of the board in order to help them accomplish what they need and want to accomplish. If there are things that need to be cleared or vetted, I may be able to help them do that. I can sometimes help the heads of the CES entities sense the vision, scope, and desires of the members of the board because I end up having more contact with them. I work closely with the executive committee, the board, and the First Presidency. The Commissioner is not a member of the board or executive committee but does attend all board and executive committee meetings and makes presentations and recommendations to those groups. The Commissioner’s assignment is a First Presidency assignment, and so he reports directly to them.

Morgan: Since you have been the Commissioner, you have put in a leader of each of the CES entities. How do you choose the next president or administrator?

Johnson: At other universities, the president is sometimes chosen because of his ability to fund-raise or his academic standing or how well he works with people, especially the stakeholders. The way we choose the president and the qualifications for the president are very different. We determine what the needs of the entity are for the near and distant future. Sure, the president can be involved in fund-raising, and his academic standing and ability to work well with people are important, but those are not our major considerations. We are looking for someone who is very talented and committed to the mission of the university and able to work under the direction of the Board of Education and the Commissioner. The Board of Trustees doesn’t want these universities drifting away from the Church as other religious universities have done from their sponsoring churches.

Due to various traditions and cultural perceptions, many are under the perception that our university presidents or heads of Seminaries and Institutes have to be men. There has clearly been a history of men in these positions, but somehow people have assumed, then, that these positions are somehow priesthood assignments. This is simply not the case. We have had women on the short list for university presidents. We want the right person to be the president or administrator, whether they are men or women.

Morgan: You have talked a lot in the last few years in both your professional and ecclesiastical role about the importance of guiding principles. What have been some of your guiding principles in your current assignment?

Johnson: One principle I have used to guide me is that this is the Lord’s work, and the more I can keep my own ego out of it, the smoother the work goes. If I can be open and listen to the board members, to the heads of the institutions, and to the Spirit, then the Lord can help guide me.

Another principle is that each of us has been called or assigned to our own position. I never wanted to be the head of or displace one of the heads of the institutions. I wanted them to do their job, and I wanted to stay in my role. I didn’t try to go to BYU and take over President Samuelson’s or President Worthen’s responsibilities. I didn’t try to take over Chad Webb’s position, even though I had been there before. Particularly at first with Chad, I tried to keep a distance so the Seminaries and Institutes people didn’t think I was coming to take back that position. I was in a different position now. I always try to remember who I face and who I report to and that has helped me.

Worrying about feelings of inadequacy is a waste of time. That is one principle I learned early on and have been facing for a lot of years. The people I’ve worked with over the last few years are incredible. They are amazing. For a number of years Jerry Lund was my boss, and then Stan Peterson. How do I work with these people who are so accomplished and so talented and gifted and not be intimidated? I could just choose to go in a corner and sulk, or I could say, “I’m going to do to the best I can, and they’ll work with me the best they can.” The more I could do that and not worry about not feeling qualified, the better job I could do. One of the most common comments people say is “Look who has been Commissioner before you,” and they start naming names, and that’s not really helpful. It’s intimidating. I had to make a decision to forget about that. I had to make a decision that, for whatever reason, this was my assignment now, and I needed to work hard and try to bless people. Let the Lord handle the rest.
The principles taught in section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants are extremely applicable to any leadership assignment. Sometimes in leadership positions you can force something to happen, or you can manipulate people and events in order to get something to go the way you want it to go, but in the long run it’s not right. This is a trap that you have to be careful not to fall into. It doesn’t get the real result that we are after. I’ve tried to be open with the executive committee and the board members, as well as with the presidents of the universities or whomever I work with. I’ve tried my best to not shade the information I give to them or spin it in a way to get my way.

I know that it’s probably not completely possible to do that objectively, but I’ve tried to do it right. My hope is that they can trust me. The only way they can trust me is if they know I am being open enough with them to give them all the factors that ought to be considered. Then I think I still have to be willing to step up and say, “With all of these factors, this is my recommendation.” If they don’t go with my recommendation, I have to decide am I going to sulk and say I’m never bringing anything in to them again, or am I going to do my best to accomplish what they ask me to do, even though it isn’t the way I proposed it? I think that is one of the tough lessons to learn in the family, or in a faculty, or in a Church calling. I’m going to take my best offering and lay it on the altar and then let the Lord do what he wants with it, rather than bringing my best offering and then saying, “Let me tell you how to use it.” I don’t think the kingdom works in that way. I think we oversponsor our own positions you can force something to happen, or you can manipulate people and events in order to get something to go the way you want it to go, but in the long run it’s not right. This is a trap that you have to be careful not to fall into. It doesn’t get the real result that we are after. I’ve tried to be open with the executive committee and the board members, as well as with the presidents of the universities or whomever I work with. I’ve tried my best to not shade the information I give to them or spin it in a way to get my way.

I know that it’s probably not completely possible to do that objectively, but I’ve tried to do it right. My hope is that they can trust me. The only way they can trust me is if they know I am being open enough with them to give them all the factors that ought to be considered. Then I think I still have to be willing to step up and say, “With all of these factors, this is my recommendation.” If they don’t go with my recommendation, I have to decide am I going to sulk and say I’m never bringing anything in to them again, or am I going to do my best to accomplish what they ask me to do, even though it isn’t the way I proposed it? I think that is one of the tough lessons to learn in the family, or in a faculty, or in a Church calling. I’m going to take my best offering and lay it on the altar and then let the Lord do what he wants with it, rather than bringing my best offering and then saying, “Let me tell you how to use it.” I don’t think the kingdom works in that way. I think we oversponsor our own positions you can force something to happen, or you can manipulate people and events in order to get something to go the way you want it to go, but in the long run it’s not right. This is a trap that you have to be careful not to fall into. It doesn’t get the real result that we are after. I’ve tried to be open with the executive committee and the board members, as well as with the presidents of the universities or whomever I work with. I’ve tried my best to not shade the information I give to them or spin it in a way to get my way.

I know that it’s probably not completely possible to do that objectively, but I’ve tried to do it right. My hope is that they can trust me. The only way they can trust me is if they know I am being open enough with them to give them all the factors that ought to be considered. Then I think I still have to be willing to step up and say, “With all of these factors, this is my recommendation.” If they don’t go with my recommendation, I have to decide am I going to sulk and say I’m never bringing anything in to them again, or am I going to do my best to accomplish what they ask me to do, even though it isn’t the way I proposed it? I think that is one of the tough lessons to learn in the family, or in a faculty, or in a Church calling. I’m going to take my best offering and lay it on the altar and then let the Lord do what he wants with it, rather than bringing my best offering and then saying, “Let me tell you how to use it.” I don’t think the kingdom works in that way. I think we oversponsor our own positions you can force something to happen, or you can manipulate people and events in order to get something to go the way you want it to go, but in the long run it’s not right. This is a trap that you have to be careful not to fall into. It doesn’t get the real result that we are after. I’ve tried to be open with the executive committee and the board members, as well as with the presidents of the universities or whomever I work with. I’ve tried my best to not shade the information I give to them or spin it in a way to get my way.

I know that it’s probably not completely possible to do that objectively, but I’ve tried to do it right. My hope is that they can trust me. The only way they can trust me is if they know I am being open enough with them to give them all the factors that ought to be considered. Then I think I still have to be willing to step up and say, “With all of these factors, this is my recommendation.” If they don’t go with my recommendation, I have to decide am I going to sulk and say I’m never bringing anything in to them again, or am I going to do my best to accomplish what they ask me to do, even though it isn’t the way I proposed it? I think that is one of the tough lessons to learn in the family, or in a faculty, or in a Church calling. I’m going to take my best offering and lay it on the altar and then let the Lord do what he wants with it, rather than bringing my best offering and then saying, “Let me tell you how to use it.” I don’t think the kingdom works in that way. I think we oversponsor our own positions you can force something to happen, or you can manipulate people and events in order to get something to go the way you want it to go, but in the long run it’s not right. This is a trap that you have to be careful not to fall into. It doesn’t get the real result that we are after. I’ve tried to be open with the executive committee and the board members, as well as with the presidents of the universities or whomever I work with. I’ve tried my best to not shade the information I give to them or spin it in a way to get my way.

I know that it’s probably not completely possible to do that objectively, but I’ve tried to do it right. My hope is that they can trust me. The only way they can trust me is if they know I am being open enough with them to give them all the factors that ought to be considered. Then I think I still have to be willing to step up and say, “With all of these factors, this is my recommendation.” If they don’t go with my recommendation, I have to decide am I going to sulk and say I’m never bringing anything in to them again, or am I going to do my best to accomplish what they ask me to do, even though it isn’t the way I proposed it? I think that is one of the tough lessons to learn in the family, or in a faculty, or in a Church calling. I’m going to take my best offering and lay it on the altar and then let the Lord do what he wants with it, rather than bringing my best offering and then saying, “Let me tell you how to use it.” I don’t think the kingdom works in that way. I think we oversponsor our own positions you can force something to happen, or you can manipulate people and events in order to get something to go the way you want it to go, but in the long run it’s not right. This is a trap that you have to be careful not to fall into. It doesn’t get the real result that we are after. I’ve tried to be open with the executive committee and the board members, as well as with the presidents of the universities or whomever I work with. I’ve tried my best to not shade the information I give to them or spin it in a way to get my way.

I know that it’s probably not completely possible to do that objectively, but I’ve tried to do it right. My hope is that they can trust me. The only way they can trust me is if they know I am being open enough with them to give them all the factors that ought to be considered. Then I think I still have to be willing to step up and say, “With all of these factors, this is my recommendation.” If they don’t go with my recommendation, I have to decide am I going to sulk and say I’m never bringing anything in to them again, or am I going to do my best to accomplish what they ask me to do, even though it isn’t the way I proposed it? I think that is one of the tough lessons to learn in the family, or in a faculty, or in a Church calling. I’m going to take my best offering and lay it on the altar and then let the Lord do what he wants with it, rather than bringing my best offering and then saying, “Let me tell you how to use it.” I don’t think the kingdom works in that way. I think we oversponsor our own positions you can force something to happen, or you can manipulate people and events in order to get something to go the way you want it to go, but in the long run it’s not right. This is a trap that you have to be careful not to fall into. It doesn’t get the real result that we are after. I’ve tried to be open with the executive committee and the board members, as well as with the presidents of the universities or whomever I work with. I’ve tried my best to not shade the information I give to them or spin it in a way to get my way.

I know that it’s probably not completely possible to do that objectively, but I’ve tried to do it right. My hope is that they can trust me. The only way they can trust me is if they know I am being open enough with them to give them all the factors that ought to be considered. Then I think I still have to be willing to step up and say, “With all of these factors, this is my recommendation.” If they don’t go with my recommendation, I have to decide am I going to sulk and say I’m never bringing anything in to them again, or am I going to do my best to accomplish what they ask me to do, even though it isn’t the way I proposed it? I think that is one of the tough lessons to learn in the family, or in a faculty, or in a Church calling. I’m going to take my best offering and lay it on the altar and then let the Lord do what he wants with it, rather than bringing my best offering and then saying, “Let me tell you how to use it.” I don’t think the kingdom works in that way. I think we oversponsor our own
everyone could feel good about where we were headed, but unity made possible the changes. The youth curriculum is revolutionary, and unity is a powerful principle behind it. I’m sure this is the case across all organizations. Unity is important at the First Presidency level, Quorum of the Twelve level, General Authority. I don’t believe that.

I hide information because I’m worried about myself. If we go in to a meeting I’m working with—whether they be members of the Twelve or First Presidency or a General Authority doesn’t agree with something they say, it must mean they are unrighteous and it may affect their eternal salvation, or they may be concerned about what someone else may think about their loyalty to the Brethren. I believe that unless we are off-doctrine or really off-base on something, we have a responsibility to open our mouth. In fact, I don’t think I’m sustaining those leaders I’m working with—whether they be members of the Twelve on the executive committee or the board members or any other person or office above me—if I hide information because I’m worried about myself. If we go in to a meeting and then try to figure out what our leaders are thinking and then only parrot that, we aren’t sustaining them. In fact, we are crippling their ability to get guidance and move the work forward. Sometimes we think that if we make a statement that may not be exactly what they are thinking, then we are saying, “I’m not sustaining my leaders” or “I’m in opposition to the prophet or a General Authority.” I don’t believe that.

When a decision has been made and we have direction from the board, we should get behind the decision and put our hearts into it. That is a different situation than when we are in a counseling mode discussing an issue or are charged with gathering information to help make decisions. I have a little concern that, particularly with some employees in Seminaries and Institutes, some view the structure of the system ecclesiastically and think their leaders preside over them in an ecclesiastical sense. This just isn’t accurate, and is wrong. Because of this misunderstanding, some are reticent to speak up when they could be helpful in the decision process.

I had an experience early on as the CES administrator that demonstrates this. After I had been called to be an Area Seventy, I went into my first meeting with the zone administrators. I noticed that not only did they call me “Elder Johnson” but that everything I said was right. It hit me in the middle of the meeting just what they were doing. I said, “Hold it just a minute,” and we had a serious talk. I explained to them that being an Area Seventy was my Church calling, and that was what I did on the weekends and in the evenings. During the week, I’m a CES administrator, and they were zone administrators, and I needed their help. “Number one,” I said, “do not call me Elder Johnson; I’m Paul when we are working. Second,” I said, “you have to be willing to tell me what you are thinking. It doesn’t mean I’m always going to agree with you, but you have to tell me, otherwise how can we do this?” That was a real eye-opening experience for me. I wasn’t their ecclesiastical leader, and although they knew that, somehow we got things crossed.

This issue has been a little more difficult since I was called a General Authority. It was easier to draw the line as an Area Seventy. Now my calling includes my appointment as Commissioner of Education, and yet I still have the same feelings. As a Commissioner, I have tried to foster open communication. I know that the university presidents and the administrator for Seminaries and Institutes and I must be open with each other in order to be effective, and I think we have pretty open communication. It’s important that those I work with know that I won’t try to pull ecclesiastical rank on them. One change for me when I became a General Authority as well as an administrator was the fact that now when I come into my office on Sundays to get something done, I am magnifying my calling, whereas before I was breaking the Sabbath.

Morgan: What have been some of the successes you have seen in CES as the Commissioner?

Johnson: The real successes for the Commissioner happen in the CES entities. They are not necessarily related to what the Commissioner does; in
fact, they are much more tied to those individual places. If you look at each of the entities and see areas where progress has happened over the last few years, that’s where I think the success has happened. When you see that the change has happened over the years, I wish I could take credit, but in reality it is the people on the ground doing the actual work.

Seminaries and Institutes has sharpened its focus on some very critical things. After many years and after recent encouragement, including some from the First Presidency, now there is an open door for all young single adults to take institute. For almost a century, institute was focused almost exclusively on college students. During the early nineties, the door got opened a little bit, and those young single adults who weren’t in college but lived near an institute could enroll. There were pushes for change for a while, and now all young single adults are encouraged to take institute. This is really a significant turning point that has happened in the last few years, and it makes me so happy. I believe that is really going to be important for the Church over the next few years.

Another success has been the youth curriculum, as I discussed previously. I think the whole matter of the youth curriculum is one of those powerful things affecting the kingdom that CES has shaped in some way. It has been great to be in the middle of it. I think it takes into account some real principles of teaching that have been bubbling up in Seminaries and Institutes, BYU-Idaho, the Missionary Department, and across the Church. Finally we were able to unify and focus these principles for the benefit of this current generation of young people. They are looking now at implementing it among the adults, too. I think that was an important thing.

LDS Business College has had a miraculous transformation in the last few years. When Ricks College changed into BYU-Idaho, the nature of that institution changed, and they became a four-year baccalaureate program. Prior to this, Ricks had been a transfer school. Students went there for two years with the intention of transferring to BYU or some other university. After the change, that niche got lost in CES, and by natural evolution LDS Business College began to fill that niche. It got to the point where 70 percent of our students there were looking for associate degrees so they could transfer to BYU. The college was really built and has continued to be maintained in order to enable somebody to come in, spend a year or two to get a certificate and an applied degree, and get into the job market. A year ago, it was explained to the board that LDSBC was planning to refocus on their historical mission.

The board members enthusiastically approved that initiative, and in one year, they have done almost a complete 180. Now 70 percent of the students are working on applied degrees and certificates. That is a miraculous change that has happened and has been great to watch.

BYU-Hawaii has made a major transformation and expansion of the campus. They are in the process of getting up to 3,200 students on campus and making their operation much more efficient. The cost per student there is extremely expensive in Hawaii, but they are making significant progress in reducing cost while maintaining high standards.

BYU-Idaho has continued its transformation into a four-year university. Probably the most remarkable thing in the last few years has been the online program they have established. The Pathway program was started in 2009 with three sites and maybe 100 students. Now they are up to 360 sites this fall with 12,000 to 15,000 students enrolled. Their online classes for matriculated students have also increased dramatically, and that has been fascinating to watch.

There have been significant changes at BYU as well. One of the notable changes has been the explosion of BYUtv and BYU Broadcasting. They have viewership from around the world. It has been incredible to see their expansion. The upgraded programing that has happened there and the philosophy and the way they have gone forward has been really exciting to watch. In athletics, we have seen them transition into independent status in football and join the WCC in other sports. This was approved by the First Presidency.

One of the most memorable experiences for me personally as the Commissioner is my involvement in the appointment of a new university/college president or S&I administrator. I have been involved in that now for every CES entity. It started with Chad Webb just a couple of months after I came in as the Commissioner, then Larry Richards a few months later. President Cecil O. Samuelson was replaced by Kevin J Worthen, Kim B. Clark was replaced by Clark G. Gilbert, and just recently we replaced Steven C. Wheelwright with John S. Tanner. That has been very memorable and really a touching process to go through. I’ve really loved every one of the heads of the institutions that I have worked with and I’m excited for all the new ones too.

Things are looking up in CES. It’s an important part of the kingdom. It has made many contributions to the kingdom in the past and will make many more contributions in the future. It’s a little sad to say good-bye.
Morgan: What advice do you have as you are leaving your assignment as Commissioner?

Johnson: I would advise teachers, administrators and all involved in CES to keep their eyes focused on the student. Not just the student that is sitting in front of them, but that student twenty years and forty years from now and on to eternity. I wish I could have done that better as a teacher. I’m trying to do better at that. I think that would be helpful. We can always improve and take steps forward in the effectiveness of our teaching. I love watching the young people of the kingdom learn and become what the Lord needs them to be. This generation that is coming up is so exciting to watch. They are powerful, and it is a privilege for us to even have the opportunity to know some of them.

I would also advise us to remember President Uchtdorf’s call to “lift where you stand.” If we spend energy worrying about, I wish I were doing this, or I wish I were doing that, or I wish I could have a change of a position to do that, it diverts our energies and our attention and focus away from what we can do right now in blessing peoples lives. That’s true in whatever position we are in, whether you are the Commissioner or a brand-new teacher. There are things a brand-new teacher can do that I cannot do. I’m not in that classroom, and I don’t know those young people.

When I was in my first assignment in Chandler, Arizona, I was really sick and ended up in the hospital for about a month and out of the classroom for at least two months or maybe a little longer. The doctors weren’t able to diagnose anything for over a year. My wife, Jill, was trying to substitute for me, and we had little children. I was worried I was going to lose my job. I didn’t know much about CES at the time, and I was in a one-person seminary. Our associate area director was known for being pretty gruff and straightforward, and I was just sure he was going to fire me. He came to visit me one day, and I thought he was going to tell me it was over. He wanted to find out how I was doing, and I kept telling him that my wife was taking my classes, and we had people in the ward trying to help out and babysit the kids, and that things were going to work out.

He stopped me and said, “You’re not understanding. This is CES, and we take care of you. We are going to hire a substitute until you get better because we need you in CES.” That was a turning point in my career. I prayed and promised the Lord I would do whatever He wanted me to do. I said, “I’ll teach in junior high for the rest of my life, go wherever you want me to go and do whatever you want me to do.” That experience really helped me. I don’t worry about what I’m doing or about what position I have because I know what the Lord has done for me. I love CES, and I’m glad to be a part of it. If we can just be happy where we are the Lord will put us where he needs us. The biggest challenge we have in life is to develop our ability to submit our will to the will of the Lord. That’s what the Savior did perfectly. We can mistakenly get the idea that if we want to be happy, we do what we want to do. The irony is that the real joy and the fullness of joy comes when we submit our will to the will of the Lord.

The most important CES employee for me right now is the teacher who is teaching my oldest grandson this year. I don’t know who it is, but that’s the most important teacher in my life right now. Our daughter, this grandson’s mother, just passed away a month ago. My grandson is facing life without a mom. I’m just praying for that seminary teacher and hoping that somehow he or she can help that boy as he is facing his life right now.
BYU–Hawaii: A Conversation with Steven C. Wheelwright

INTERVIEW BY FRED E. WOODS

Steven C. Wheelwright (swheelwright@hbs.edu) was president of BYU–Hawaii from 2007 to July 2015.

Fred E. Woods (fred_woods@byu.edu) is a professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU.

This interview was held to celebrate the 60th anniversary of BYU–Hawaii and the 150th anniversary of Laie’s designation as a gathering place for Latter-day Saints.

Steven Charles Wheelwright was born in Salt Lake City in September 1943. Raised also in this locale, he grew up loving Scouting and the outdoors. Further, Steve enjoyed swimming on both the East High School and the University of Utah swim teams. Following missionary service in the North Scottish Mission (1963–65), Steve returned to the University of Utah, where he met and later married Margaret Steele. They are now the parents of five children and have twenty grandchildren.

After completing an MBA and PhD degrees at Stanford, Steven spent one year in France at INSEAD and then joined the Harvard Business School faculty in 1971. Eight years later the Wheelwrights received a tenured offer to return to the Stanford Business School. In 1988 they moved back to Boston because of an offer extended by Harvard University and because they felt inspired that this was the best place for their family.
The Wheelwrights presided over the England London Mission from 2000 to 2003. When Steve and Margaret again retired from Harvard in August 2006, almost immediately President Monson called and asked if they would serve as a senior missionary couple at BYU–Idaho under the direction of President Kim B. Clark. Little did the Wheelwrights imagine that less than a year later (June 2007), Steve would become the ninth president of BYU–Hawaii.

Woods: What do you notice about the caliber of the students coming to and graduating from BYU–Hawaii during the past eight years since your arrival here?

Wheelwright: It’s interesting how we view our students as they come from these many different countries; they’re obviously coming much better prepared in two very important respects. Increasingly, we find that they’re spiritually better prepared. We’re getting a larger and larger percentage of returned missionaries. In fact, this semester we have received the first batch returning since they lowered the age limit [October 2012]. We think that our percentage of returned missionaries will go up dramatically and this will be thought of as a returned-missionary school. The second thing is that we find that as we better understand the school districts and the different countries our students are coming from, we get a clearer sense of their academic preparation, and we can use our online program to help prepare them much better, both in English as well as in academic subjects. We find that this improves their success rate and better prepares them to be successful in jobs in their home country, which of course is very important.

Woods: How does such a small place as Laie play such a significant role in the Church and in the world?

Wheelwright: One of the great things about Laie is that it’s always been a gathering place. Initially it was a gathering place for the Saints in the greater Pacific, but when the university was built it became a gathering place for higher education. Then the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC) followed, and it became a gathering place for tourists that might otherwise never have stopped in this place. So I think the combination of these Church activities—temple, BYU–Hawaii, and PCC—make it unique and special within the Church system.

Woods: What do you notice about there being [in the words of President Hinckley] “something special, something spiritual, something wonderful, that’s associated in the kinship with the Almighty” in this area?

Wheelwright: One of the things that really makes Laie unique is to have the temple here, and then to have everything really focused around the temple. I think local residents, particularly members of the Church (and that’s most of what we have in this part of the island), came here mostly because of the temple. The university and the PCC have simply strengthened and enhanced that attractiveness of the temple. But it means that the activity level of the people here in this area, particularly among members of the Church, is unique and special. We think of the temple as the center of all that we do. We think then of the other institutions as a complement to the spiritual learning that goes on in the temple. So I think part of it is the fact that the temple is here; that makes us unique and special.

Woods: Being a former professor and senior associate dean at the Harvard Business School, what have you learned that has made you realize that BYU–Hawaii, though small and sheltered, has such a great mission and destiny as one of the best schools of learning?

Wheelwright: Having been associated with leading secular institutions all my life, it’s been very interesting coming to a small, religious-based institution like BYU–Hawaii. Here you really see the impact of a complete education. You see what a difference it makes to educate the spiritual, as well as the social and emotional and other aspects of the individual, in addition to the academic or professional preparation. One of the things that is sorely missing on secular campuses is the opportunity to teach the full person gospel truths and all of the things that they will need in their life. I think that makes us unique and special, and it certainly comes through in how our students feel about the institution.

Wheelwright: Having been associated with leading secular institutions all my life, it’s been very interesting coming to a small, religious-based institution like BYU–Hawaii. Here you really see the impact of a complete education. You see what a difference it makes to educate the spiritual, as well as the social and emotional and other aspects of the individual, in addition to the academic or professional preparation. One of the things that is sorely missing on secular campuses is the opportunity to teach the full person gospel truths and all of the things that they will need in their life. I think that makes us unique and special, and it certainly comes through in how our students feel about the institution.

Woods: I find this interesting just because Harvard was the first university in America—1636, as I recall—and their original mission statement was “This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

Wheelwright: In fact, all of those initial Ivy League schools were focused on a Christian-based education. In those days they educated only young men, which is unfortunate, but they were founded to educate young men on the principles of truth found in the Bible so that they could be what we would call a Renaissance person—that is, somebody who in all aspects of his or her life is educated. And then over time they started cutting things out and got to where they are now.
Woods: So what do you think are the strengths of BYU–Hawaii that are unequaled in other parts of the world? What really makes it distinctive?

Wheelwright: One of the things that I think is really unique about BYU–Hawaii is the multicultural environment. We have students from more countries, and we have a larger proportion of our student body from outside the U.S., than any other undergraduate institution. This is true even of institutions that have forty or fifty thousand students. Nowadays, many others are trying to duplicate that diversity and variety, if you will, but we have this wonderful laboratory where we get to see it in action all the time. Another thing that is unique is the fact that with those students from those different cultures, you see the gospel and how it interacts with different cultures, which again is very different than if you were just in a single culture and watching the interaction between the gospel and that culture. Here you get to see what really is common, what might be at odds or could be refined in order to better be a part of the gospel culture, and that’s very important to our students.

Woods: In 1973, President Marion G. Romney made the comment that this school “is a living laboratory. . . . For what could be done here interculturally in a small way is what mankind must do on a large scale if we are ever to have real brotherhood on this earth.” So I wanted to ask you how you view BYU–Hawaii as this living laboratory that President Romney spoke of more than forty years ago.

Wheelwright: I loved President Romney—he was wonderful—and I love the reference that he made to a living laboratory, because that is what we are. Our students come here not knowing in many cases what to expect, so we help them set expectations, whether it’s about work, education, social life, service in the community, or serving in the Church. Those are all things that are part of the educational laboratory here on this campus. And I think our students do a wonderful job, as do our faculty and staff, at discovering new and better ways to accomplish those things. And I think that’s one of the senses that President Romney had in mind when he called it a living laboratory.

Woods: So I often tell my students [citing BYU professor Terry D. Olson], “I want you to always remember to sift your discipline through the gospel, not the gospel through your discipline.” I wanted to just get your feedback on this statement. Would you comment about that?

Wheelwright: Sometimes people would call it a clash of cultures, where either their discipline culture or their ethnic culture may conflict with the gospel culture. One of the things that we’ve worked very hard on—and my predecessors have done a great job of this—is how do you take the best of those cultures and put that into a context that is consistent with the gospel culture? That’s something that I think is distinctive about BYU–Hawaii. We have students from enough cultures that we should be able to make real progress on that front. One of the things that leads to most of the violent clashes in the world is the clash of cultures. Sometimes it gets couched in beliefs and practices. But I really think that if we would focus on what it is that is valuable about an ethnic culture, and give somebody identity, purpose, and so forth, and then use the mirror of the gospel culture and its truths, then I think we can get the gospel culture embedded into even ethnic culture. And that’s what I think the Lord has in mind. I don’t think the Lord intends for us to all be the same and have the same ethnic culture. We are the way we are because that’s how he created us. And it’s a matter of making the gospel the dominant culture but not having it erase the rest of the influences of our ethnic culture.

Similarly, one of the wonderful things regarding the many academic disciplines here at BYU–Hawaii is that our faculty see the melding of ethnic cultures to make them complementary to gospel culture, and they naturally do the same thing with their academic discipline culture.

Woods: What were some of the ways in which you feel the Lord prepared you for your appointment as the ninth president of BYU–Hawaii?

Wheelwright: I had no idea what to expect when I came to BYU–Hawaii, and yet as it has unfolded I’ve discovered more and more aspects of his preparation. Let me just highlight a couple of these that I think make the point of how intimately involved the Lord is in the detail of our lives because he knows what’s coming later.

One of them is connected to the year we spent in France (1970). At the time, I thought we were going to France right out of my PhD program so that I could get my feet on the ground and establish my own style of teaching and research and really get started without having to be in the intense environment I knew I was going to be in when I got to Boston. Well, it turns out that did work and that was great, but I probably learned even more about how it feels to be a non-native speaker in a foreign culture. That has had a great influence on how I think of our international students and their struggles with English and what we can do to assist them.

A second is connected to our involvement with the building of the Boston Temple. Right from the beginning the Boston Temple had more than its share of opposition during its planning and construction. My wife was in charge of responding to people who called the hotline about issues
We've also added certificates and additional educational elements that are just English that you can use either in employment or in pursuing higher education. Boston, but the Boston experience was very relevant for what's going on here in Laie with some of our opponents and how we might respond. I find myself in conversations thinking about some of those things that we learned during the Boston Temple planning, construction, and open house.

Further was the experience of being a mission president. We had young men and young women from forty different countries at any one time. While I had international students in my MBA classes, it's different when you're a mission president because you really get to know how they are thinking and how they are reacting to circumstances around them in a more personal way.

Woods: How does BYU–Hawaii deal with the challenge of preparing international students to be exceptional employees in such a wide range of countries that you're currently serving?

Wheelwright: It's clear that President McKay was prophetic, not just about the institution but about the individual students and what they would need to be successful in accomplishing all the Lord intended for them to do. We use a little triplet to summarize President McKay's mission statement—we see our students becoming learners, leaders, and builders. That's our code for the mission of BYU–Hawaii. It's focused on our students becoming lifetime learners who are broad in their approach to learning so that it covers all aspects of what they're doing, not just one certain aspect. Furthermore, if their leadership is based on character and integrity and if they want to build something that's going to last, those are the things that employers want all over the world. We've also added certificates and additional educational elements that are just what companies are looking for, whether it's familiarity with a certain IT package or whether it's the ability to use graphic arts in web design.

Woods: Please share some of the challenges in the pursuit of English acquisition that you've found for missionaries as well as returned missionaries.

Wheelwright: There are two things that I think most people would agree are needed to become an accomplished English speaker and to acquire the English that you can use either in employment or in pursuing higher education. One is that you need a diagnostic test that can be administered regularly so students know how they are doing and also where they need to focus more attention, whether it's reading, writing, listening, or speaking. It's not just a matter of vocabulary. It's a matter of all of those dimensions and moving them forward so that they become more accomplished in each of those rather than only being accomplished in say, conversational English without being able to read or write English. The diagnostic testing needs to be effective and inexpensive if it is going to be used periodically with large numbers of missionaries and returned missionaries.

The second thing you need is a curriculum. And it needs to fit a framework that goes from the novice to the advanced levels. One of the wonderful things about English as a second language is that there's been lots of work done on it, so there are pretty good standards for different levels of accomplishment, whether it's reading, writing, speaking, or listening. If you took those standards and provided a curriculum and diagnostic tests that would help missionaries master English, you could then continue moving forward by keeping them learning English throughout their missions and postmission.

Such a curriculum would help missionaries end their missions with a 2,500- to 3,000-word vocabulary instead of being at about a 1,500-word vocabulary. Then they would be ready to select one of two tracks as they come home from their mission. The one track would be employment English, and that's going to be the responsibility of the Self-Reliance Centers internationally. These are like the employment centers in the U.S. The Self-Reliance Centers have discovered the quickest way to enhance somebody's employment opportunities is to enhance their English and do it through teaching them employment English. The other track is academic English. That's a much higher level of English. That's the level of English that will enable a student to get an English-based higher-education degree. We are working to add more online English courses that will assist with each of these.

Woods: I've read online that BYU–Hawaii's mission statement "is to integrate both spiritual and secular learning, and to prepare students with character and integrity who can provide leadership in their families, their communities, their chosen fields, and in building the kingdom of God." What are some of the things BYU–Hawaii is currently doing to fulfill her mission statement, beyond what you have already articulated?

Wheelwright: Clearly one is academic excellence, which is where our faculty is focused. That's their main charge and they do a great job of that. On the spiritual learning side, which is also an integral part of that mission statement, we really look to the campus stakes and wards as well as the temple
and the opportunities that the students have to serve both places. One of the great things about our students is that with more and more of them being returned missionaries, they understand why it’s important for them to be engaged, accept a calling, and fulfill that calling. The fact that they’re in this environment has a lot to do with helping them accomplish the mission—an environment where classes start with prayer, an environment where they’re learning from faithful Latter-day Saints who inevitably are going to include their personal testimonies and examples in their teaching. The fact that they’re with other students who have a similar belief, even though they may have a very different cultural background, is beneficial. You get all of that mixed together, and that’s all part of how we help them accomplish this mission of becoming learners, leaders, and builders.

Woods: How does the triad of BYU–Hawaii, the Polynesian Cultural Center, and the Laie temple complement each other?

Wheelwright: At a very fundamental level—and this is part of our mission—we’re trying to integrate all aspects of learning so there’s a single foundation for a lifetime of learning. So, whether it’s spiritual learning, employment and work practices learning, academic learning, or social learning, we want all of that to be part of the same foundation so that our students will be lifetime learners. One of the things that happens if you work part-time either in the temple or at the PCC is that you’ll end up testing what you’re learning in the classroom in those other settings. We see all three of these learning environments as complementing each other. It’s doing them all regularly in parallel that allows a student to get the most out of each one of them individually, but also to get the most out of all three of them collectively. If you’re going to become a learner, leader, and builder, you need to have all of these aspects working together.

Woods: How will the new BYU–Hawaii academic calendar operate, and what were the reasons behind the changes?

Wheelwright: An academic calendar is a very interesting set of challenges, as most people can appreciate. Historically, everybody needed to be off from May to October because that’s when they were needed on the farm. These were farmers in an agrarian society, so people got in the habit of thinking that you go to school for two semesters (fall and winter) and then you’re out the rest of the time. Well, that’s not a very effective or efficient way to use the resources of the Church that are supporting the Church Educational System. Both BYU–Hawaii and BYU–Idaho have been asked to look for ways to better utilize those resources and serve more students.

Our new calendar, which will start this summer, was suggested by the faculty with student and staff input. The new calendar has three equal semesters, one starting the beginning of August, another the beginning of November, and another the beginning of March. The winter semester has a two-week break for Christmas and New Year’s. Following the spring semester there is a seven-week break from about the second week of June until the end of July. Those seven weeks correspond to when the Hawaii public schools are out. It also corresponds to when the PCC has its busiest two-month period. Since most of our international students don’t leave, three semesters a year means that we can serve more students, better utilize the resources, the faculty still get time off with their families in the summer, and they get a break at Christmas. Plus we have a week between each of the semesters. We think for BYU–Hawaii this calendar is going to work very well.

Woods: What are some of the tutorials you’ve learned while functioning as the ninth president of BYU–Hawaii?

Wheelwright: One of the great things that I’ve learned is the difference between a CES institution and a secular institution—how they work and why they work and what’s important to each. Probably the thing that is easiest to summarize regarding this difference comes from Elder Ballard’s book Counseling with Our Councils. The Church works on councils, and so does CES when it works best. We have a Dean’s Council. We have an Academic Council. We have the President’s Council. And each of my vice presidents has a council with their direct reports.

One of the places where this difference is most visible in counseling with councils is when it comes to hiring faculty. Within the Church Educational System, the way we choose faculty is we form a search committee whose job it is to find the best candidates, get the two or three best to campus, have a wide range of people interview them, and have each candidate teach and present. Then we have a council that meets, so this is the hiring council, which is advisory to myself and the academic vice president. Rather than the search committee deciding whom they’re going to hire, we instead have a very thoughtful and prayerful discussion about how we would rank these candidates and why, and what would be most useful to the university, this department, and the students at this time. With that counsel, it is then my
A Conversation with Steven C. Wheelwright

And so no faculty member sees administration as their career. Whereas on the faculty side it’s more like counseling in a bishopric or a stake presidency or even as a mission president. This is different from the secular model, but it works well for us. And so that’s probably one of the biggest lessons that I’ve learned.

A second lesson I’ve learned is about change. When I arrived, the executive committee was very clear on some imperatives that we needed to address, and I felt very accountable to them for delivering on those. So it wasn’t a matter of “Well, do I want to do this or not?” It was a matter of “How’s the best way to do this, and how do I use my councils to help me do this?” so that they would understand why we needed to do this. Then we’d collectively come up with the best way to do it. In the end you sometimes have to make a hard decision and move forward. In the secular world, everybody understands that, but in the Church employment world, they don’t all understand that. And that was something I had to learn because I had never worked in a Church employment situation.

Woods: Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?

Wheelwright: One of the things I’ve learned is that you need to give people options whenever possible. Now, they might not like any of the options, but at least if they have options, then they get a chance to use their agency when you say, “Here’s the range of options that are possible.” It always works better if you can find a way to give people at least two options, and it took us a while to get that established as a pattern.

A second thing is that I’ve learned some things about hiring. I think we’ve done very well on the faculty side with our counseling approach. On the staff side it’s been a little more mixed because of how long people had been in their positions. One of the nice things about academics, at least in a place like this, is the deans and the department chairs turn over every three to five years. And so no faculty member sees administration as their career. Whereas on the staff side, once you reach a certain level it’s very hard to either move up or out and to keep them there if they’re not doing their job. Then it’s hard to find options. I think if we’d have done a broader and more extensive educational effort on counseling and councils earlier and made it deeper on the staff side, that would have helped. You can always look back and say, “I wish we would have done this a little differently or that a little differently.”

Woods: What do you think are the contributions that you either have made or you’re striving to make that you feel strongly about?

Wheelwright: This is my crystallization of what the executive committee and the board wanted me to do: continue to improve the quality of every aspect of the university, continue to lower the cost of the university, and continue to serve more students. Now, the first two have been the ones that I have spent most of my time on, because I knew if we made real progress on those first two, number three would happen naturally. But in fact, number three is probably the most important. For example, we went after getting a higher percentage of our students their degrees before they leave. We’ve increased the number of degrees awarded fairly dramatically. And it’s about helping them develop a plan to finish in a reasonable number of semesters. Students now understand what their responsibility is and what their opportunity is while they’re here so that they really take advantage of everything because that’s part of the expectation.

We also had some buildings that were at their end of life, and we needed to either completely renovate them or we needed to tear them down and build new ones.Fortunately, they built the original campus to last, and we’ve been able to renovate many buildings and get another fifty years out of them. All of those things are important. In addition, I think one of the most important is the university’s role in the broader community and in partnership with the PCC, the temple, and Hawaii Reserves Inc. (HRI) in making our community more sustainable.

Woods: Drawing upon the many experiences that you’ve had at either Harvard, Stanford, or other areas, what do you think it means for a person to be truly educated?

Wheelwright: I heard an interesting talk recently about the transition from data to information, from information to knowledge, and from knowledge to wisdom. Now, this was a secular talk, but this was clearly somebody who had thought a lot about what it means in the secular world to be educated. It means to have wisdom. It means getting away from the data through the information that’s in the data on into the knowledge and really understanding. But then it’s the application of that understanding, which is where the wisdom comes in. I think about it more in terms of President McKay’s wisdom comes in. I think about it more in terms of President McKay’s...
teaching of becoming a learner, leader, and builder in the gospel sense. We’re here on earth to gain an eternal education, to lay a foundation for who we’re going to be in the eternities.

The way President Ezra Taft Benson used to say it is that thoughts lead to acts, acts lead to habits, habits lead to character, and character determines our eternal destiny. Character is what we’re really about at BYU–Hawaii. It’s the character of our learning and how we think about learning. It’s the character and integrity of our leadership and what we’re willing to take responsibility and accountability for. It’s the character of what we build. Are we building an eternal family or something temporary, whether it’s our family, our profession, and so forth? I think that our mission statement about developing learners, leaders, and builders is probably the best summary of what it means to be truly educated.

Woods: What do you love most about BYU–Hawaii?

Wheelwright: I love teaching, and I love students. That’s why I got into academics. I haven’t gotten to do as much traditional teaching here as I have in the past, but every week at devotional we make sure at the luncheon we try to have a dozen students there, and I love hearing their stories. I love asking them what they are thinking—about their major, about their classes, about what their plans are. I love the idea of still being able to teach, and so I’ve told our faculty that I’ll teach a class for them anytime they’d like me to. Obviously those in business ask most often. I’ve also done some sessions in intercultural relations and in peace building, and it’s been very interesting. Plus I view the opportunity to speak at a devotional each semester and at commencement as additional teaching opportunities.

Woods: This last fall while driving across the country, I was listening to a book tape with my wife on the life of Larry Miller, titled Driven. This leads to my final question, which is what drives Steven C. Wheelwright? I’d just like to have you share your thoughts about that, your core of what motivates, what drives you, going back to your childhood and up to the present.

Wheelwright: I had a mother who taught me that you can do anything that you put your mind to if you really work at it. Work was the answer to most goals—not gifts or talents or anything else. And she believed it. It had been true in her life, and she taught her kids that same thing. I also had a father who owned his own business, and so I worked in it from the age of twelve on up. I got to where I really enjoyed work. I could see what you could learn while you were working and what you could accomplish. I also had the good fortune of having an excellent math teacher in about the fifth grade who pulled me aside and said, “You know, you could be really good at this if you really work at it.” And I took that to heart and decided that I was going to be an excellent student and that if I worked hard at it, and with the Lord’s help, I could do it.

I always had tremendous faith that the Lord would help me if I did my part, and I wanted to make sure that I was doing my part so that I’d feel comfortable asking for his help. Those things really set a standard for excellence, hard work, and faith in the Lord in my life. I went into teaching because I loved it. Even on the hardest days, I loved it. And I loved the fact that I was learning while the students were learning and I could see my learning as well as theirs, and that’s been rewarding.

I thought I was going to retire after our mission. We sold our house before we left Boston in 2000. Then I got recruited back to Harvard by my good friend Kim Clark, and that was an exciting three more years that I wouldn’t have had otherwise. Then we had the missionary opportunity in Idaho, and frankly I would never have applied for this job had it been an application. But you know, that’s not how it works. We have been delighted with our BYU–Hawaii experiences thus far and have learned a tremendous amount. We love the students and being involved in their lives. And we enjoy having them keep in touch after they leave. I get emails almost every day from former students who give me an update on their life and express their appreciation for BYU–Hawaii. I love hearing from them and how they are doing. Those are the real rewards of being president.

Notes
The Role of Art in Teaching Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine

Anthony Sweat (anthony_sweat@byu.edu) is an assistant professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU.

This article is an expanded and adapted version from an appendix in the book From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon, by Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat.

How far has Fine Art, in all or any ages of the world, been conducive to the religious life? —John Ruskin, Modern Painters, 1856

Being a Brigham Young University religion professor and a part-time professionally trained artist is a bit like being a full-time police officer and a weekend race-car driver. At times the two labors are mutually reinforcing, and at others they are completely at odds. As a teacher of Latter-day Saint history and doctrine, it is extremely beneficial to have visual art represent and bring understanding to our history, and as an artist it is invaluable to have meaningful history to illustrate and provide context to messages in a piece of art. Many of the world’s most iconic pieces of art, such as Michelangelo’s Pieta or Jacque Louis David’s Marat, are visual representations of historical events. However, true art and true history rarely (if ever) fully combine. They are intertwined...
entities (history needs to be visually represented, and artists need meaningful history to create impactful images), but their connection more often creates difficult knots instead of well-tied bows that serve both art and history. These knots often result because the aims of history and the aims of art are not aligned, often pulling in entirely different directions. History wants facts; art wants meaning. History strives to validate sources; art strives to evoke emotion. History is more substance; art is more style. History begs accuracy; art begs aesthetics. The two disciples often love yet hate one another as they strive to serve their different masters. This discord has never been more apparent to me than in my recent experience of painting the feature image of the translation of the Book of Mormon, *By the Gift and Power of God*, and illustrating the subsequent chapters for the book *From Darkness unto Light*. Using images of the translation of the Book of Mormon as the primary example, this article attempts to briefly illuminate why this discord between art and history exists and the roles that art and scholarly sources play in our understanding of historical events. Based on these ideas, this article concludes with three practical implications for gospel teachers and learners about the use of gospel art in teaching and learning religious doctrine and history.

The Language of Art

Often an inherent misunderstanding exists between artists and historians partly because the two disciplines speak different native languages. The language of history is facts and sources, and the language of art is symbolic representations in line, value, color, texture, form, space, shape, and so forth. The tension lies in that historians, scholars, and teachers often want paintings that are historically accurate because images often shape our perceptions of history as much as, or perhaps more than, many of the scholarly works about history. A great example of how works of art shape our historical memory would be to ask, “How did George Washington cross the Delaware?” What comes to mind? Probably Emanuel Leutze’s famous *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851), with Washington standing heroically toward the front of a rowboat in daylight. However, historically the boat is probably wrong, the weather is off, the flag is anachronistic, and the pose is just downright unrealistic (try standing that way in a rowboat and it will probably capsize). Thus, when paintings carry apparent egregious historical errors, manipulations, or complete fabrications, there are some who bristle and wonder why the artist didn’t paint it more accurately, wishing that painters and sculptors and the like wouldn’t engage in revisionist history by distorting reality.

However, artists often have little to no intent of communicating historical factuality when they produce a work. Artists want to communicate an idea, and they want to use whatever medium or principle and element of art it takes to communicate that idea to their viewers. In doing research on this topic, I interviewed a handful of well-known and talented Latter-day Saint artists and asked them various questions regarding the responsibility of an artist to paint historical reality. Almost unanimously, they said the artist carries no responsibility to do so. When I asked this question of prominent LDS artist Walter Rane, who has painted many Church history–related paintings, he said:

I don't think an artist has any responsibility to be historically accurate. If I'm doing a painting I can do whatever I want. I can look at a sunset and paint it blue instead of red if I want to express something. I don't feel like as an artist I have a responsibility to be historically accurate unless someone has commissioned me [to do so]. Art is self-expression. Art is communication. That's what art is. If I'm trying to express something that is important to me I'll do whatever I want. If it means putting Christ in contemporary clothing, or whatever, if it's important to the message I'm trying to make then I'll do it.

Thus, for example, one of the greatest biblical painters and illustrators of all time, Rembrandt, set many of his biblical paintings in quaint seventeenth-century Dutch settings and dress perhaps because it communicated biblical ideas in ways familiar to his audience but far from historical reality. I was once conversing with a group of Muslim religious educators from Saudi Arabia when they visited a local LDS seminary. One of them pointed to perhaps our most oft-printed LDS image—Del Parson’s portrait of Christ in a red robe titled *The Lord Jesus Christ*—and he asked me who that person in the portrait was. “Jesus,” I told them. They all broke out in spontaneous laughter. “You think that is what Jesus looks like? An American mountain man?” they said humorously. “What do you think he looks like?” I asked in return. “Us!” they said in unison. And perhaps they are right. But whether Jesus looks American or Swedish or Saudi Arabian or African American, all that matters to an artist is the message that comes through to the audience receiving that image.

In an interview I conducted with Del Parson, painter of *The Lord Jesus Christ*, he had a similar attitude of feeling over facts:
When I’m painting the Savior I am going for emotion more than anything else. When they [the viewers] see the painting, they see the Savior. I did the best I could [to create the painting] with what I had. I got some material and wrapped it around a model and painted it. The last thing I was worried about was whether the robe was at the right level at the neck. The whole thing I was worried about was can they feel the Savior? 

Artist J. Kirk Richards, when speaking with me about painting the First Vision, said:

I’ve had people talk about what the “correct” clothing is [of the First Vision] and so on and so forth. In reality, I don’t care. I want it to feel [like] what we feel when we think about the First Vision. And a lot of times historical details detract from getting that feeling across. So, very low on my list of considerations is historical detail. Sorry historians. Don’t hate me. . . . I’m usually trying to present the principle of a spiritual truth rather than a historical truth.

Thus, because art and artists’ first language is usually meaning and message, it is not necessary for an artist to be bilingual and able to fluently speak the language of history. Paradoxically, a piece of art can and often does communicate “truth” without being historically true, as countless images over the years have exemplified.1 Duke professor of religion and art David Morgan says that the meaning of “truth” in art is therefore “ambivalent . . . whose meanings range from ‘credible’ to ‘accurate,’ and ‘correct’ to ‘faithful’ and ‘loyal.’ In each case, true designates not the image as much as the proactive contribution of the ‘eye of faith.’”

However, while art and artists are often credited with making historical, and particularly religious, ideas come alive and plainer to understand,11 an inherent problem enters when the language of religious art becomes translated into the language of history by its viewer. What we see becomes what we believe, and often, therefore, what we think we know about facts and details of history. And when we learn religious facts and history (from scholars or historians) that contradict what we think we know (through artistic renderings), a state of cognitive dissonance—and in the case of religious art, spiritual dissonance—can often be the result. The translation of the Book of Mormon is perhaps the most pertinent and pressing example of this problem today in the LDS mind.

Artistic Renderings of the Book of Mormon Translation

In the fall semester of 2013 in one of my Doctrine and Covenants courses at Brigham Young University, we were studying about the translation of the Book of Mormon (D&C sections 6–9). I showed and discussed with my class many of the sources12 about Joseph translating the Book of Mormon using the seer stone(s) placed in a hat, presumably to eliminate light. We had a great discussion and learning experience together. Later that day I received the following email from a student:

I just wanted to thank you for today’s lesson about Joseph Smith and the translation process. A little over a year ago, I started spending a lot of time with my friend [name omitted] who had recently left the Church and was pretty much convinced of atheism. He had researched some things about Joseph Smith and would tell me all about it. . . . When he would tell me about these things, my first instinct was to deny it and say, “No that can’t be true; that’s not what the illustrations of the translation look like and I’ve never been taught that at church.” . . . This time in my life turned out to be a huge trial of my faith.13

Of particular importance to this article is the phrase “That can’t be true; that’s not what the illustrations of the translation look like.” This student (and many others) had formed historical knowledge of the translation through representations in religious art. Many of us do the same. Regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, this becomes particularly problematic because none of the currently used Church images of the translation of the Book of Mormon are consistent with the historical record.

Over the past year with my research assistant, Jordan Hadley, I have documented and analyzed all of the paintings of the translation of the Book of Mormon that have ever been published in the Church’s Ensign magazine since its inception in 1971 through March of 2014. This provided us with the last forty-three years of published representations of the translation of the Book of Mormon in one of the Church’s official magazines. In all, there have been fifty-five times the Ensign has depicted the translation of the Book of Mormon over the past forty-three years, repeatedly using seventeen different images. The most oft-used image is Del Parson’s Joseph Smith Translating the Book of Mormon (also printed in the Gospel Art Kit and Preach My Gospel), used a total of fourteen times since January of 1997.14 All of the Ensign images are inconsistent with aspects of documented Church history of the translation process of the Book of Mormon. For example, in each of the seventeen Ensign images, Joseph Smith is shown looking into open plates (not closed or wrapped or absent plates). In eleven of the images Joseph Smith has his finger on the open plates, usually in a studious pose, as though he is translating individual characters through intellectual interpretive effort and not through revelatory means through the Urim and Thummim. Only one painting15 in
A logical question emerges upon analyzing the published images of the translation with Joseph looking into a hat, he surprised me by telling me that the Church had actually talked to him a few times in the past about producing an image like that but that the projects fell by the wayside as other matters became more pressing. Note how Walter refers to the language of art as to why he never created the image: 

At least twice I have been approached by the Church to do that scene [Joseph translating using the hat]. I get into it. When I do the drawings I think, “This is going to look really strange to people.” Culturally from our vantage point 100 years later it just looks odd. It probably won’t communicate what the Church wants to communicate. Instead of a person being inspired to translate ancient records it will just be, “What’s going on there?” It will divert people’s attention. In both of those cases I remember being interested and intrigued when the commission was changed (often they [The Church] will just throw out ideas that disappear, not deliberately), but I thought just maybe I should still do it. But some things just don’t work visually. It’s true of a lot of stories in the scriptures. That’s why we see some of the same things being done over and over and not others; some just don’t work visually. 

In my interview with J. Kirk Richards, when I asked him how he would approach the translation of the Book of Mormon image, he said to me, “It would be hard for me to paint a painting with Joseph with his head in a hat. We would have no sense of the vision of what is happening inside.” Thus great and gifted artists like Walter Rane and J. Kirk Richards and others, who do know the history and have considered creating translation paintings with Joseph using the hat, have not created an image to reflect that history because it doesn’t translate well in the language of art. Their point of view, as artists, is perfectly valid: If the image doesn’t communicate the proper message, even if it is historically accurate, then the art won’t be effective and has failed to speak properly in its native tongue. 

As an artist, I can sympathize with Walter and Kirk. Many of my own sketches of the translation for the book project From Darkness to Light didn’t look right or feel right in terms of the marvelous work and wonder of the Book of Mormon. I joked that some of my sketches with Joseph in the hat should have been called “The Sick of Joseph” because he looks like he is vomiting into the hat. Upon seeing these sketches, multiple people, unfamiliar with our history, asked me if this was the case. The images didn’t communicate anything about inspiration, visions, revelations, miracles, translation, or the like. Just stomach sickness. For past artists (or Ensign art directors) who may have known about the historical documents of the translation, it may simply be that choosing to depict Joseph with his finger in open plates with a pensive look was more visually appealing and communicative than the historical reality of what the translation may have looked like. It is easy for critics to assume a coordinate cover-up or historical rewrite when looking at the images, but perhaps the unjuicy reality may have more to do with a preference for speaking artistic language that is more “true” in its communication, even if the depicted events contain historical error. 

However, when my colleagues Michael MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat introduced me to their manuscript, notwithstanding the tension between the language of art and the language of history (and in spite of my artistic shortcomings when compared to more qualified artists), I felt impressed that it was time to try and provide a faithful, well-executed artistic image (as many of the existing images of using the hat to translate are either deliberately pejorative or devoid of much artistic merit) of the translation of the Book of Mormon that better reflected historical reality.
The Painting *By the Gift and Power of God*

Toeing a difficult line, my image of the translation attempts to be based upon factual reality while also employing the principles and elements that create good art. I wanted the image to be edifying for a believer and sufficiently accurate for a scholar. In terms of historical accuracy, the image is set from actual interior photographs taken in the replica Whitmer home on location in Fayette, New York, where Joseph and Oliver finished the translation of the Book of Mormon. There is not a sheet between them, and the plates lie wrapped in a linen cloth, as Emma Smith explained they often lay. Both Joseph and Oliver were young at this time (twenty-three and twenty-two years old, respectively, in June of 1829), and I wanted their youth reflected accurately in the image. The clothing is time-period specific; however, I didn’t research it in too much detail. (I am sure there is a clothing expert somewhere saying, “They didn’t wear that type or color of two-toned vests!”) The chair Joseph is sitting on is out of my front room. I did look at photos of top hats from the time period, and I painted the top hat white to try to be accurate to Martin Harris’s description of the “old white hat” Joseph used, but it may not be exactly right (perhaps the brim is too wide or the bottom too deep; I don’t know). The model for Oliver Cowdery was a BYU student who providentially passed by as I was shooting photographs and just “looked” to me like Oliver Cowdery (similar hairline and facial features to some of the historical Oliver Cowdery photos), but not exactly. I modeled Joseph’s body after my own (naturally, some inconsistencies there). Joseph’s face was an amalgamation of profiles from the death mask and some of the features off the actor of the movie *Plates of Gold*, who has a great, youthful “Joseph” look to him. But, really, what did Joseph look like when he was twenty-three? Aside from stylized Sutcliffe Maudsley drawings done later in Joseph’s life, his historical image is difficult to pin down.

Although my attempt tried to include basic historical accuracy, most notably Joseph’s face is not “buried” in the hat, as some translation sources claimed. Why? This is the question of my image I get most often from people who are familiar with the historical explanations of the translation. There are three reasons I chose not to bury his face in the hat: (1) Simply put, it didn’t work visually for this composition. I wanted an unfamiliar viewer to immediately recognize it was Joseph Smith, and having his face in the hat was difficult for many of the people whom I ran preliminary sketches by. Without knowing the historical background, they didn’t know who or what this image depicted. (2) Returning to the language of art, I wanted to communicate the message of inspiration in this image. The human face carries a lot of subtle emotion, and by covering Joseph’s face in the hat, it was difficult to portray ideas such as prayer, pondering, focus, reverence, and revelation. A hat obscured all of those ideas visually. By showing his face I...
could more easily portray inspiration elements in Joseph—the studying it out in his mind and heart and the revelatory gift of a seer—yet still have the image be set in historical reality (as opposed to a figurative or abstracted composition). (3) Last, his face outside the hat still reflects historical reality. Logically, Joseph had to put his face into, and pull his face out of, the hat. I imagine the moment depicted in my painting as Joseph getting ready to go into the hat to see—starting the process of revelation. He almost looks like he is getting ready to tip forward, and the anticipation of that moment causes the viewer want to put Joseph's face into the hat, visually measuring Joseph's face and looking into the opening of the brim, fitting the two together. With this composition your mind can imagine what Joseph is about to do—the revelatory mode he is moving into—and the gift he is starting to exercise at this moment. Having the face out of the hat helped to provide a more interactive and purposeful viewing experience.

Speaking of viewing experience, any well-composed piece of art uses artistic devices to move the eye of the viewer in certain orders, directions, and places. I tried to do the same in this image. When you initially look at the image, odds are that you will look first at the hat. I placed it centrally in the painting for that reason and used the brightest white to pull the eye there. I wanted the viewer to look at the hat first, to deal with it, think about it, examine it, and process it. Next, the eye moves up to Joseph's face, seeing him move into a revelatory mode and connecting it with the opening in the hat. The viewer then might naturally move to the covered plates on the table, contrary to past visual representations of open plates and sheets. Next, the eye moves to Oliver Cowdery in the background as he sits and scribes the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven (Joseph Smith—History 1:71 footnote). Deliberately, the diagonal line of the floor and wall joint coming in from the bottom left of the image, and the vertical line made by where the walls meet, visually pass through Joseph and Oliver and lead the eye to the hat. Using artistic devices of light, I intentionally included the window with sun streaming through, illuminating the ground and room to suggest ideas such as light, truth, revelation, and inspiration upon Joseph.

While my painting is a faithful attempt to visually depict the translation of the Book of Mormon in a manner that is more consistent with the historical records than previous translation paintings, it contains some elements that are purely aesthetic and speak the language of art. Although I tried to accommodate both, the inherent tension between artistic merit and historical reality tugged at me during the creation of this painting. A commentary on one detail in the painting, the lit lantern, is a fitting item and topic upon which to illustrate this tension between the language of art and the language of history. After examining the central aspects of the painting such as the white hat, Joseph, the plates, and Oliver, ultimately I hope the viewer's eye looks up and sees the black lantern above Joseph and Oliver. Michael MacKay, coauthor of From Darkness to Light (for which this image was created), asked me, when he saw the painting in process, why the lantern was lit in the middle of the bright daylight sun in the room. Historical reality? No. Artistic device? Yes. And without explaining, you can already deduce what that illuminated lantern might suggest and symbolize. That's the joy of the language of art, even when it isn't entirely historically accurate.

**Implications for Gospel Teachers and Learners**

With this background explaining why artistic expressions do not always conform to doctrinal or historical factuality (nor do they need to), there are some logical implications for how one might approach the use of art in gospel teaching and learning. I suggest the following three implications: (1) Teach students to see art symbolically and religiously, not just historically and factually; (2) recognize that students may form religious doctrine and history from artistic images, and thus conscientiously help them incorporate interpretive images to better fit into a proper framework of belief; and (3) understand that images depicted in official Church publications are not official declarations of doctrine or history.

**Implication #1: Teach students to see art symbolically and religiously, not just historically and factually.**

When using art and images in gospel teaching, help students approach art in the native language of art. The following two common pedagogical approaches are diametrically opposed examples. In one classroom, Harry Andersen's classic The Second Coming image is projected on the LCD screen and the teacher asks the following: “Take a look at the following painting about the Second Coming. What is wrong with it? How should it have been painted?” The students quickly respond, “He's wearing a white robe and the scriptures say that Christ will be wearing red when he returns.” While this
Another says, “His hands being raised up could show his reverence or gratitude to God the Father.” The second teacher positioned the students to view art through a symbolic, metaphorical, representative lens, suggesting that art does not have to be factually or scripturally precise (lilies don’t grow in sealed tombs, and there is no record of Jesus’ immediate actions when he came forth) to convey meaning, message, and truth. Using art in its native, interpretive tongue helps learners more accurately explicate messages that may get lost in translation if they try to interpret an image strictly through the vocabulary of factuality.

Implication #2: Recognize that students may form religious doctrine and history from artistic images, and thus conscientiously help them incorporate interpretive images to better fit into a proper framework of belief.

Great paintings have the potent force to profoundly shape ideas and beliefs regarding students’ understanding of doctrine and history. As a gospel teacher I have said to classes, “I want each of you to close your eyes and picture King Noah and Abinadi.” The students momentarily do so, and then I ask, “How many of you pictured King Noah as an overweight man sitting on a throne?” Nearly all hands go up. “How many of you pictured Abinadi with his shirt off, as an older man who is apparently in extremely good shape?” Same majority. “What kind of pet does King Noah have?” “Leopards!” the students shout. “How many?” “Two!” The students give these factual details confidently and quickly. The only problem is that these are not factual details. At least not scripturally factual details, as the Book of Mormon never mentions Abinadi’s age, Noah’s weight, nor his pet leopards. What the students were describing were the details of Arnold Friberg’s classic painting Abinadi Before King Noah, an image with such influence and widespread distribution that it has shaped these artistic interpretations into almost certain facts for an entire generation of Church members.

Thus, because art carries such power to form ideas, religious educators would do well when using artistic images to preface them with comments such as, “Here is one interpretation of this event.” Walter Rane told me that, simply, “we need more [varied] images out there” so that nobody confuses one of them as the “official” way things looked or happened, but can appropriately be seen simply as one person’s expression.22 Perhaps this is one reason why the Church has recently produced three varied depictions of the sacred temple video. Although “the script in each of the films is the same,” each varies the setting and unspoken details differently, which may imply to viewers that each film is an interpretation and not a singular historical declaration.23 When I asked J. Kirk Richards the question “From an artist’s perspective, what would you want religious educators and students of religious education to bear in mind when using art to teach and learn the gospel?” he answered, “Always preface that this is an artist’s interpretation of it, and the reason why I [as an educator] am using it is because. . . . If you feel like you have historical facts that contradict the imagery you can say that: ‘We know this or research shows this’—I don’t think an artist would mind that at all. I certainly would not mind if someone said that [about my images].”24

The more we recognize that our students often form scriptural, doctrinal, and historical ideas from the imagery we use, the more responsible and conscientious we become in how we may help students understand, use, and incorporate interpretive images to better fit into a proper framework of belief.

Implication #3: Understand that images depicted in official Church publications are not official declarations of doctrine or history.

Just because a piece of art is published in the Ensign, it does not necessarily depict the Church’s official position on a scriptural, doctrinal, or historical theme. While Church magazines do what they can to attempt to have images be doctrinally and historically accurate, the reality is that it is not always feasible nor reasonable to do so. In an email communication, a representative at...
Church magazines wrote to me, “While our library consists of many images created from the past, we do not always have the time, money, or resources to create new art and direct every minutia of detail [of images] for monthly publications.”

Thus the Church often publishes paintings created in the past from artists (both LDS and of other faiths) who may have depicted a scene with some doctrinal or historical inconsistencies. To innocently expect all images in Church publications to be doctrinally and historically accurate creates problems and confusion both for the viewer and the Church—such as when Church magazines photoshopped one of Carl Bloch’s Resurrection images in the December 2011 Ensign (digitally removing the wings from the angels and capping their clothing to cover their exposed shoulders) to perhaps try and better match LDS doctrines and standards.

Understanding the language of art removes unnecessary assumptions for both the consumer and producer of art in a Church venue.

Additionally, sometimes the temporal realities of deadlines, resources, time, and money influence why doctrinally or historically inaccurate images may be created or used in official Church outlets. Del Parson said that while understandably “the Church has got to be very careful when they throw an image out there,” some of his paintings were done quickly. “You get a call and they [the Church magazine] need it today,” Del told me, “and so I did the best I could with what I had”—suggesting that temporal realities sometimes influence how much he can put into creating an image with scriptural, doctrinal, or historical accuracy. Walter Rane said, “If they want it to be historically accurate I’ll do my best. There have been times with Church history paintings when I was commissioned to do something . . . and I tell them up front I’m not a researcher. I’m not a scholar (at all). Therefore I ask them to supply me with information that would help.”

Sometimes that is possible, and for some images it simply isn’t. Understanding that each image produced by the Church has artistic and temporal factors that sometimes influence the images they use and produce should influence how we, as teachers and learners, should see and use those images. We would do well to remember that official doctrine is proclaimed by prophets, not by painters or printers.

Conclusion

A few years ago Walter Rane did a large multi-image series of Book of Mormon themes. He told me, “When I was first commissioned to do that series on the Book of Mormon, I had shied away from doing it because we don’t know what the people and setting looked like.” Gratefully, he still painted these masterful images and printed them in a beautiful book.

Since then, these fresh Book of Mormon images have been displayed and used and printed often in Church venues to bless and inspire many persons in many places. However, when consulting with a well-known Book of Mormon scholar in the beginning stages as the images were being sketched out for production, the scholar said to him, “You shouldn’t even do this project. We should stop doing Book of Mormon paintings until the archaeologists have better determined what things really looked like.” Walter Rane said, “So I went ahead and ignored that advice and did the images anyway . . . as best as I could.”

To think that we cannot produce or use a painting unless it is factually, doctrinally, or historically accurate is detrimental to the pursuit and expression of truth. Such a historical, wrong-unless-its-factually-accurate perspective would undermine much of the great art and its potent effects the world over.

Using Doctrine and Covenants 50:19–21 as a guide, as teachers and students of the gospel we must recognize that there is both “the word of truth” and “the spirit of truth.” That duality is true not only in preaching, but also in painting. A painting can be devoid of accurate words or facts or history (words of truth) yet still inspire, edify, uplift, and be of God (the spirit of truth). History needs art, and art needs history, but each speaks its own native tongue that is most conducive to its desired outcomes—which, for artists, is primarily to create meaning and message, evoking emotion and inspiration. As Del Parson said to me as we concluded our interview, “We are just trying to make something tangible that is intangible. It’s our way of worship.”

As we let painters speak the language of art, and understand why they do so even if it isn’t doctrinally or historically accurate, we can be better prepared to responsibly use their images of truth as we help others teach and learn the gospel.

Notes

2. Anthony Sweat received a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting and drawing from the University of Utah in 1999.
3. Jacque Louis David’s The Death of Marat (1793) is a prime example of a historical painting that is not entirely historically accurate. The painting depicts the death of the radical French Revolution journalist Jean-Paul Marat as he was murdered in his bathtub by a French loyalist. However, it is full of historical inconsistencies, artistic license, and idealizations.

[Continued on following page]
intended to cause the viewer to sympathize for the martyr and the revolution. The painting was meant as a political piece of art, not a historical recreation of the actual murder scene.  
4. See Corey Kilgannon, "Crossing the Delaware. More Accurately," in the New York Times (December 23, 2011), for an article describing a recent, more historically accurate painting done to try and correct the historical inconsistencies in Leutze’s famous painting.  
6. A great example of the “feeling” of a Christ-centered painting being more important than the historical reality of it comes from popular LDS artist James Christensen. He tells of an experience when he sat down with LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball about a painting of Jesus he was working on and asked President Kimball, “If you were going to hang a painting of the Savior in your office, what would you want that picture to look like?” Christensen relates that the prophet “took off his glasses and put his face about a foot away from mine and said, ‘I love people; that’s my gift. I truly love people. Can you see anything in my eyes that tells you that I love people? In that picture, I would like to see in the Savior’s eyes that he truly loves people.’” See James C. Christensen, “That’s Not My Jesus: An Artist’s Personal Perspective on Images of Christ,” BYU Studies 39, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 11–12.  
9. One such image, for example, is John Trumbull’s 1817 classic Declaration of Independence, showing forty-two of the fifty-six signers of the declaration in one room together, although the declaration was signed by different men over multiple days. They were never all together in the same room at the same time signing the document, as the image shows, a fact that caused John Adams to detest the painting. While historically inaccurate, it is an example of a painting being “true” (to an idea), even though it distorts historical truth.  
11. Artist and historian Graham Howes summarized this point by stating, “As early as 1805 a local synod at Arras [France] had already proclaimed that ‘art teaches the unsettled what they cannot learn from books.’” Two centuries later we find Bonaventure defining the visual . . . as an open scripture made visible through painting, for those who were uneducated and could not read.” See Graham Howes, The Art of the Sacred (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 12.  
13. Private email message to author, September 18, 2013.  
15. Gary E. Smith, Translation of the Book of Mormon. Interestingly, Gary E. Smith painted a very similar image of the translation of the Book of Mormon that was published in the Ensign in December of 1983 on the inside front cover. In that image, Joseph Smith does not have the breastplate or the Urim and Thummim. Gary Smith seemingly redid the painting essentially using the same composition for his November 1988 painting, but in that painting, Joseph Smith is wearing the breastplate and seems to be holding a pair of spectacles, or what could be the Urim and Thummim, in his right hand. See Ensign, November 1988, 46.  
16. According to Emma Smith, the plates “often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth.” “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” Saints’ Herald, October 1, 1879, 189–90.  
17. Rane, interview.  
18. Richards, interview.  
20. The “white hat” comes from Martin Harris’s telling of an interesting story where Joseph used his seer stone to find a lost pin he had dropped into some straw. He said Joseph took the seer stone “and placed it in his hat—the old white hat—and placed his face in his hat. I watched him closely to see that he did not look one side; he reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick, and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me. I know he did not look out of the hat until after he had picked up the pin.” Joel Tiffany, “Mormonism,” Tiffany’s Monthly, August 1859, 164.  
22. Rane, interview.  
24. Richards, interview.  
25. Private email message to author, February 10, 2014; grammar standardized for publication.  
26. See Ensign, December 2011, 54, for the edited Carl Bloch image. See “On Immodest Angels . . . ,” May 16, 2012, http://www.dovesandserpents.org/wp/2012/05/on-immodest-angels/. The author of this post apparently broke this story and provided a side-by-side comparison of the original and photoshopped image, commenting: “This is nutty. I feel like someone has hijacked my religious train car and steered it right off the rails. We’re so concerned with modesty that we have now taken to modifying a beautiful piece of artwork (originally painted in 1875) before publishing it in our official church magazine so that it reflects our hyper-vigilance [sic] with regard to modesty? What do we hope to accomplish by doing things like this in official church publications?” The Salt Lake Tribune also mentioned this problematic change to the Bloch image. See “Mormons Alter Bloch’s Angels so They’re Wingless and Not Sleeveless,” Salt Lake Tribune, May 18, 2012.  
29. Walter Rane, By the Hand of Mormon: Scenes from the Land of Promise (Deseret Book: Salt Lake City), 2003.  
Elder David A. Bednar taught that “inspired technological and communication innovations . . . have come forth in this decisive dispensation, . . . and how we appropriately use these powerful tools to advance the work of salvation” should be considered in our days.

Recently, I received a couple of emails from my children’s seminary teachers. One was in regards to the seminary’s attendance policy, and the other outlined the new seminary graduation requirements. These Seminaries and Institutes (S&I) teachers utilized modern tools to increase communication between the seminary and the home. A study by L. Grant suggested there were benefits in enhancing communication between the home and the school, as well as utilizing technology to augment this communication. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that “inspired technological and communication innovations . . . have come forth in this decisive dispensation, . . . and how we appropriately use these powerful tools to advance the work of salvation” should be considered in our days.

How should S&I leaders and teachers use these tools to communicate with parents in today’s digital world? This article considers insights from religious educators and parents in regards to the preferred mode and frequency of communication between the seminary and the home, how parents value and use electronic communication, and challenges experienced pertaining to communication with parents in this digital age. As noted in our S&I materials,
S&I leaders and teachers effectively manage information when they **gather, organize, analyze, communicate**, and **use** information to make wise decisions.3

S&I leaders and teachers can (and should) seek to communicate effectively with parents by utilizing modern communication tools available to us today.

**Prophetic Teachings Regarding Communication in Our Day**

About forty years ago, President Spencer W. Kimball said, “I believe that the Lord is anxious to put into our hands inventions of which we laymen have hardly had a glimpse. . . . These [are] miracles of communication.”4 Today’s digital communication tools are indeed modern-day miracles compared to tools of past years. Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles noted that “the future would bring greater reliance on technology” and that we should give attention to both the message “and the way it is delivered—that is, the technology that’s used.”5 S&I leaders and teachers should understand that what we communicate is just as important as how we communicate.

President Gordon B. Hinckley noted that “as the work of the Lord expands . . . communication is the sinew that binds the Church as one great family. Between those facilities which are now available and those which are on the horizon, we shall be able to converse one with another according to the needs and circumstances of the time.”6 The Lord has provided S&I leaders and teachers with tools to meet our needs and circumstances as we strive to communicate with parents. We should seek the Spirit when communicating with others. However, “although the Spirit is the greatest aid to communication, there a number of activities and techniques we can use that will also help us communicate better with [others].”7 There are also many modes and forms of communication. President Thomas S. Monson said that “the ability to communicate is not something we are born with. We have to learn it and earn it.”8 Best practices are shared in this article to help religious educators communicate better with parents in today’s digital world.

**Communication between S&I and the Home**

Those who labor in the S&I programs of the Church seek to “administer our programs and resources appropriately” for the purpose of “assist[ing] parents in their responsibility to strengthen their families.”9 To help strengthen families, “[S&I] leaders and teachers can . . . assist parents by communicating pertinent information about their child’s performance in class, such as attendance, punctuality, conduct, academic performance, or credit.”10 Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that “there is a desperate need for parents, leaders, and teachers to help our youth learn to understand, love, value, and live the standards of the gospel.”11

The content of the information provided to parents has generally remained the same over the years, but how teachers communicate with parents today has changed significantly with the advent of email as well as the proliferation of electronic and mobile devices. Still, it is important to recognize that effective communication is crucial and that “despite technological advances in communication—radio, telephones, television, and satellites—our communication with those we know best is often as difficult as it ever has been.”12

President Spencer W. Kimball, while he was Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, used the following story to illustrate the importance of maintaining communication lines:

> In South America we saw once an example of broken communication lines. . . . [There] was a series of poles on which were strung the wires for telephone communication to the world. . . . Someone had carelessly thrown a lighted cigarette from a car window. It had ignited the grass, the telephone communications . . . and communication was down. . . . Telephone lines and telephone poles are a little like people. . . . [They] are designed to be firm and stout and to give support; but in many cases they are leaning and swaying and sagging until communications are greatly impaired, if not actually cut off.”13

To ensure that communication lines are working properly, “seminary leaders and teachers should periodically issue report cards . . . [and] should be available and responsive to questions and concerns from parents.”14 “This helps to update parents and to maintain an open line of communication between the S&I teachers and the parents. An article by the Church suggests that “when a child does bring home a poor report card, parents could have a meaningful conversation and schedule “a conference with the teacher . . . [to] focus their attention on a common problem and work together to find a solution.”15 “In addition, relationships with parents can be greatly strengthened by occasional phone calls, letters, or conversations that express deserved praise and commendation.”16 S&I leaders and teachers should “treasure the divine gift of communication, and . . . use it wisely to build and to assist others.”17
Communicating with Parents in Today's Digital World

A Seminary Communication Pilot

A pilot study was conducted to understand and evaluate the communication between seminary teachers and parents of seminary students. Questions answered in this study included the following:

1. What mode and frequency of communication do parents prefer with their child’s seminary teacher?
2. How do parents use and value email communication from their child’s seminary teacher?
3. What are some of the challenges regarding email communication with parents?

This pilot study included the faculty of four released-time seminary programs (three in Utah and one in Arizona), one coordinator in the United States (in Massachusetts), and one coordinator outside the United States (in Brazil). These two coordinators had approximately 15–20 stake-called teachers participating in this pilot.

During this three-month pilot, seminary teachers provided parents with highlights of key concepts or principles of the seminary lesson covered in class that week, along with a couple of discussion questions to help encourage gospel conversations at home. Level of participation varied based on location and assignment. For example, some teachers sent emails daily instead of weekly, and the length of communication varied from a couple sentences to several emails. There was also delayed and reduced participation by stake-called teachers compared to released-time teachers. Towards the end of this pilot, telephone interviews with S&I teachers and online survey data from 176 parents helped to capture their experience and feedback (see figure 1). Findings based on the analysis of the data could benefit religious educators throughout the world.

The online survey was only available in English, which may have resulted in the low response rate from Portuguese-speaking parents in Brazil. The majority of responses came from parents who had children in released-time programs in the United States (84 percent), and very limited data was received from parents with children in daily or home-study programs. As such, findings may not be generalizable to all daily and home-study programs in or outside the United States. In addition, most released-time teachers indicated that almost all parents were active members of the Church, and findings may not be generalizable to populations that include parents who are non-members or less-active members of the Church. Interview data was gathered from S&I employees only, and no primary data was gathered from stake-called teachers. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provided valuable insights.

Mode and Frequency of Communication

The average length of emails sent by seminary teachers was a couple of paragraphs, typically providing a summary of the week’s lesson and a couple of discussion questions. A few emails were longer and included additional information, such as general announcements, reminders regarding upcoming events, and so forth. One parent noted that generally, each email “gives the information needed without being too long. Highlighting the subject area [or] scripture references helps.” When accounting for both mode and frequency of parents’ communication with their child’s seminary teacher, table 1 shows that parents generally preferred an email once a week (67 percent), followed by a face-to-face communication a few times a year (56 percent), and telephone contact a few times a year (29 percent). One parent summarized it as follows: “I visit with the [seminary] teacher once or twice a year at the parent-teacher conference, otherwise a short weekly update by email or text is sufficient.”

![Figure 1. Parents responding to online survey](image-url)
Communicating with Parents in Today’s Digital World

Many parents received their emails on their mobile devices, such as their cell phone or tablet. A *New Era* article by Brad and Russell Wilcox noted that it is important to remember that “like all communication tools, cell phones with text messaging capabilities can be positive or negative depending on how they are used. … Like e-mailing, texting can be a wonderful way to communicate and build relationships, but it’s not the relationship itself.”18 To this end, S&I leaders and teachers should recognize that besides a weekly email, parents also indicated they would like face-to-face communication a few times a year.

### Short, simple, and easy-to-read weekly emails

The majority of parents preferred email communication above the other modes of communication. One parent indicated that “it is easiest for me to just get the email on my cell phone.” In addition, parents preferred weekly rather than daily communication. One parent said that “for me, it would be easier to get one email for the week instead of daily.” Another parent responded by saying that “a daily email gets a little overkill. I do appreciate having the information but maybe the daily email could be consolidated and sent just once or twice a week.” Parents wanted short, simple, and easy communication they could get on their electronic or mobile devices.

The *New Era* article by the Wilcoxes noted that “sending simple, positive messages doesn’t take long.”29 A number of parents in the pilot study noted that emails were most helpful when they were short, simple, and easy to read. One parent liked the emails that were “short and sweet!” or “just a few sentences to let me know what they are doing.” Others echoed the same sentiments by noting that the email received was “great, short and to the point, [and] it lets me know what is being taught and what is expected.” Most parents appreciated the fact that the “emails [were] short and well organized,” providing them with an outline of the past and upcoming assignments, quotes, or reading blocks. According to responses from parents participating in this pilot study, these emails were “brief and not too long to read/understand” as well as “very simple and effective.” Another parent explained that “the email communications are to the point and informative as to what is being taught. … They are not hard to wade through.” In his *Ensign* article, Mark Ogletree taught that “if we can communicate better—meaning more clearly and concisely—then we can . . . improve the quality of communication in our relationships.”20

Parents also noted that they generally don’t read emails that are wordy or lengthy. One parent said that “sometimes the email was way too long [and] I don’t have much time to read them.” Another said that the “notes are well intentioned, but way too long. I don’t have time to read all of that. Nor do I care what is happening in the whole seminary.” For parents such as these, the emails were not “concise and informative,” causing them to be more of a burden than a help. These parents want “enough details to fill [them] in,” but not for the messages to be “so lengthy that it’s daunting to read.” When emails were too long, parents would “usually just skim” the email or they “wouldn’t read them” at all. Overall, a few short sentences were preferred over lengthy paragraphs.

### Personal and specific at times

Most of the emails from seminary teachers in this pilot study were generic and sent out to all the parents, rather than to individual parents concerning their own children. A few attempted to personalize the emails by highlighting a couple of students by name and how they participated in class the previous week. Although parents appreciated the general email to all the parents, they also expressed a desire for a personal note or a more child-specific email once in a while. Dr. Douglas E. Brinley, a marriage and family specialist, suggested that there are three levels of communication: superficial, personal, and validating.21 “Communication that validates is edifying, healing, nurturing, and complimentary.”22 Parents in this pilot study seemed to suggest that they
would have liked more personal and validating communication from seminary teachers.

Several parents noted the importance of a personalized email. One parent said, “The only thing that would be nice is if maybe every other month the seminary teacher could say something about my child in the email to make it more personal.” Another parent shared the following: “If there could be a comment about how my son is doing personally (not just his grade) . . . maybe [once a] month or so, it would really be helpful for me as a parent.” A third parent said, “The emails are great. An occasional personal [one] would be nice, maybe 2 a term, or more if needed.” An article from author Jennifer Grace Jones promotes the idea that “all our communication should uplift others and strengthen them in the Lord.”23 As communication from S&I teachers becomes more personal in nature, it will uplift parents and students.

Parents in this pilot study would have also appreciated specific comments about their children’s performance in class: “It would be nice if the email occasionally had specific comments about how my children are doing in seminary,” and “I would like to know how my child is doing in the class. Does he participate? Is he interested in what is being discussed?” Another parent agreed that he would like “specific information about my student. How my student is doing, things my student needs to work on (assignments, reading etc), attendance about my student, and so forth.” In short, each of these parents “wish[ed] there was a way to give specific information about [their] student.”

Perhaps S&I leaders and teachers could consider ways to email all the parents while recognizing specific students. A grateful father said, “I love that [the seminary teacher] has recently started using names of students that have brought up a particularly good point in class.” A parent with two children attending seminary, each with a different teacher, explained the variance as follows: “I prefer the emails from one teacher over the other because of the better explanation of what was taught that week in class. It is more individual for the class.” These parents appear to suggest that effective communication should be personal, specific, and “communicate at the feeling level and not just at the telling level. . . . This is communication with the heart.”24 By being specific and communicating from the heart, seminary teachers “use the language that fits the experience and understanding level [of the students].”25 These communications can be very powerful to bring unity and strength to families. By receiving personalized praise from seminary teachers, parents will feel more connected with their children and the seminary program.

**How Email Communication Is Used**

Online responses from parents provided information regarding how parents used the email communication to learn what was being taught in seminary. Sixty-eight percent said they used the emails to foster gospel conversations with their children at home.

Almost 90 percent of parents indicated (see figure 2) that emails gave them information about “what is being taught each week and what scriptures are being worked on” as well as “great information about the weekly curriculum.” They even said that they were “more informed about seminary” than ever before. A comment from one parent illustrates the emails were received as follows: “It seems just right—explains what has been taught, what will

![Figure 2. How Email Communication Was Used (n=169)](image-url)

*Note: respondents marked all that applied. Some respondents did not respond to some questions.*
be taught in the coming week and a couple of questions to ask my daughter about what she has been studying."

How Email Communication Is Valued

Over 80 percent of parents indicated that these email communications were “valuable” or “very valuable” to them (see figure 3). They noted that the emails from the seminary teacher were informative and appreciated. “I love her emails . . . and look forward to [the] information that she provides,” noted one parent. Another expressed the significance of the email communications this way: “I have two children with different teachers so I get to enjoy two different types of emails. This is a fantastic program. Thank you for starting it.” In general, parents saw great value in receiving email updates from seminary teachers: “I love the way my child’s seminary teacher communicates with me now.”

How Email Communication Is Affecting Gospel Conversation at Home

As indicated earlier, seminary teachers included a couple of discussion questions for parents. In reference to these questions, one parent noted, “I especially like the questions he suggests asking students in order to start a conversation.” Another parent said, “It has helped me to know what [my son has] learned. And it has a few times sparked a conversation. [It shocked him] that I knew what [his class] had discussed. He doesn’t communicate much about what happens at school.” The discussion questions from the seminary teachers facilitated family gospel conversations. Elder Marvin J. Ashton noted the following regarding family communications:

Communications in the family will often be a sacrifice because we are expected to use our time, our means, our talent, and our patience to impart, share, and understand. . . . One must be willing to forgo personal convenience to invest time in establishing a firm foundation for family communication. . . . We must realize that communication is more than a sharing of words. It is the wise sharing of emotions, feelings, and concerns. . . . Proper communication will always be a main ingredient for building family solidarity and permanence. . . . Communication can help build family unity if we will work at it and sacrifice for it.26

It is wonderful that these emails can establish this firm foundation for family communication.

According to survey responses, 51 percent of parents indicated that the email communication received from the seminary helped to increase gospel conversation at home (see figure 4). Several parents indicated that the gospel-centered communication in their home was particularly nurturing when seminary emails were short and to the point. One parent noted that “the length of the e-mails I have received from the seminary teacher is just right. It gives me enough to ask my son about his feelings on the subject that they have discussed in class.” Another noted that “it’s brief and to the point, enough to stimulate conversation and keep it simple.” Most parents noted that emails containing a couple of sentences with one or two discussion questions were sufficient.

As the discussion questions in the emails have helped increase gospel conversations, they have blessed both the students and the parents as explained by the following parent: “The emails I receive are relatively to the point and short. It only takes a moment to see what scripture assignment is to be read that day. It’s great because it has gotten me to read the scriptures daily with my child.” A past Ensign article ascertains that “one of the best sources of conversation is the gospel. . . . How many family conversations have been started with the simple question, ‘What did you learn in church [or seminary] today?’ . . . Good conversations [in the home] can become a means of increasing family unity and providing memories that we will treasure throughout our lives.”27 Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that “nothing is more important to the relationship between family members than
open, honest communication. . . . When long-established patterns of positive communication and faithful example prevail, it is much easier to counsel together.”28 Many benefits result by providing discussion questions that increase gospel conversations in the home.

Although many of the emails were able to spark gospel conversations between parents and children, a New Era article notes that “meaningful communication doesn’t just happen—it takes practice, practice that you can often initiate.”29 An article in the Ensign further explains that “healthy communication affects both the heart and the mind.”30 By providing discussion questions related to seminary lessons, S&I teachers can help to initiate those gospel conversations to help strengthen the relationship between parents and children in the home.

Challenges Related to Email Communication with Parents

It is important to keep in mind that “poor communication often results in disunity, hostility, and a breakdown of trust. Sometimes this causes communication to stop altogether.”31 Elder David A. Bednar warned that there are potential pitfalls of various technologies in today’s world.32 S&I leaders and teachers should be aware of communication challenges so that they might consider ways to mitigate those challenges and improve communication.

There are also “invisible walls,” and “we must find a way to remove the obstacle, . . . look over the wall, or find a loose brick to let us through, or dismantle it entirely.”33

Although there were many positive experiences that came from the weekly emails to parents, there were also some challenges. For example, released-time and stake-called teachers had some difficulty gathering and setting up email lists. In addition, stake-called teachers worried about the time and ability required to compose a weekly email message to parents. Finally, some teachers discussed challenges associated with contacting nonmember parents.

Released-time teachers

STAR and WISE are computer programs developed by S&I to gather and maintain student information. STAR was gradually phased out and replaced with WISE. As a result, released-time teachers using STAR experienced some minor difficulties to access, verify, and set up email mailing lists of parents. One teacher explained that “most parents will give us their email on their release form, and we enter them in STAR. Then at the beginning of the year, the secretary gives an excel form to the teachers so they can email parents.” Following the release of WISE, many teachers were able to more easily address this challenge. Teachers indicated that “it is fairly easy [now]” and that “WISE simplified a way to access and email parents.” Their challenge now is to verify and update email addresses in WISE for parents to ensure the email information in the system is accurate.

Coordinators and stake-called teachers

Coordinators experienced more difficulty sending the weekly email to parents than released-time teachers. Coordinators worked through stake-called teachers to send these weekly emails. Stake-called teachers experienced various challenges in sending weekly emails to parents, such as the difficulty gathering email addresses (particularly from nonmember parents) and consistently

Note: Some respondents did not respond to some questions.

Figure 4. Effect of Email Communication on Gospel Conversations at Home (n=166)
sending out the emails each week. In addition, stake-called teachers were worried about their lack of time and competency to compose a weekly summary of the lesson, as well as responding to nonmember parents.

While the coordinator in Boston encouraged stake-called teachers to compose their own weekly emails, the coordinator in Brazil created the initial message and encouraged stake-called teachers to add to or revise a pre-composed message. They noted some challenges in getting stake-called teachers to assist in this effort. The coordinators noted the following:

I asked my volunteer teachers to send a weekly email and . . . only about 1/3 of stake called teachers [did] . . . . Most teachers had a hard time [getting] . . . parent’s email address. (Boston coordinator)

In Brazil, the coordinator emails the volunteer teacher, who emails parents. A few volunteer teachers [less than half] will add something, but most just forward [my email]. (Brazil coordinator)

Coordinators in this pilot study noted that stake-called teachers were concerned about how much time it would take to compose a weekly summary. They were also worried about their ability to compose a competent and coherent email with a summary of the week’s lesson.

For those not participating, the biggest reason for not participating is because it is taxing on their time. Some worry about being able to compose the email . . . [and] their ability to craft a smart, readable email to parents, which can be daunting to volunteer teachers. Some teachers are intimidated to write intelligent emails to parents. (Boston coordinator)

Our volunteer teachers have other jobs and callings. . . . They don’t have time to prepare the summary and send emails. . . . They need help with the summary, and then create the questions. . . . It may be easier to have coordinators create a short summary, and have 1–2 questions, and then have the volunteer teacher to adapt it. It is obviously better for them to do it, but due to time, it is easier for them to forward it. (Brazil coordinator)

Finally, there was a challenge among communication with nonmember parents. This was particularly an issue with S&I teachers outside the United States. The coordinator in Brazil provided the following assessment of this challenge:

Most don’t have parents that are members of the Church, many [nonmember] parents say they don’t know how to do this because they are not members of the Church. Having their children give their parents’ email . . . [is] a concern. [Nonmember] parents were really unsure how they were supposed to help if they are not members of the Church. . . . Some nonmember parents didn’t want to do it, some ok to do it, some nonmember indicated they wouldn’t want to do this

[the discussion questions] with their kids. Guessing we have about 40 percent nonmember parents. (Brazil coordinator)

Summary

The communication pilot highlighted some of the best practices for communication between S&I teachers and parents, especially for those in released-time programs. Parents indicated that they preferred emails once a week that were short, simple, and easy to read. In addition, they appreciated when these emails had personal and specific information about their children once in a while. These parents valued these emails and used them to learn what was being taught in seminary. The emails also resulted in increased gospel conversations with their children at home. Coordinators indicated additional challenges by stake-called teachers to send a weekly email, noting their lack of confidence to compose a competent email as well as some challenges working with non–Latter-day Saint parents. Overall, pilot participants had a very good experience.

As S&I leaders and teachers seek to improve how they communicate with parents in today’s digital world, it is helpful to remember the counsel from President Lorenzo Snow that “it is your business to find the way to the hearts of those to whom you are called [to serve].” According to a licensed clinical social worker at the LDS Family Services, even though “communication techniques are simple to learn, . . . [they] need to be practiced before they can be used effectively. . . . It is never too late to enhance your communication skills.” These suggestions apply whether we are talking with parents face-to-face or through modern-day digital communication tools. Each teacher should consider how to more effectively communicate with parents in today’s digital world and encourage meaningful gospel conversations in the home.

S&I leaders and teachers have a unique opportunity to communicate with parents and to help them increase gospel conversations with their children at home. “Our communications are at the core of our relationships with others. . . . Therefore, we must be careful [with] not only what we communicate, but also how we do so. Souls can be strengthened or shattered by the message and the manner in which we communicate.” In his 2014 Education Week address, Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles provided the following suggestions in our communication online: be authentic and consistent, edify and uplift, respect intellectual property, and be wise and vigilant. Elder Bednar closed his address by blessing us to “have eyes to see
clearly both the possibilities and pitfalls of the remarkable technologies that are available to us today, that you may increase in your capacity to use these inspired tools appropriately.”

© Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.

Notes
2. David A. Bednar, “To Sweep the Earth as with a Flood,” address delivered on August 19, 2014, during Education Week at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
5. L. Tom Perry, “Thou Shalt Give Heed unto All His Words,” in Conference Report, April 2000, 27.
10. CES, Administer Appropriately, 5.
12. “Improving Family Talk, 18.”
14. CES, Administer Appropriately, 5.
16. CES, Administer Appropriately, 5.
Teachers need to be careful and vigilant with comments made about gospel doctrine and doctrinal interpretation in classroom settings. Definitive statements made in classroom settings can form deep impressions in the minds and hearts of students.

Doctrinal comprehension can be influenced by both authoritative and less-than-authoritative ideas. Teachers may have extensive notes about specific doctrines that seem to support their comprehension even though, unknown to them, some of the notes may not be in harmony with what is the established Church teaching as taught by current prophets and apostles. The word *doctrine*, as used in this paper, refers not only to general gospel teachings but to multiple concepts associated with these teachings. For example, doctrines and principles associated with the spirit world address many concepts such as spirit prison, paradise, outer darkness, location of individual spirits, and social structure. They also include such ideas as the exact requirements to enter paradise; the duration each person will spend in hell; the number of people who will embrace the gospel; the success rate of missionary work in spirit prison; and the nature of the spirit world during the Millennium. Personal doctrinal
There are varying degrees of definitiveness associated with doctrinal interpretations. It also considers the possibility of otherwise good teachers inadvertently misleading students in classroom settings. It offers suggestions to assist in distinguishing between well-established and less-established Church doctrines and doctrinal interpretations. In a previous article in the Religious Educator, Robert L. Millet commented, "Before beginning this discussion, let me affirm that I understand implicitly that the authority to declare, interpret, and clarify doctrine rests with living apostles and prophets. This paper will thus speak only about doctrine and in no way attempt to reach beyond my own stewardship." His comment reflects the approach of this paper.

Responsibility of Teachers to Identify and Teach the Truth

There are varying degrees of definitiveness associated with doctrinal interpretations. Some interpretations are inaccurate, while others, though accurate, may not be as well established and documented. It is important to know that there can be varying degrees of accuracy or exactness with regard to doctrinal learning and teaching. In this paper, correct usually refers to a teaching that is inherently true regardless of personal interpretation, while accurate refers to a description of the truth that is approved and authorized by the Church. In the Doctrine and Covenants, truth is defined as "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come. . . . All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence" (D&C 93:24, 30). A current Seminaries and Institutes manual defines doctrine as "a fundamental, unchanging truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ." The Book of Mormon states that "the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13). The adverb really emphasizes the absolute and eternal nature of truth regardless of opinions, whether they be close to or far from the truth. Teachers need to be cognizant of their own understanding of gospel doctrines, gain insight into how the understanding was formed, and make appropriate adjustments when needed.

In Seminaries and Institutes, the pattern established by the "Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning" includes the following: understanding context and content; identifying and understanding the meaning of doctrines and principles; feeling the truth and importance of those principles and doctrines through the influence of the Spirit; and applying such principles and doctrines practically. This pattern underlines the need for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of correct doctrinal truth, as opposed to a rudimentary awareness. Simply being able to locate and expound on passages of scripture does not constitute adequate knowledge of gospel doctrine. Teachers must stand steadfast on the rock of sound, accurate, up-to-date, and approved doctrinal teaching and interpretation. Joseph F. McConkie, while serving as an LDS chaplain, noted, "Meaningful attention will be accorded the teacher who establishes the reputation of being orthodox and sound in doctrine."

The Doctrine and Covenants outlines the importance of teaching only what is found in the standard works and what is taught by prophets and apostles: "And again, the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel" (D&C 42:12). It also states: "And let them journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith. . . . Let them labor with their families, declaring none other things than the prophets and apostles, that which they have seen and heard and most assuredly believe, that the prophecies may be fulfilled" (D&C 52:9, 36).

The pleading in one of our hymns is to "fill my mind with understanding; Tune my voice to echo thine." It is important that teachers are striving to be in harmony with the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. The mandate to teach includes teaching correct doctrine accurately while being attuned to what is authoritative and approved by those fifteen men who are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators. The formal objective of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion emphasizes that teachers should "teach students the doctrines and principles of the gospel as found in the scriptures and the words of the prophets." Doctrine and Covenants counsels, "And I give
unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand” (D&C 88:77–78). The phrase “doctrine of the Kingdom” refers to the revealed truths of the gospel, not personal opinion and interpretation.

Students are to be taught substantive, revealed truth, as opposed to perceived or unorthodox doctrine. Teachers should avoid teaching doctrinal interpretations that are not representative of official Church teachings. President Boyd K. Packer, former President of the Quorum of the Twelve, once said, “It is not the belief in a false notion that is the problem, it is the teaching of it to others.” Teachers who assume that false doctrine only emanates from peripheral exponents rather than respected teachers can develop a false sense of doctrinal security. All teachers should be vigilant at all times. The Church manual Teaching, No Greater Call states, “We should ensure that we teach correct doctrine.” Great care should be taken before making definitive and interpretative statements on doctrine unless it is known to what extent the statements are established and accepted in the Church as taught by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. President Henry B. Eyring has stated that “we must pray in faith that the Spirit will warn us away from teaching false doctrine, from giving personal interpretation, and from all speculation as we teach the gospel. That restraint may become more difficult as we read more books and hear more talks with what seem to us to be novel or more profound expositions of the gospel.”

The teaching of doctrine needs to be aligned with the prophets and apostles while reducing the possibility of teaching less-than-accurate doctrinal interpretation. Gospel Teaching and Learning states, “Teachers should consistently look for opportunities to use the scriptures and words of the prophets to clarify and illustrate the doctrines and principles taught in these courses.” The doctrines and principles of the gospel taught in classroom settings should be established teachings of the Church and not simply personal opinions that have the appearance of legitimacy no matter how authoritative they may appear. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland counseled teachers to “use caution and limit . . . classroom instruction to what the Brethren prescribe. Listen carefully and see what they choose to teach at general conference.” Teachers have a divine mandate to teach correct doctrine, and to do so in an accurate manner.

Responsibility of Teachers to Document Accurate and Reliable Sources

It is imperative that teachers do not develop the habit of expounding on interpretations of doctrinal principles without appraising and documenting their sources. If principles being taught are not authenticated as accurate representations of established Church teachings, they ought not to be taught. Moreover, supporting statements should only be used after meticulous and conscientious deliberation. This does not mean that supporting statements are required for every single comment made during classes. However, general classroom discourse can be greatly improved as teachers and students cultivate environments of correctness and accuracy in gospel teaching and learning.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught that “no one has the right to give his own private interpretations when he has been invited to teach in the organizations of the Church; he is a guest, . . . and those whom he teaches are justified in assuming that, having been chosen and sustained in the proper order, he represents the Church and the things which he teaches are approved by the Church.”

President J. Reuben Clark, former First Counselor in the First Presidency, made the following comment:

You are to teach this gospel, using as your sources and authorities the standard works of the Church and the words of those whom God has called to lead His people in these last days. You are not, whether high or low, to intrude into your work your own peculiar philosophy, no matter what its source or how pleasing or rational it seems to you to be. To do so would be to have as many different churches as we have seminaries—and that is chaos.

You are not, whether high or low, to change the doctrines of the Church or to modify them as they are declared by and in the standard works of the Church and by those whose authority it is to declare the mind and will of the Lord to the Church.

Consider the various interpretations that might be taught in classroom settings on such ideas as eternal progression from one kingdom of glory to another (see discussion below about the James E. Talmage book Articles of Faith), the lifting of the veil in the next life and when this will occur, or the practice of plural marriage in the celestial kingdom. Before making definitive statements on such subjects, it is important to weigh doctrinal opinions, even from well-respected resources, against what the Church actually teaches. One criterion for assessing doctrinal interpretations is that established and reliable doctrines of the Church are not only taught by one Church authority but by all prophets, seers, and revelators. Elder Neil L.
Andersen of the Quorum of the Twelve taught, “There is an important principle that governs the doctrine of the Church. The doctrine is taught by all 15 members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. It is not hidden in an obscure paragraph of one talk. True principles are taught frequently and by many. Our doctrine is not difficult to find.” President Boyd K. Packer, while serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, taught that “essential truths are repeated over and over again.” Proof-texting, the practice of using isolated quotations from documents and texts to establish propositions, can lead to unsound doctrinal interpretation. This is true of both the standard works and supporting statements. On the use of scripture quotations, a Seminaries and Institutes manual states the following: “When we quote scriptures, we should ensure that our use of them is consistent with their context.” Teachers need to be careful and accurate in their use of isolated passages of scripture to support doctrinal instruction. The standard works comprise the essential texts for all gospel doctrinal teaching. In *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, we read that “the primary source for determining what to teach in these courses is the scriptures themselves.” Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve commented, “The scriptures are the touchstone for measuring correctness and truth.” In addition to the standard works, there is a vast repository of well-established Church material that includes First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve statements, curriculum manuals, general conference reports, and other official Church publications. Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve stated, “Teachers can stay on safe ground when they use the standard works, the approved manuals, and the writings of the General Authorities.”

To ensure accuracy, definitiveness, and the use of up-to-date and authoritative supporting statements, religious educators need to carefully select and document their sources. The policy of Seminaries and Institutes is that “the safest sources for lesson materials are found in official Church publications, including S&I curriculum materials.” One manual states, “To help us teach from the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets, the Church has produced lesson manuals and other materials. There is little need for commentaries or other reference material. We should study the scriptures, teachings of latter-day prophets, and lesson materials thoroughly to be sure we correctly understand the doctrine before we teach it.”

Seminary and institute manuals are written under the direction of the Church Board of Education and are extensively reviewed by the Correlation Executive Committee. This process is carried out under the direction of the First Presidency, which imparts to current manuals a far higher level of authority than non-correlated works. President Henry B. Eyring taught, “Those called by the prophet to assure the correctness of doctrine taught in the Church review every word, every picture, every diagram in that curriculum which you receive. We can unlock the power of the curriculum simply by acting on our faith that it is inspired of God. . . . Sticking with the content of the curriculum as well as its sequence will unlock our unique teaching gifts, not stifle them.” Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, has said, “We are to keep current with the teachings of the prophets, and we harmonize those teachings with our current curriculum.”

Current curriculum manuals take precedence over out-of-date manuals. Although older manuals may be considered, these should be weighed against the current curriculum material. For example, the current New Testament institute student manual takes precedence over the earlier manual. If teachers are not acquainted with the new manual, they may not be aware of current Church teachings on various doctrines and principles, especially where there may be variations from previous teachings. Elder Paul V. Johnson, Commissioner of the Church Educational System, said that a “challenge we face, especially if we have taught for some time, is a tendency to hold on to old files and old explanations. We would be much better off keeping up with the current stance of the Church.” The manual *Gospel Teaching and Learning* states, “Semininary and institute curriculum materials have been provided as the main resource to help teachers prepare and teach effective lessons. The curriculum provides background information about the scriptures and their context, explanations of difficult words and phrases, General Authority comments on the doctrines and principles taught in the scriptures, and suggestions for what content, doctrines, and principles to teach.” Teachers are to teach the prescribed subject matter. Referring to curriculum manuals, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve has stated that “A gospel teacher is not called to choose the subject of the lesson but to teach and discuss what has been specified.” *Gospel Teaching and Learning* states that, along with curriculum material, “teachers may use additional resources such as Church magazines, especially teachings from general conference, as they contribute to a clearer understanding of the scripture block. Other resources
should not be used to speculate, sensationalize, or teach ideas that have not been clearly established by the Church.”

Whereas non-correlated gospel commentaries can be very useful for background information, context, and other teaching approaches, they do not constitute a high level of doctrinal authority and cannot be used to establish official Church teachings. However, they can assist with gaining insight into doctrinal interpretation as used judiciously. Non-correlated interpretations can be considered in the light of current, correlated, supporting statements and evaluated accordingly. Elder Oaks noted that “commentaries are not a substitute for the scriptures any more than a good cookbook is a substitute for food. . . . One trouble with commentaries is that their authors sometimes focus on only one meaning, to the exclusion of others. As a result, commentaries, if not used with great care, may illuminate the author’s chosen and correct meaning but close our eyes and restrict our horizons to other possible meanings. Sometimes those other, less obvious meanings can be the ones most valuable and useful to us.”

Commentaries contained on private blogs, other websites, and general publications must be evaluated in the light of their levels of accuracy and authority. No matter how authoritative or plausible a commentary may appear, it may or may not be in line with current, established interpretations of gospel doctrine as taught by modern prophets and apostles. For example, current official doctrinal interpretation on race and the priesthood is far removed from many comments that have been made by those ranging from senior Church leaders to general Church members.

Caution is also advised in the use of selected quotations from non-correlated, published compilations of statements made by senior Church leaders. It is worth noting that the Religious Studies Center Style Guide asks authors to “replace citations of History of the Church or Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith with more carefully documented sources.” This request pertains to only two specific works, but the principle is interesting nonetheless. Quotations from compilation works that are used in Church curriculum material are given an authoritative status because they have been documented and correlated, as with one compilation quotation used in this paper (see note 14). However, other compilations may or may not be well documented and are certainly not correlated. In Teaching, No Greater Call, we read, “We should not attribute statements to Church leaders without confirming the source of the statements.” For example, concerning the book Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith referred to above, selections are no longer to be used in Church publications “because the scholarship is no longer current . . . [and] . . . some of the statements attributed to Joseph Smith in the book were not actually made by him.” Many compilations do not authenticate the original sources of their quotations, leaving the teacher to use the compilations as the main sources. In other words, some compilations are well documented while others are not, which is why caution is advised.

Teachers need to ensure that the supporting statements they use are taken from well-documented sources while being aware, where possible, of the original sources. They have a responsibility to develop effective patterns of identifying and authenticating reliable and accurate sources to ensure sound doctrinal teaching. One Church manual includes Joseph F. McConkie’s comment that “the disciplined teacher will be sure of his sources and will also make every effort to determine whether a statement properly represents the doctrine of the Church or is merely the opinion of the author.”

Church curriculum material does not replace the standard works as the primary source of gospel teaching and learning. However, it can be used as a sound resource on the path of accurate doctrinal interpretation.

Responsibility to Distinguish Between Official and Unofficial Comments

The scriptures make it clear that prophets and apostles are divinely called and hold a mandate to teach and instruct members of the Church. In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord describes this mandate, declaring, “Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; for his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 2:14–15; emphasis added). And, “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38; emphasis added).

The Doctrine and Covenants also teaches, “No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses” (D&C 28:2; emphasis added). And, further, “There is none other appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abide in me” (D&C 41:13). The following is also taught: “They shall speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost. And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the
Understanding and Teaching Correct Doctrine Correctly

Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation” (D&C 68:3–4; emphasis added).

The same principles apply to each President of the Church, including the current President and, by implication, according to stewardship, other leaders of the Church. They speak for and represent the Lord. Whereas the doctrinal comments made by prophets, seers, and revelators are highly valued in the Church, teachers need to recognize the distinction between official and unofficial comments. Not every comment made by members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve is considered official Church doctrine. There are times when such leaders speak and write of their own accord while making well-thought-out comments. While serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, President Harold B. Lee commented:

It is not to be thought that every word spoken by the General Authorities is inspired, or that they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost in everything they read and write. Now you keep that in mind. I don’t care what his position is, if he writes something or speaks something that goes beyond anything that you can find in the standard church works, unless that one be the prophet, seer, and revelator—please note that one exception—you may immediately say, “Well, that is his own idea.” And if he says something that contradicts what is found in the standard church works (I think that is why we call them “standard”—it is the standard measure of all that men teach), you may know by that same token that it is false, regardless of the position of the man who says it.40

A statement in LDS Newsroom also clarifies teachings by Church leaders:

Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole Church. With divine inspiration, the First Presidency (the prophet and his two counselors) and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (the second-highest governing body of the Church) counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications. This doctrine resides in the four “standard works” of scripture (the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price), official declarations and proclamations, and the Articles of Faith. Isolated statements are often taken out of context, leaving their original meaning distorted.41

Echoing this statement, Elder Christofferson taught, “It is commonly understood in the Church that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church.”42 For example, private books authored by members of the Quorum of the Twelve carry the disclaimer that the opinions and writings are theirs alone and should not be taken as approved by the Church and accepted as doctrine.43 This does not mean that what they write cannot be considered by teachers, only that such works do not carry the same level of authority as official Church curriculum material. Isolated statements from senior Church leaders should not be used to support private doctrinal interpretations unless it can be verified that the interpretations represent established Church teachings, especially as found in the standard works and the current curriculum. For example, it is inappropriate for teachers to teach doctrinal interpretation using comments made by members of the Quorum of the Twelve during stake conference addresses. This is because personal notes about such comments have not been correlated and carefully documented. It is against Church policy to “record the talks or addresses that General Authorities and Area Seventies [give] at stake conferences, missionary meetings, or other meetings.”44 Church policy also states that “any notes made when General Authorities, Area Seventies, or other general Church officers speak at stake conferences or other meetings should not be distributed without the consent of the speaker. Personal notes are for individual use only.”45

Doctrinal comments made by senior Church leaders should be considered either official or unofficial, depending on the circumstances and settings. Unofficial comments may not constitute an appropriate resource for classroom teaching, especially those that are anecdotal.

Responsibility of Teachers to Recognize Various Levels of Doctrinal Authority

There are different levels of definitiveness or authority associated with comments about gospel doctrines. This is so because of the nature of continuing revelation, the positions held by speakers when they make comments, and under what circumstances comments are made. Commencing with the living President of the Church, there is a line of doctrinal authority that it is important to recognize. A keen awareness that all statements do not carry the same doctrinal weight leads to more effective and accurate classroom discourse.

A Seminaries and Institutes manual teaches the following: “Speaking under the direction of the Holy Ghost, the living prophet’s words take precedence over other statements on the same issue. His inspired counsel is in harmony with the eternal truths in the standard works and is focused upon
Understanding and Teaching Correct Doctrine Correctly

Correct Doctrine

The teachings and directions of the living prophet take precedence over what other Church authorities have said. It is reasonable to assume that this is part of an authoritative continuum. Various comments from President Charles W. Penrose, former President of the Church, are used to clarify Church teachings in the current Doctrine and Covenants institute student manual. President Penrose is quoted nine times in the manual and three times further as part of First Presidency statements. These quotations are taken from times in his life that range from when he was twenty-seven years old (forty-five years before becoming a member of the Quorum of the Twelve) to when he served as First Counselor in the First Presidency, representing a sixty-year period.

There is significant authority attached to all nine of the quotations because of their inclusion in the current Church curriculum. However, in general, statements made by members of the Quorum of the Twelve do not carry the same level of authority as later statements. Such statements may be retroactively attributed a higher level of authority by being included in approved Church manuals or other official Church publications. It is useful to know the positions of authority held at the time comments were made so that wise choices can be made when selecting supporting statements from outside Church curriculum. Such is the case with regard to the quotation from President Penrose when he was twenty-seven years old. A teacher might choose to use a selected quotation from the original article by President Penrose that has not been included in a Church manual. In this case, discretion is advised because, although a particular section of the original source article has been correlated, this may not be true of the entire article. This does not mean such quotations cannot be used—just that care is always advised in the selection of supporting statements.

In one citation, the Doctrine and Covenants manual incorrectly lists President Penrose as First Counselor to President Joseph F. Smith when he was, in fact, Second Counselor. In this case, the error is not significant but, in general, it is important that teachers are aware of the position held by the person at the time the person is being quoted. For example, if the quotation from when President Penrose was twenty-seven had been mistakenly attributed to him while serving in the First Presidency, this would be significant.

Church manuals reflect best practice with regards to the use of titles for General Authorities. The current Church style guide policy states, “When introducing a quotation from a living General Authority, usually give the title of his current position rather than the title he held at the time he made the statement. When introducing a quotation from a deceased General Authority, usually give the title of the highest position he held while serving as a General Authority.”

Consider the following examples of varying levels and types of doctrinal authority. Various comments from President Charles W. Penrose, former First Counselor in the First Presidency, are used to clarify Church teachings...
Another example of levels of authority is the book *The Articles of Faith: A Series of Lectures on the Principal Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (commonly known as Articles of Faith) by Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve. The book was published in 1899 after the First Presidency invited Talmage to produce a work that could be used in Church schools. The first edition of the book was published when Talmage was a professor of geology at the University of Utah, twelve years before he became a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. However, it was prepared under the authority of the First Presidency and published by the Church, which made it an official and authoritative Church publication. The book made a significant contribution to Latter-day Saint theology and is a highly respected work in the Church.58 Elder Talmage made revisions after becoming a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. The book is not currently part of the Church curriculum and is no longer published by the Church, although selections are used in current Church curriculum publications such as the New Testament institute student manual, where the 1924 edition is referenced once.59

Revisions have been made to some doctrinal interpretations among the various editions of Elder Talmage’s book. One example is the concept of eternal progression and advancement from one kingdom of glory to another:

**1899 edition**

It is reasonable to believe, in the absence of direct revelation by which alone absolute knowledge of the matter could be acquired, that, in accordance with God’s plan of eternal progression, advancement from grade to grade within any kingdom, and from kingdom to kingdom, will be provided for. But if the recipients of a lower glory be enabled to advance, surely the intelligences of higher rank will not be stopped in their progress; and thus we may conclude, that degrees and grades will ever characterize the kingdoms of our God. Eternity is progressive; perfection is relative; the essential feature of God’s living purpose is its associated power of eternal increase.60

**1990 edition**

It is reasonable to believe, in the absence of direct revelation by which alone absolute knowledge of the matter could be acquired, that, in accordance with God’s plan of eternal progression, advancement within each of the three specified kingdoms will be provided for; though as to possible progress from one kingdom to another the scriptures make no positive affirmation. Eternal advancement along different lines is conceivable. We may conclude that degrees and grades will ever characterize the kingdoms of our God. Eternity is progressive; perfection is relative; the essential feature of God’s living purpose is its associated power of eternal increase.61

In this example, a doctrinal interpretation has been significantly changed from one edition to another. Selected quotations from various editions of the book may or may not represent current Church teaching concerning the doctrine of eternal progression. One Church manual states: “Even if something has been verified or published before, it still may not be appropriate for use in the classroom.”62 This is not to say that the book *Articles of Faith* may not be used in classroom settings. However, teachers ought to be aware of the possibility of different levels of authority associated with statements within the book. Selections from the book that are used in current Church curriculum manuals represent a higher level of authority than other selections.

The above examples are not meant to undermine respected comments and works in the Church. However, if teachers simply use quotations from outside current Church curriculum or official, up-to-date publications as supporting statements without identifying the level of authority, they run the risk of teaching principles that are considered doctrinally unclear or unsound. Teachers should make students aware when material from outside the current curriculum is being used.

Quotations from another well-known work, the *Journal of Discourses*, are sometimes used in Church classroom settings. The official Church view ought to be considered before using selections from the journal. *Gospel Topics* states, “The *Journal of Discourses* is not an official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . . It included some doctrinal instruction but also practical teaching, some of which is speculative in nature and some of which is only of historical interest.”63 Reading and studying the articles within the twenty-six volumes is quite different from using selections from these articles as supporting, authoritative statements in classroom settings. Discretion is advised. To use a selection from the journal that is contained in a current, official curriculum publication raises the level of authority above a selection that is not. There are many correlated quotations available in current Church curriculum from which teachers may choose. For example, the current Doctrine and Covenants institute student manual contains seventy-three64 references to the *Journal of Discourses*.

A third example is the book *Mormon Doctrine*.65 This was once widely used by Church members as an authoritative resource for establishing gospel doctrine. It was originally published in 1958 when its author, Elder Bruce R.
McConkie, was a member of what was then the First Council of the Seventy. The third and final edition of the book was published in 1978 while Elder McConkie was serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. The book was published privately and was never published by the Church. Selections from the book that are included in the current Church curriculum publications carry a higher level of authority than those that are not. This does not mean that other quotations from the book cannot be used, but that the level of authority for each selection should be considered. In other words, it cannot be assumed that every principle taught in *Mormon Doctrine* represents current Church teaching; nevertheless, we may assume that any quotation from the book used in an approved Church manual does. This does not undermine Elder McConkie or his published works but simply clarifies how selections can be used with greater accuracy and authority in classroom settings.

Elder McConkie made numerous revisions to his book in the second and third editions because, as he himself stated, “As is common with major encyclopedic-type works, experience has shown the wisdom of making some changes, clarifications, and additions.” This means that, by his own acknowledgment, at least the first two editions contained statements that needed correcting. Therefore, if a quotation is used by a teacher from an earlier edition of the book, a principle that Elder McConkie revised later may be taught inaccurately. In this case, it would be much safer to work within the curriculum. Selections from the book are still used in Church curriculum publications, including the latest New Testament institute student manual, where fourteen selections are used—mostly from the 1966 edition. It is referenced once in the New Testament teacher manual.

Teachers can use the current curriculum to appraise selections from unofficial Church material. Quotations from many works are used in Church curriculum. The selection of one quotation does not necessarily mean that another, unselected quotation from the same source is unreliable. There is simply not enough space in curriculum manuals to use every sound quotation. Nevertheless, selections used in up-to-date curriculum material are guaranteed to be in line with established and current Church teaching.

A final example in relation to varying levels of doctrinal authority is the teaching of lesser-known, though well-established, Church doctrines. In such cases, it is particularly important to use carefully documented and accurate statements so as to avoid confusion and inappropriate speculation. For example, the concept of all people, including children, having adult spirits rather

*“The elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel” (D&C 42:12).*
than being born with child spirits is perfectly consistent with other gospel doctrines and, in the standard works, is considered an implied principle of the gospel rather than a stated principle. It is also taught in curriculum material and other official Church publications. Gospel Principles states, “All spirits are in adult form. They were adults before their mortal existence, and they are in adult form after death, even if they die as infants or children.” Under the heading “What Do Spirits Look Like?” on lds.org, we read that “people’s spirits had an adult form in premortal life and will have that same form in the spirit world, even if they die as infants or children.” These selections are examples of authoritative statements that clearly establish this doctrine as being an official Church teaching. There are authoritative quotations about the doctrine from senior Church leaders as well, but the number is small.

The doctrine is taught far less in the Church than other doctrines such as the Atonement. With lesser-known doctrines, particular care must be taken in the use of authoritative and supporting statements so that students are taught correct doctrine with accuracy. In this way, they will be less inclined to speculate on, or misinterpret, what is being taught.

Teachers have the responsibility to recognize that every comment made, and every work authored, by senior Church leaders and others does not carry the same level of doctrinal authority. It is important to know the level of authority of supporting statements that are intended for use in classroom settings or for personal doctrinal understanding. This does not mean that extensive research must be undertaken each time a quotation is used in the classroom. Nevertheless, an awareness of the principle of differing levels of doctrinal authority, even from the same Church leader, can effectively and positively influence teaching practice in the classroom by drawing attention to both authoritative and unauthoritative statements. Consequently, teachers will be more assiduous in making comments about doctrine.

Responsibility of Teachers to Be Hesitant to Teach Doctrinal Application

The Spirit may give personal insight into doctrinal application. The Book of Mormon makes it clear that “he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Nephi 10:19). However, personal insights, no matter how profound, should not be taught in classroom settings unless they are verifiably in tune with current, established Church teaching. It is also true that teachers can receive inspiration for their own stewardship, meaning their students, and will be inspired to say things that their students need to hear. Nevertheless, they need to be vigilant about what they teach with regard to doctrinal practice. Elder L. Tom Perry, while serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, taught: “There is order in the way the Lord reveals His will to mankind. We all have the right to petition the Lord and receive inspiration through His Spirit within the realm of our own stewardship. Parents can receive revelation for their own family, a bishop for his assigned congregation, and on up to the First Presidency for the entire Church. However, we cannot receive revelation for someone in another person’s stewardship.” Teachers need to note the line of demarcation between personal revelation and revelation that can be appropriately shared within their broader stewardship. All inspiration is not necessarily intended for classroom use.

In one Seminaries and Institutes manual we read, “There may be times when the teacher or students in the classroom offer suggestions as to how gospel principles could be applied. Such examples can give students helpful ideas of ways to apply principles of the gospel in their everyday lives. However, teachers should be careful not to be too prescriptive in assigning specific applications for students. Remember that the most meaningful direction for personal application comes individually through inspiration or revelation from the Lord through the Holy Ghost.” Elder Oaks commented, “Teachers who are commanded to teach ‘the principles of [the] gospel’ and ‘the doctrine of the kingdom’ (D&C 88:77) should generally forgo teaching specific rules or applications. . . . Once a teacher has taught the doctrine and the associated principles from the scriptures and the living prophets, such specific applications or rules are generally the responsibility of individuals and families.”

One example is the law of tithing. How should the 10 percent principle be applied in practice? For example, is it calculated on gross or net income? Should tithing be paid on bank interest? What about birthday and Christmas gifts? Since such questions are about doctrinal application, the approach of the teacher should be circumspect. Careful and accurate use of the standard works and authoritative supporting statements is essential. The Doctrine and Covenants states: “And after that, those who have thus been tithed shall pay one-tenth of all their interest annually; and this shall be a standing law unto them forever, for my holy priesthood, saith the Lord” (D&C 119:4). The current general handbook, drawing upon a First Presidency letter, explains the Church’s policy on the law of tithing as follows: “The simplest statement we know of is that statement of the Lord himself, namely, that the members of the
Church should pay ‘one-tenth of all their interest annually,’ which is understood to mean income. No one is justified in making any other statement than this.”76 This represents Church policy on the matter. In other words, once accepting the 10 percent principle, members of the Church are entitled to make their own decisions as to what they think they owe the Lord.77 Elder Oaks has stated that teachers should “not teach any rules for determining what is a full tithing.”78 An inaccurate comment made in a classroom setting may lead to some students applying the law of tithing in a questionable manner.

Another example of doctrinal application is conjecture about the Word of Wisdom. There are varying opinions within the Church as to what items are prohibited as part of this commandment. Should members avoid herbal tea, caffeine, the use of alcohol in cooking, and the regular use of meat? Does the Word of Wisdom apply to prescription and over-the-counter medications? What about drugs that are legal or illegal depending on the jurisdiction? How can members know what to avoid in their observance of this law? Teachers need to know what is and is not established doctrinal interpretation. For example, the current handbook of instructions comments as follows: “The only official interpretation of ‘hot drinks’ (D&C 89:9) in the Word of Wisdom is the statement made by early Church leaders that the term ‘hot drinks’ means tea and coffee. Members should not use any substance that contains illegal drugs. Nor should members use harmful or habit-forming substances except under the care of a competent physician.”79 Gospel Topics states, “When people purposefully take anything harmful into their bodies, they are not living in harmony with the Word of Wisdom. Illegal drugs can especially destroy those who use them. The abuse of prescription drugs is also destructive spiritually and physically.”80 LDS Newsroom comments that “the Church revelation spelling out health practices (D&C 89) does not mention the use of caffeine. The Church’s health guidelines prohibit alcoholic drinks, smoking or chewing of tobacco, and ‘hot drinks’—taught by Church leaders to refer specifically to tea and coffee. ‘Avoid any drink, drug, chemical, or dangerous practice that is used to produce a ‘high’ or other artificial effect that may harm your body or mind. Some of these include marijuana, hard drugs, prescription or over-the-counter medications that are abused, and household chemicals.”81

Teachers may have their own personal opinions about doctrinal practice, some of them held very strongly. Such opinions are private unless they can be shown to be part of established Church teaching on doctrinal practice.

Conclusion

Teachers need to be careful and vigilant with comments made about gospel doctrine and doctrinal interpretation in classroom settings. It is not appropriate to make comments in a definitive manner without being certain that the comments are, in fact, in line with established Church doctrine. Definitive statements made in classroom settings can form deep impressions in the minds and hearts of students and are often remembered for many years after they were made. False teaching can lead to false practice. This places a great responsibility on teachers to be diligent in seeking after correct doctrine and to teach it in a manner that is proper and in line with current, authoritative teaching.

Teachers should be familiar with, and well-versed in, the doctrines they teach. They are to teach students the doctrines and principles of the gospel as found in the scriptures and the words of the prophets. This does not require a perfect mastery of every doctrine, for no one can claim to have such. Nonetheless, if a specific doctrine is not a documented Church teaching, it ought not to be taught until it can be assessed by reference to current official and approved doctrinal standing. This may involve postponing responses to difficult or complex questions to allow for more comprehensive analyses.

Before each lesson, notes should be made of relevant scriptures supported by the most current statements of prophets and apostles, preferably as found in current Seminaries and Institutes manuals. Not every single comment requires supporting documentation, but there is an imperative for the teaching of correct principles while avoiding unsound doctrinal interpretation. Multiple passages of scriptures are preferable to one passage of scripture, and it is important to note that historical statements no longer in line with Church teachings are not considered to be authoritative. Material outside the Church curriculum can be useful and informative. Notwithstanding this, doctrinal interpretation should be in line with current Church curriculum. As well-thought-out practices for determining doctrine and doctrinal interpretation are followed, students will be more likely to develop sound doctrinal understanding and personal application.

© Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.
Notes
7. Gospel Teaching and Learning, x; emphasis added.
8. Teaching, No Greater Call, 204.
10. Teaching, No Greater Call, 8.
15. J. Reuben Clark, “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” address to religious educators, August 8, 1938 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 10; emphasis added.
24. Teaching, No Greater Call, 52.
32. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 51; emphasis added.
37. Teaching, No Greater Call, 53.
40. Harold B. Lee, “The Place of the Living Prophet, Seer, and Revelator,” address delivered to Seminaries and Institutes faculty, July 8, 1964, 14, as quoted in Church Educational System, Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual (Religion 324, 325) (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981, 2001), 144; formatting in original.
43. The following is a standard disclaimer used in books that are written by General Authorities and published by Deseret Book: “This work is not an official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The views expressed herein are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of the Church or of Deseret Book Company.” See, for example, M. Russell Ballard, Daughters of God (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), copyright note.
44. Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 160.
46. Church Educational System, Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual (Religion 333) (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 8; emphasis in original changed from bold to italics.
47. Church Educational System, Teachings of the Living Prophets Teacher Manual (Religion 333) (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 8.
also Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” Liahona, June 1981.


50. J. Reuben Clark, “When Are the Writings and Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?” address to Seminaries and Institutes personnel, BYU, July 7, 1954, 6.


52. Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual, 58, 325, 416.


54. Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual, 308.


57. James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith: A Series of Lectures on the Principal Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1899).


60. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 420–21; emphasis added.

61. James E. Talmage, Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 371; emphasis added.


69. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 27.


72. See Teachings of the Presidents of the Church; Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 131–132. See also Bruce R. McConkie, The Salvation of Little Children,” Ensign, April 1977, 46–51.

73. L. Tom Perry, “We Believe All That God Has Revealed,” in Conference Report, October 2003, 90.

74. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 31.


76. Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops, 125; emphasis added.

77. See First Presidency letter (Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, N. Eldon Tanner), March 19, 1970.


82. For the Strength of Youth (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001, 2011), 26.
President Henry B. Eyring noted, “Our goal is to teach and learn eternal truth in such a way that a child of God can choose to know and to love our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son.”

During the 2012 centennial celebration of the formation of the seminary program, President Henry B. Eyring noted: “Much has happened in 100 years. . . . Our task has always been and will always be to teach and to learn so that the gospel of Jesus Christ will go down into the heart of the one—the individual son or daughter of Heavenly Father. Our goal is to teach and learn eternal truth in such a way that a child of God can choose to know and to love our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son.” In the century since their creation, the fundamental goal of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) has remained constant. However, with the introduction of the Current Teaching Emphasis in 2003 (later renamed the Teaching and Learning Emphasis), an updated objective statement in 2009, and the release of the Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook in 2012, there have been several noteworthy refinements to the description of effective teaching and learning methods in S&I. These three significant innovations represent S&I’s response to the increased clarity in direction received from senior Church leaders regarding the elements of teaching and learning that assist individual students in their process of conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
Teaching for Conversion: Recent Refinements in Teaching and Learning

105

For some future cleansing and strengthening. Our aim must be for them to become truly converted to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ while they are with us.6

Due to intensified threats to the moral and spiritual strength of young people, the Brethren needed increased effort from S&I to teach in a way that facilitated conversion by and through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Raising the Bar

Around this same time, an additional request was made for S&I to increase their effectiveness. Shortly after Elder Eyring’s address to S&I, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles expressed the need to prepare the “greatest generation of missionaries.” In the October 2002 general conference, he told members of the Church that it was time to “raise the bar” in regards to missionary work.7 The Church needed young people to be better prepared and have more gospel knowledge before entering the mission field. Elder Ballard’s challenge was issued during the development phase of the Preach My Gospel manual for missionaries. This manual was printed and distributed in 2004, but it had been in the works since 1999.8 Preach My Gospel was intended to help each missionary teach from his or her own knowledge and experience, rather than reciting memorized lessons.

In 2002, the Missionary Department made a request of S&I. Randall Hall, an S&I administrator at the time, noted that “the Missionary Executive Committee had asked ‘What can S&I do to help students be better prepared to teach the way that we are going to ask them to teach in . . . Preach My Gospel?’”9 This request included a desire for students to gain some experience in “[teaching] by the Spirit and from the heart.”10 Around this same time, Paul V. Johnson (CES administrator of religious education from 2001 to 2007) was invited to visit President Boyd K. Packer’s home. President Packer read to Brother Johnson a draft of the letter that the First Presidency was going to send out on “raising the bar” for missionaries. Brother Johnson related that after “he [President Packer] read it through with me [he] said, ‘Now what does that mean for seminary and institute?’ I said, ‘Well, it probably means that we need to step up to the plate.’ He said, ‘That’s right. You’ve got to prepare them better. You’ve got to make sure they’re ready to go on their mission[s].’”11

A Request from the Brethren

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, senior Church leaders began asking S&I to increase their effectiveness in teaching for conversion. Gary Moore, former S&I administrator, still remembers the Thursday in 2001 that two Apostles visited the administrative offices of S&I to express their concern for the youth. Moore noted that “when a member of the Twelve comes to meet with you after you know they have just finished a meeting with the Twelve and the First Presidency, it is critically important to listen and to be ready to go to work. When two [Apostles] come together, it gives greater emphasis.”9 Stanley Peterson (CES administrator of religious education from 1990 to 2001) reported that the Brethren had expressed their concern that S&I needed “to do a better job of instilling in the hearts and souls of our young people the importance of keeping the commandments of God and helping them to be more faithful.” They said, “Many young people who attend seminary and institute carry their scriptures; they memorize the verses, but they don’t internalize the doctrine into their spirits. They don’t internalize the gospel into their lives. We are losing too many of them.”4 Elder Richard G. Scott and President Gordon B. Hinckley had likewise expressed concerns that the gospel was not going down into the hearts of the students in a way that would lead to deep personal conversion.5

In August 2001, Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles also issued a formal call to S&I to do more. Elder Eyring taught that Latter-day Saint youth needed to gain more spiritual strength as an outcome of their time in S&I classrooms. His call was not for a philosophical shift, but for a clearer focus and a more concentrated effort to bless and strengthen the young Latter-day Saints who participated in S&I. At a 2001 CES conference on the Book of Mormon, Elder Eyring said:

The spiritual strength sufficient for our youth to stand firm just a few years ago will soon not be enough. . . . We must raise our sights. . . . Students need more during the time they are our students.

The pure gospel of Jesus Christ must go down into the hearts of students by the power of the Holy Ghost. It will not be enough for them to have had a spiritual witness of the truth and to want good things later. It will not be enough for them to hope...
The Current Teaching Emphasis

In 2003, S&I responded to the requests of senior Church leaders through the creation of the Current Teaching Emphasis. The Emphasis included the following:

- We are to learn and teach by the Spirit. We are to encourage students to learn and teach by the Spirit.
- We are to emphasize more strongly the importance of reading the scripture text for each scripture course of study. We are to help students develop a habit of daily scripture study.
- We are to help students understand the scriptures and the words of the prophets, identify and understand the doctrines and principles found therein, and apply them in their lives in ways that lead to personal conversion.
- We are to help students learn to explain, share, and testify of the doctrines and principles of the restored gospel. We are to give them opportunities to do so with each other in class. We are to encourage them to do so outside of class with family and others.
- We are to emphasize the mastery of key scriptural passages and help students understand and explain the doctrines and principles contained in those passages.

The intent of the Current Teaching Emphasis was to clarify the principles of teaching and learning that would help students “become truly converted to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ while they are with us.” The Emphasis was not meant to be seen as a replacement to what has been done previously in S&I, but rather as the next step required to meet the contemporary challenges facing the youth. Chad H. Webb, administrator of Seminaries and Institutes, explained:

The intent of the Current Teaching Emphasis was to clarify the principles of teaching and learning that would help students “become truly converted to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ while they are with us.” The Emphasis was not meant to be seen as a replacement to what has been done previously in S&I, but rather as the next step required to meet the contemporary challenges facing the youth. Chad H. Webb, administrator of Seminaries and Institutes, explained:

The Teaching Emphasis is an attempt to incorporate and emphasize those principles of learning that we believe will lead to deepened conversion—to help the gospel go from a young person’s head to their heart. We’re not saying that what we have done in the past was not right or that there’s a new way of doing things. What we are suggesting is that we should continue to do all of the good things we’ve always done, as well as working to identify additional principles of learning that will deepen conversion, protect our students against the influences of the world, and prepare them for what the Lord is expecting of them.

In the August 2003 satellite training broadcast, S&I presented the Current Teaching Emphasis to the global S&I faculty. Randall Hall, who led the introduction, noted that the Emphasis constituted a “distillation of thoughts, feelings, and ideas flowing from . . . various events and circumstances,” including direction from the Brethren that S&I needed to play a more capable role in preparing the Church’s young people to serve missions. Due to the requests from the Missionary Department in particular, the Emphasis deliberately increased the focus on “student participation and the idea of them explaining, sharing, and testifying, because that’s what a missionary does.”

Brother Hall also explained that the Current Teaching Emphasis was a response to “the continuing invitation from senior Church leaders to do more to get the gospel from the head to the heart of the students.” Years later, in his role as S&I administrator, Chad H. Webb remarked that the Emphasis “was an answer to a question begun by those who preside over us, asking how we could help the gospel get more into the hearts and lives of the students.” Thus, by developing the Current Teaching Emphasis, S&I heard and responded to the requests of the Brethren for both converting youth and preparing more capable missionaries.

The Current Teaching Emphasis was not only formulated in direct response to specific requests from prophets and apostles, but the principles embedded in the Emphasis (and subsequently, the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning) are founded upon the teachings of prophets as well. Brother Hall, who was a principal figure in the formation of the Emphasis, recalled:

[The Emphasis] was . . . a response to what [S&I has] been taught. A fascinating thing was, when we started to go back and look at the talks that had been given [to S&I from the Brethren], back in the 70s and 80s, and even “The Charted Course,” we thought, wow, here it is! And there were some parts of what they had been teaching us that we had sort of assumed were happening, but had not made clear, had not been defined with any real degree of clarity. And that is one of the things which I think the Current Teaching Emphasis began to do was to take what had been taught and to distill it more clearly. Doctrines and principles had been talked about for years. But, it had sort of been taken for granted that it was happening, and it wasn’t to the degree [needed]. . . . If you go back [through the addresses of the Brethren to S&I], there is nothing that is embodied in “Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning” that we had not been told or encouraged to do by the Brethren.

Although each principle in the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning has a long prophetic parentage, the introduction of the Current Teaching Emphasis marked a significant step in clarifying expectations and refining the standards of success for S&I. No longer would these principles be “something that we sort of took for granted was happening, or hoped was happening.”
Brother Webb told of a conversation that occurred between Paul V. Johnson and Elder Richard G. Scott (who was involved with the Missionary Executive Committee) during the formation of the Current Teaching Emphasis. This exchange profoundly connected the purposes of personal conversion and missionary preparation that inspired the Emphasis. It also illustrates the power behind the principles embedded therein. Brother Webb related the following:

Elder Scott remarked that missionaries are an interesting model of going through an experience that deepens conversion, because you come back a different person. He started to ask what the experiences are that missionaries have that lead to that deepening of conversion. They talked about things like seeking for the Holy Ghost every day, studying, praying for the Holy Ghost, looking for principles and doctrines in the scriptures, identifying them and seeking to really understand them, and then having the opportunity to explain them to people, to share your experiences and testimony with other people, and those kinds of things that missionaries do. . . . As they talked about the experiences that a missionary has, they asked the question: “How can we create an environment and create an experience for S&I students that would replicate on some level what a missionary goes through that helps them to become more converted?”23

Through the Current Teaching Emphasis, students were invited to do more than simply attend seminary. They were invited to participate in processes and experiences that would help them progress along a path of personal conversion. Elder Scott used missionaries as a model to identify principles that aid in this conversion, such as studying sacred scripture in order to identify, understand, and feel the truth and importance of gospel principles, applying and sharing gospel principles, and testifying of their value to others. These elements, which a teacher can incorporate into a classroom setting, assist a student in attaining a personal understanding of and deeper conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Following its 2003 release, the Current Teaching Emphasis went through three further iterations, each bringing slight but significant changes. The first change was to drop the word current from the title. The first formal reference to the “Teaching Emphasis” was during the 2005 August CES satellite broadcast.24 Randall Hall explained that the decision to drop current from the title was based on the realization that “these are basic principles that . . . are going to last for a while.”25

In 2009, the Teaching Emphasis was officially reintroduced as the Teaching and Learning Emphasis.26 It was reduced from 275 words to 63 words, streamlined and simplified for its global audience. Adding “and Learning” to the title seemed fitting, since the role of the learner is a significant part of the Emphasis. This name change came on the heels of three foundational addresses given by the Brethren to S&I.

In February of 2005, Elder Richard G. Scott delivered his landmark “To Understand and Live Truth” address.27 During his talk, he repeatedly admonished S&I teachers to engage the students in meaningful participation. He memorably cautioned S&I teachers that they should “never, and I mean never, give a lecture where there is no student participation. A ‘talking head’ is the weakest form of class instruction.”28

The following year, in February of 2006, Elder David A. Bednar delivered his foundational “Seek Learning by Faith” address.29 Elder Bednar opened his remarks by observing that “we emphasize and know much more about a teacher teaching by the Spirit than we do about a learner learning by faith.”30 He then went on to instruct S&I in the doctrine, principles, and implications of facilitating learning by faith through inviting students to fulfill their role in the learning process. He taught that when a student exercises faith as an active participant in the learning process, the likelihood of meaningful personal conversion is greatly increased.

In addition to these two critical addresses, S&I personnel were invited in February of 2007 to participate in a worldwide leadership training meeting for the Church entitled “Teaching and Learning.”31 Therefore, for three years in a row, the message to S&I from the Brethren was to increase the focus on the role of the learner in order to teach for conversion.

The Teaching and Learning Emphasis underwent one further iteration when the Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook was released in 2012. The emphasis appeared therein as “The Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning”32:

- Teach and learn by the Spirit.
- Cultivate a learning environment of love, respect, and purpose.
- Study the scriptures daily, and read the text for the course.
- Understand the context and content of the scriptures and the words of the prophets.
- Identify, understand, feel the truth and importance of, and apply gospel doctrines and principles.
- Explain, share, and testify of gospel doctrines and principles.
- Master key scripture passages and the Basic Doctrines.33
These seven Fundamentals are the desired “principles, practices, and outcomes” of teaching and learning in S&I. Randall Hall described them as playing “the dominant role in [the] teaching philosophy” of S&I.

The Current Teaching Emphasis marked the presentation of a unified and concise description of the basic building blocks of teaching and learning which should be present in every S&I classroom throughout the world. The Emphasis was more focused than any earlier commission on describing conditions and factors that would lead to personal conversion and missionary preparation. The Emphasis was designed to help facilitate teachers in their quest to help the “gospel of Jesus Christ . . . go down into the hearts of students by the power of the Holy Ghost.” It focused on “teaching the scriptures by the Spirit and helping students identify, understand, and apply doctrines and principles of the gospel.” And, significantly, it emphasized the need for students to explain, share, and testify of gospel truths rather than being passive listeners. The evolution of the Current Teaching Emphasis into the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning included a significant perspective in describing the principles and processes that assist conversion as something that “teachers and students should” experience together. Brother Hall recalled that when the Emphasis was presented to the Church Board of Education, which is chaired by the First Presidency, they “responded by giving their endorsement, and the new [emphasis] was characterized as ‘very timely.’”

The Objective

With the sharpened focus that resulted in the Current Teaching Emphasis, an update to the “why” behind it soon followed. In the S&I Teaching the Gospel handbook, which was used from 1994 to 2012, the organization’s objective and commission appeared as follows:

The objective of religious education in the Church Educational System is to assist the individual, the family, and priesthood leaders in accomplishing the mission of the Church by—

1. Teaching students the gospel of Jesus Christ as found in the standard works and the words of the prophets.
2. Teaching students by precept and example so they will be encouraged, assisted, and protected as they strive to live the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. Providing a spiritual and social climate where students can associate together.
4. Preparing young people for effective Church service.

The commission of teachers and leaders in the Church Educational System is to—

1. Live the gospel.
2. Teach effectively.
3. Administer appropriately.

In 2009, a new mission statement was introduced to clarify the vision behind the new Emphasis. This mission statement replaced the objective and commission, and is now known as the Objective of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion.

The new objective was a response to two influences. First, it was a response to the Current Teaching Emphasis—including both the concerns of and training from the Brethren which led to its formation. The second influence came from Elder W. Rolfe Kerr, who was appointed Commissioner of CES in 2005. During his three-year tenure, he emphasized, among other things, having a “clarity of focus” and “increasing the impact” that S&I was having by teaching in a way that would change students’ lives. In connection with Elder Kerr’s teachings, he suggested to Gary Moore (CES administrator of religious education from 2007 to 2008) that the objective and commission which existed at that time had some gaps in it. Although the change was not mandated by Elder Kerr, Brother Moore took the initiative to assign an administrative team to look at the objective, and even perhaps rewrite it, in order to clarify the focus of S&I.

Chad Webb was assigned to chair the committee to create a new objective, and Grant Anderson was asked to assist him. Both were fulfilling assignments as assistant administrators at the time. Brother Anderson reported that not much happened with the objective until the fall of 2008, after Chad Webb was appointed administrator of S&I. Because of his new responsibilities, Brother Webb asked Brother Anderson to chair the objective committee. Grant Anderson focused almost exclusively on the Objective from October 2008 until March 2009.

In the early developmental stages of the new objective, many sources were consulted. Brother Webb recalled that they reached out for input from the Young Men and Young Women organizations of the Church. Suggestions from teachers in the field were requested as well. Brother Webb still keeps in his office a binder filled with the input gathered from S&I personnel via letters and email. He remarked that suggestions from the field “honestly shaped to some degree the objective statement. . . . [They] really did influence our thinking.”
Brother Anderson explained that they also referred to articles and books written about forming effective corporate mission statements. These sources taught that a mission statement should highlight the niche of an organization and how they set themselves apart from other similar organizations. Brother Anderson and Brother Webb began to brainstorm regarding how S&I differed from Sunday School and other youth organizations in the Church. They settled on the fact that S&I taught the scriptures daily and on a deeper level than is possible in other venues in the Church where youth learn the gospel. Though common to all Church organizations, they also felt that the new objective should include an increased focus on helping each individual student to come unto Christ.

As they employed this approach of trying to highlight S&I’s niche, they would send iterations to Elder Paul V. Johnson (who had been appointed Commissioner of CES in 2008), and he would send it back with suggestions. At times, Elder Johnson would suggest that they walk over to Elder Russell M. Nelson’s office and get his input. Their desire was to create a solid draft of the new objective before it was formally presented to the Executive Committee of the Board of Education, which at the time was chaired by Elder Nelson. Brother Anderson remarked that “this flow between Elder Nelson and Elder Johnson and us happened a lot.” They created fifty-nine drafts of the new objective within a time span of five months.

Brother Anderson remembered one particular visit to Elder Johnson’s office to review a draft of the objective and see if he felt that it was ready to take to the Executive Committee. After he reviewed the proposed objective, Elder Johnson asked what it was that they were trying to accomplish. Brother Anderson explained their focus on finding S&I’s niche, to which Elder Johnson responded, “Why do you have to be different than everybody else?” Brother Anderson related that this question changed the way they approached the objective. They realized they did not need to focus on how S&I was different, but rather focus on what they hoped would happen in the life of the S&I students. Brother Anderson stated that this new perspective turned a corner for us, because our [objective] was still very centered on what the teacher did. [Our initial drafts said]: “Our objective is to teach the young people the scriptures on a daily basis in a way that . . .”—well, you notice now that the opening statement [of the new objective] doesn’t even mention scriptures. That’s a means to an end. And so we finally landed on that our opening statement ought to be not what we do, but on what we hope happens to students . . . [and] we knew

With the decision to focus on the desired influence of S&I in the lives of students—namely, encouraging and assisting their personal journey of coming unto Christ—the new objective began to take shape. Not only was Elder Nelson “heavily involved,” but some drafts of the objective went “unofficially to the Executive Committee.” Each time this happened, it came back with specific suggestions, including the need to incorporate Heavenly Father, the family, and temple and missionary work into the statement. More suggestions came as the Executive Committee continued to work with the objective, prompting Elder Nelson at one point to say, “That’s enough. This is good enough.”

Elder Nelson suggested that rather than keep the prior format of an objective with a separate commission, there should be just one objective statement. It was decided that the objective would have an opening statement, and then include some qualifying statements derived from the former commission to “live, teach, and administer.” Brother Anderson noted that although Elder Nelson was heavily involved in the formation of the opening statement of the new objective, “he left it up to us to go back, and he didn’t have as much to say as we crafted the three [paragraphs]: live, teach, and administer.” It was decided that each paragraph would include three sentences that would encompass what an S&I teacher should do in order to achieve the vision captured within the opening objective statement. After having gone through an extensive review process with the Executive Committee, the new objective went to the Church Board of Education, where it “went through without a hitch.”

An important lesson learned from the formation of the 2009 Objective is how directly S&I is led by prophets, seers, and revelators. Most personnel understand that S&I is governed generally by the Church Board of Education. This board is chaired by the First Presidency, and is comprised of three of the Twelve Apostles, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, the Relief Society general president, and the Young Women general president. However, the Brethren’s involvement in S&I extends far beyond an organizational formality. Chad Webb observed that “the Church Board of Education is not a token board. They truly oversee the major decisions within our programs, and we do the best we can to carry out their direction and counsel.”

Brother Anderson remarked, “It was interesting to see how hands-on Elder Nelson was with [the Objective]. . . . I may have written out the document, but . . . Elder Nelson’s guidance about having things like the Father in it and the temple, and saying
that we had to include those kinds of things” was deeply influential.66 Elder Nelson and the members of the Executive Committee truly helped to mold and shape the opening statement of the Objective. Brother Webb added, “I think virtually every person on the Executive Committee of the Board has a phrase or a word in there that they said to ‘make sure and say it this way, or include this idea.’”57

Not only were Elder Nelson and other members of the board influential, but so too were the addresses given to S&I by the Brethren throughout the years. Brother Webb explained, “We reviewed some things like ‘The Charted Course.’ We reviewed a lot of the recent talks from the evening with a General Authority. . . . We tried . . . to say something that is inclusive of all of them. . . . There is no question that there is a huge influence from the talks of the Brethren and especially from the evening with a General Authority and the August Broadcast, Symposiums, [and] General Conference talks on teaching and learning.”58 Just as with the Current Teaching Emphasis and the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning, the Objective encapsulated the direction given to S&I from prophets, seers, and revelators “over the last 20 years.”59

The new objective statement was the subject of a “Global Faculty Meeting” released to S&I personnel in April of 2009.60 Brother Webb and Brother Anderson introduced the newest encapsulation of their charge, and the vision behind why they do what they do, to teachers and administrators worldwide. The final product consisted of a forty-three-word statement of purpose, followed by three paragraphs containing three sentences each. These three paragraphs were derived from the previous three-part commission to “1. Live the gospel. 2. Teach effectively. 3. Administer appropriately.”61 The opening paragraph of the new objective states, “Our purpose is to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven.”62

The Objective has now become the definitive statement of vision regarding an S&I teacher’s purpose. Fundamentally, the purpose expressed in the new and old objectives is the same: S&I has always been concerned with helping young people learn and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. The new objective statement, however, represents a more compact and comprehensive description of S&I’s “aim.”60 The Objective begins with a clear and overt focus on a student gaining a personal conviction of and relationship with Jesus Christ, his teachings, and his Atonement. This implies that the teachers have gained, and are continuing to deepen, the same conviction and relationship. Whereas the old objective highlighted what teachers do, the new objective describes what S&I hopes will happen in the lives of students and teachers. Though subtle, this shift is both significant and profoundly complementary to the Fundamentals. Brother Anderson concluded that the new objective was another direct response to the request made by Elder Eyring and other Church leaders for S&I to refocus their efforts at getting the gospel into students’ hearts and teaching for long-term conversion.64

In a 2011 address to S&I, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf offered a powerful endorsement of the Objective. Quoting its exact language, he taught that “religious education is all about helping our young people understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ.”65

The Gospel Teaching and Learning Handbook

In consequence of the Teaching and Learning Emphasis and the Objective of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, the teaching handbook which had been provided for S&I teachers and administrators was now outdated. This handbook was first printed in 1994 and went by the title Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders. One writer of the new handbook noted that “the old . . . handbook . . . was adequate for its day, in fact it was more than adequate, it was a step forward and helpful, it was perfect for its time.” However, he also noted that the principles embedded in the Teaching and Learning Emphasis were scattered throughout the handbook in a way that “you would have to dig it out.”66 Since each teacher was asked to apply the Objective and incorporate the Emphasis—both of which presented principles of teaching for conversion to be applied by both teachers and students—a handbook built around these guideposts was necessary.

Initially, approval was granted to S&I for a revision of Teaching the Gospel. The idea was to update the objective, include the Teaching and Learning Emphasis, and include some quotes from the Brethren that supported these directives. As the revision neared completion, it was sent to select members of the training and curriculum departments for a review. The feedback received was that the revision was inadequate because it tried to explain the Emphasis and the Objective using old tools and old language. Additionally, several quotes from the Brethren were inserted in ways that made the handbook feel
like a quote book rather than a training document. One reviewer reported that it felt “disjointed” and scattered, “like shooting skeet.”

As the principal agents of the revision counseled together, they quickly came to the consensus that they should seek approval for a rewrite of the handbook. Once approval was granted, it was evident that the new handbook needed to clarify the standard of teaching and learning in S&I by explaining this standard in terms of the Objective and the principles contained in the Teaching and Learning Emphasis. It was also critical that the new handbook illustrate how these standards align with the teachings and expectations of the Brethren.

**Clarifying the standard of teaching and learning in S&I**

One writer of the new handbook stated that “the primary purpose of this manual is to establish a clear standard and example of how that standard is to be implemented.” This primary purpose is evident in the very layout of the new handbook. The first chapter is a presentation of the Objective, and therefore an explanation of the *why* behind what is presented in each chapter that follows. The second and third chapters explain *how* teachers and students achieve the Objective through application of the Seven Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning. Chapters 4 and 5 present ways that teachers can apply the Fundamentals in lesson preparation and through the use of various teaching skills and methods. To understand the *why* behind a method or skill, one would refer to the previous chapter. To understand *how* to implement a principle of teaching and learning explained in the handbook, one would refer to the following chapter.

Each method or skill in the handbook is tied to one of the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning, which in turn are tied to the Objective of S&I. Each of the skills, as with the focus of the Fundamentals, is designed to assist a teacher in creating an environment where students, acting as agents, can learn in a way that would invite conversion through meaningful participation. *Gospel Teaching and Learning* is “custom designed to tie *what, how,* and *why* together in extreme clarity.”

Regarding the layout, Randall Hall stated that because of the new handbook,

> you ought to be able to stop at any time in your lesson and ask the question: “Now, why did I ask that question?” and you ought to be able to go back to one of the Fundamentals and say “this one was what I was trying to accomplish.”

Brother Webb observed that because of *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, S&I has a “common standard and common language to refer to.” When introducing this new handbook to teachers worldwide, he explained that it would “unify us as to what we believe is effective teaching. It will give clarity and definition to a standard of effective teaching for all of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion.”

This new handbook not only describes clearly the standard, thereby allowing for greater impact, but it also unequivocally builds the standard upon the foundation of prophetic direction given to gospel teachers.

**Connecting the standard with the teachings and expectations of the Brethren**

One writer of the new handbook explained that “part of the reason why *Gospel Teaching and Learning* was needed was because we had not tied together as a system, overtly, what the Brethren were teaching as far as the doctrinal underpinnings of the objectives that we are trying to go to . . . We had the Teaching Emphasis . . . and we had the Brethren who were talking about what needed to happen; but as a system, we were not connecting the dots very well.” A clear connection needed to be made between the Emphasis and the Brethren. One writer observed, “If you asked a teacher why they did something that way, a lot of times they would say ‘because it works.’ But they couldn’t give you an answer that would mirror very closely anything that the Brethren were teaching in their talks to us. There was a disconnect in the curriculum between them, there was a disconnect in *Teaching the Gospel,* which means the disconnect went to training and in-service.” The *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook is the connecting bridge between the Objective, the Emphasis, and the Brethren.

One way the writers went about building this bridge was to “get the Brethren in [S&I’s] thinking” and to clearly position the instruction of the Brethren as the foundation behind the Objective and the Fundamentals. Through the new handbook, teachers could see the Objective and the Fundamentals “in terms of Elder Eyring, in terms of Elder Bednar, in terms of Elder Scott.”

Brother Hall remarked that “the words of the Brethren are
very clear to us, and we’re to do what they have asked us to do. . . . And so that continued to inform the way we worded things in the handbook and the fact that we included so many quotations of the Brethren.”76

By way of illustration regarding the importance of the words of the Brethren in the new handbook, consider the following:

- The 2012 printing of Gospel Teaching and Learning contains 82 pages with explanatory text.77
- Within these 82 pages, there are 88 citations in Gospel Teaching and Learning from prophets and apostles. Taking the average of the frequency of citations in the entire handbook, there is a citation every 0.93 pages.
- In the chapter on the Objective, there is a citation every 0.45 pages. In the chapter on the Fundamentals, there is a citation every 0.64 pages. These numbers highlight a density of citations from the Brethren in the chapters that establish the definition of teaching and learning in S&I.
- Of the 88 citations, 44 come from addresses from the Brethren to S&I, and 26 come from general conference addresses about gospel teaching.
- Of the 44 citations from addresses to S&I, 23 postdate the publication of Teaching the Gospel, 13 are derived from foundational talks to S&I,78 and 8 come from talks prior to 1994 (when Teaching the Gospel was published).

Chad Webb explained the connection between the Brethren and Gospel Teaching and Learning in a worldwide internet introduction of the new handbook. He stated:

Over the last 20 years, we have had a handbook that served us very well. And through that time we have continued to learn and to grow as an organization. We have the wonderful blessing of being led by inspired leaders who have taken many opportunities to instruct us about effective teaching. One of the reasons for this new handbook is to have a collection where we have compiled much of what we’ve learned throughout the years in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion about effective teaching and about effective learning. I am grateful for the opportunity to have the words of living prophets and the things that they are teaching us about teaching gathered together and placed in this wonderful new handbook.79

In this citation, Brother Webb asserts that the Gospel Teaching and Learning represents the direction and training S&I has received over the past twenty years from prophets, seers, and revelators. The history of the handbook’s creation supports this claim.

In a 2013 address to S&I personnel worldwide, Elder Russell M. Nelson gave the Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook the following endorsement: “If teachers will incorporate these fundamentals effectively . . . if you do all you can—teach in the way that is outlined in your handbook—you will be doing what you need to do to assist with [the] prophetic priority.”80 Gospel Teaching and Learning represents a remarkable effort by S&I to clarify the standard of teaching and learning in S&I and to demonstrate how the standard aligns with the teachings and expectations of the Brethren.

Gospel Teaching and Learning “was a massive effort. . . . In some ways there are 150 people who wrote it.”81 The project started in 2010, with a goal to present the new handbook at the area director’s convention in the spring of 2011. However, as that date neared, the handbook was not yet finished and the decision was made to aim for a later release date. Because those working on the project had made such an intense and consuming effort to finish by the initial deadline, the S&I administration decided to step back from the project for a season once it became evident that the desired release date would not be realized. This period of time away from working on the handbook became a blessing for three reasons:

First, it allowed S&I to unify some of their efforts with the Come, Follow Me youth curriculum released by the Church in 2012.82 This unification occurred through a shared introduction to Gospel Teaching and Learning and the Come, Follow Me teacher handbook, as well as through sharing common “Basic Doctrines.”83

Second, the time taken away from the project allowed the writers to see what was being produced in the handbook through different lenses. One writer was also working on a project to create new S&I curriculum. As he worked to directly incorporate the Objective and the Fundamentals into the new curriculum, he gained insights that improved Gospel Teaching and Learning. As another writer, who had responsibilities in the training department, worked to incorporate portions of the new handbook-in-process into training experiences, he too gained insights that improved how the handbook was worded and arranged.84

And third, the time away allowed the writers to reflect on all that they had been working on and to “let it stew.”85 It was after this time away that the decision was made to include in the fifth fundamental desire for each S&I student to “feel the truth and importance of . . . gospel doctrines and principles.”86
In May of 2012, S&I published and distributed *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders* in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion as a capstone to the decade of adjustments to the definition of teaching and learning in S&I. *Gospel Teaching and Learning* has been distributed to the worldwide cadre of more than forty-five thousand teachers. It has been translated into thirty-eight languages. The content of the new handbook is the foundation of preservice and in-service training for all full-time personnel, as well as for the volunteer teachers, who make up 90 percent of the teaching corps. *Gospel Teaching and Learning*, therefore, potentially effects not only S&I teachers and administrators, but also more than 740 thousand students worldwide.

Brother Webb explained that the handbook "will help to increase the impact that we have on our students while they are learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders. S&I through an important shift in their understanding Prophets have led S&I into personal progression. That will help them to deepen conversion and to be converted unto the Lord and to never fall away (see Alma 23:6)."

The desired conversion for each individual teacher and student is described generally in the Objective. Conversion includes not only understanding, but also relying upon, the Savior. To "rely" denotes a daily dependence upon the Savior and a consistent incorporation of his teachings and Atonement into one's personal progression. The Objective also explains that this conversion should deepen continually, through Church and temple service, until one qualifies for eternal life with Heavenly Father. Elder Bednar described conversion in the following terms: "The learning I am describing reaches far beyond mere cognitive comprehension and the retaining and recalling of information. The type of learning about which I am speaking causes us to put off the natural man (see Mosiah 3:19), to change our hearts (see Mosiah 5:2), and to be converted unto the Lord and to never fall away (see Alma 23:6)."

Adjusting the Aim

Prophets have led S&I through an important shift in their understanding of teaching and learning in ways that cultivate personal conversion. The Brethren have always instructed S&I teachers to teach by the Spirit "so that the gospel of Jesus Christ will go down into the heart of the one." However, since the turn of the twenty-first century, the Brethren have repeatedly focused the attention of S&I on helping students fulfill their role in learning by the Spirit. By so doing, the teacher helps the student along the path of personal conversion.

The desired conversion for each individual teacher and student is described generally in the Objective. Conversion includes not only understanding, but also relying upon, the Savior. To “rely” denotes a daily dependence upon the Savior and a consistent incorporation of his teachings and Atonement into one’s personal progression. The Objective also explains that this conversion should deepen continually, through Church and temple service, until one qualifies for eternal life with Heavenly Father. Elder Bednar described conversion in the following terms: “The learning I am describing reaches far beyond mere cognitive comprehension and the retaining and recalling of information. The type of learning about which I am speaking causes us to put off the natural man (see Mosiah 3:19), to change our hearts (see Mosiah 5:2), and to be converted unto the Lord and to never fall away (see Alma 23:6).”

Elder Eyring added that the “mighty change” desired for S&I teachers and students “is reported time after time in the Book of Mormon. The way it is wrought and what the person becomes is always the same. The words of God in pure doctrine go down deep into the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost. The person pleads with God in faith. The repentant heart is broken and the spirit contrite. Sacred covenants have been made. Then God keeps His covenant to grant a new heart and a new life, in His time.”

The principles embedded within the Fundamentals represent some of the necessary elements that create an environment where conversion may occur. Elder Bednar explained:

A learner exercising agency by acting in accordance with correct principles opens his or her heart to the Holy Ghost—and invites His teaching, testifying power, and confirming witness. Learning by faith requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception. It is in the sincerity and consistency of our faith-inspired action that we indicate to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our willingness to learn and receive instruction from the Holy Ghost. Thus, learning by faith involves the exercise of moral agency to act upon the assurance of things hoped for and invites the evidence of things not seen from the only true teacher, the Spirit of the Lord.

Consider the several different ways that a student is invited to act “in accordance with correct principles” by a teacher applying the Fundamentals of Gospel Teaching and Learning. The student is invited to read and study the scriptures and to identify, explain, share, testify of, and apply gospel principles. By these actions, students can invite the Holy Spirit to teach, witness, and strengthen them to become what God would have them be.

Regarding the adjustment represented by the Fundamentals, Chad Webb observed that the “biggest change in our approach would probably come down to the role of the student. Is the student actively participating? Is the student discovering things? Are students talking about ways the gospel blesses their lives? Are they sharing their own experiences with gospel principles? Those kinds of experiences with the scriptures and with their peers will help to take gospel principles into their hearts and will prepare them to be able to share it with others.” Rather than teachers simply sharing with the students all that they have learned about the scriptures, instructor and student are both engaged as teachers and learners who explore together the doctrines and principles of the gospel to learn saving truths for themselves.

The Objective complements and clarifies the Fundamentals by keeping S&I grounded in the primary purpose underlying increased student
engagement: so that students and teachers might come to understand and rely on the Savior. Brother Webb explained that the goal is not just to have students participate for participation’s sake, but to have students “participating in a very meaningful way.” This means that both teachers and students must “participate in a way that their conversion is deepened and . . . they are discovering truths in the scriptures for themselves.” The Objective adds a second witness to the clarification of the role of both teacher and student found in the Fundamentals when it states that the teacher’s purpose is to “help the youth,” but it is the learner that must “understand . . . rely on . . . [and] qualify” for the conversion experience. Through the Fundamentals and the Objective, the roles of teacher and student are brought into sharp focus.

S&I teachers have always desired to invite the Holy Ghost to teach students. They have always desired conversion for those they teach. So, what is the shift represented by the Fundamentals and the Objective? Elder Bednar explained that “we emphasize and know much more about a teacher teaching by the Spirit than we do about a learner learning by faith.” Clearly, the principles and processes of both teaching and learning are spiritually essential. However, as we look to the future and anticipate the ever more confused and turbulent world in which we will live, I believe it will be essential for all of us to increase our capacity to seek learning by faith. Prior to the formation of the Current Teaching Emphasis, the main emphasis of training and instruction provided for teachers by S&I focused primarily on the role of the teacher. While it was not silent on the role of the student, such was not emphasized to the degree now present in S&I. By way of illustration, in Teaching the Gospel, the S&I teacher handbook from 1994 to 2011, three out of forty-four pages were specifically dedicated to explaining “The Role of the Student in Gospel Teaching and Learning.”

In contrast, the new Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook has been specifically designed to tie each teaching skill and teacher method into the Fundamentals and the Objective, which have as their driving purpose to invite students to learn by faith through the righteous exercise of their personal agency.

The role of the teacher in the conversion process is vitally important and has been consistently emphasized in S&I throughout its history. That importance has not diminished, but has been appropriately counterbalanced with an understanding that a “teacher can explain, demonstrate, persuade, and testify, and do so with great spiritual power and effectiveness. Ultimately, however, the content of a message and the witness of the Holy Ghost penetrate into the heart only if a receiver allows them to enter.” Elder Bednar reminded S&I that “the Holy Ghost is the teacher who, through proper invitation, can enter into a learner’s heart” and that an S&I teacher has an important “responsibility to preach the gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter, as a prerequisite for the learning by faith that can be achieved only by and through the Holy Ghost” (see D&C 50:14). Therefore, a teacher should learn, understand, and apply what Elder Bednar taught when he said that gospel teachers “are most effective as instructors when we encourage and facilitate learning by faith.” This clarification, born of prophetic instruction, lies at the heart of the Fundamentals, the Objective, and the Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook. Elder Bednar’s instruction to S&I in 2006 is emblematic of this clear message from the Brethren:

The most important learnings of life are caught—not taught. The spiritual understanding you and I have been blessed to receive, and which has been confirmed as true in our hearts, simply cannot be given to another person. The tuition of diligence and learning by faith must be paid to obtain and personally “own” such knowledge. Only in this way can what is known in the mind be transformed into what is felt in the heart. Only in this way can a person move beyond relying upon the spiritual knowledge and experience of others and claim those blessings for himself or herself. Only in this way can we be spiritually prepared for what is coming.

Many passages from Gospel Teaching and Learning reflect the most recent prophetic counsel given to teachers in S&I to facilitate productive and meaningful student engagement that leads to personal conversion. One passage from the new handbook teaches that “students are edified when they are led through a learning process. . . . Students should be led to search the scriptures and to discover the truths of the gospel for themselves. They should be given opportunities to explain the gospel in their own words and to share and testify of what they know and feel. This helps to bring the gospel from their heads down into their hearts.” The new handbook emphasizes that teachers should focus on “helping students fulfill their role.” It states, “As teachers prepare how they will teach, they should stay focused on the learner and not just on what the teacher will do. Rather than merely asking ‘What will I do in class today?’ or ‘What will I teach my students?’ a teacher should also approach lesson preparation thinking, ‘What will my students do in class today?’ ‘How will I help my students discover what they need to know?’” The Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook cements the refinement of focus described in the Objective and the Fundamentals and ties it inextricably
to the instruction given to S&I by the Brethren. Prophets, seers, and revelators have not only highlighted the need for greater student conversion, but have also taught the why and the how regarding teachers facilitating student conversion.

Summary and Conclusions
The Savior taught, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the Brethren have taught S&I, with increased clarity and urgency, the principles and practices which would meaningfully impact a student’s journey toward “eternal life with their Father in Heaven.” The Brethren have focused S&I on helping a student individually connect with their Heavenly Father and choose to “understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ” for him- or herself. Building a personal relationship with a loving Father in Heaven is of far greater importance than teacher knowledge, presentation, and charisma. President Eyring taught S&I that their job is “to teach eternal truth in such a way that a child of God can choose to know and love our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son.”

The Current Teaching Emphasis in 2003, the Objective of Seminaries and Institutes in 2009, and the Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook in 2012 represent S&I’s response to prophetic direction. These advances have established a clear standard and have brought increased focus on the principles and processes that effectively help the learners fulfill their role in the learning process so that they might progress along the path of personal conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conversion is a deeply personal process that comes in the Lord’s time and in the Lord’s way. Elder Eyring reminded S&I teachers that “true conversion depends on a student seeking freely in faith, with great effort. . . . Then it is the Lord who can grant, in His time, the miracle of cleansing and change. . . . Whether the miracle occurs in a moment or over years, as is far more common, it is the doctrine of Jesus Christ that drives the change.” Although conversion cannot be coerced or manufactured, when the principles embedded in Gospel Teaching and Learning are applied, an environment is created which fosters both personal conversion and preparation for future family and Church responsibilities.

Each individual chooses for himself or herself whether or not to rely on the Savior, and each should be invited to do so by an effective teacher. S&I teachers should “teach out of [their] own changed hearts.” They should expect and encourage, through their very teaching methods and constructs, each student to “[seek] freely in faith, with great effort” while they are enrolled in S&I. Elder Bednar reminded S&I teachers that their students “really are the young people that have been reserved for these latter days. Let’s quit telling them that and start treating them like that, and expecting them to come through.”

The success of S&I depends upon the application of the principles and processes that have been taught with increased clarity by prophets, and are the heart of Gospel Teaching and Learning. Understanding these principles and processes precedes effective application. Each teacher should personally pay the price to know the new handbook. It should inform their preparation, teaching, and administering. Elder Maxwell once noted to S&I personnel that “God is giving away the spiritual secrets of the universe” and then asked, “Are we listening?”

© Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All rights reserved.

Notes
5. See Elder Richard G. Scott’s account of speaking with President Hinckley about these concerns in Richard G. Scott, “To Understand and Live Truth,” address to CES religious educators, February 4, 2005.
9. Randall Hall, interview by author, October 14, 2013, copy in author’s possession.
10. Randall Hall, personal writings, copy in author’s possession.
17. Hall, interview.
20. Hall, interview.
21. This phrase is borrowed from Henry B. Eyring, “To Know and to Love God,” address to CES religious educators, February 26, 2010, 3.
22. Hall, interview.
23. Chad Webb, interview by author, November 8, 2013, copy in author’s possession.
25. Hall, interview.
33. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 10.
34. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 10.
35. Hall, personal writings.
38. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 10.
39. Hall, personal writings.
41. Grant Anderson, email to author, November 13, 2013.
42. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 10.
44. W. Rolfe Kerr, “Clarity of Focus and Consistency of Effort,” address to CES religious educators, February 3, 2006.
45. Grant Anderson, interview by author, September 25, 2013, copy in author’s possession.
46. Anderson, interview.
47. Webb, interview.
48. Regarding the sources accessed, Grant Anderson stated, “Unfortunately, I didn’t keep any documentation of what we looked at. It included articles from business magazines, books, etc.” Grant Anderson, email to author, October 15, 2014.
49. Anderson, interview.
50. Anderson, interview.
51. Anderson, interview.
52. Anderson, interview.
53. Anderson, interview.
56. Anderson, interview.
57. Webb, interview.
58. Webb, interview.
60. Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, “2009 April Global Faculty Meeting—The Objective of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion,” si.lds.org.
62. Gospel Teaching and Learning, x.
63. Eyring, “We Must Raise Our Sights,” 2.
64. Grant Anderson, email to author, November 13, 2013.
66. The principal writers of the Gospel Teaching and Learning handbook, interview by author, September 18, 2013. These writers requested to remain unnamed; they did not want to assume undue credit for their contribution to a handbook. Although the handbook was the outcome of input from many sources, there were three principal writers who worked under the supervision of Chad Webb and Elder Paul V. Johnson. A transcript of each interview is in the author’s possession.
67. Principal writers, interview.
68. Principal writers, interview.
69. Hall, interview.
70. Hall, interview.
72. Principal writers, interview.
73. Principal writers, interview.
74. Principal writers, interview.
75. Principal writers, interview.
76. Hall, interview.
77. This includes the introduction and subtracts one page that displays the objective and one page that contains only an illustration of the First Vision.
78. An address must fit the following criteria in order to be considered foundational: (1) The source is an LDS prophet or apostle; (2) The address was included in Charge to religious educators, which was a portion of the seminary preservice curriculum from 1981 to 2004;
and (3) The address is included in Teaching Seminary: Preservice Readings, which is a portion of the seminary preservice curriculum from 2004 to Present.

81. Principal writers, interview.
84. Principal writers, interview.
85. Principal writers, interview.
86. Gospel Teaching and Learning, 10.
89. Paul Murphy, email to author, September 13, 2013.
93. Elder Eyring asked S&I to adjust their aim in Eyring, “We Must Raise Our Sights,” 2.
94. Eyring, “A Foundation of Faith.”
96. Gospel Teaching and Learning, x.
98. Eyring, “We Must Raise Our Sights,” 3.
101. Gospel Teaching and Learning, x.
104. Hall, interview.
In recent years, religious educators have received guidance from Church leadership encouraging them to find ways to help students “act” and not be “acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:26). Elder David A. Bednar has taught, “A learner exercising agency by acting in accordance with correct principles opens his or her heart to the Holy Ghost—and invites His teaching, testifying power, and confirming witness.” As a result of this emphasis, many teachers are seeking to help students exercise their agency in class by inviting them to be more involved in the learning process. Students are teaching one another more, writing more, speaking more in class, and asking more questions.

As religious educators work together to find ways to encourage students to become more engaged in gospel learning, it may be helpful to identify a distinction. In an attempt to implement the principles and techniques mentioned above, some teachers have focused on student behavior rather than focusing on student agency. In other words, some have assumed that students are internally engaged in learning if they are outwardly participating in activities such as answering questions, writing, or teaching. Often, these outward behaviors are an effective measure of sincere student involvement. However,
a learner can participate behaviorally in classroom activities but still refrain from opening his or her heart to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “There remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign, unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability.”

It is at this level we hope to reach the students who sit before us.

Ultimately, there is nothing that can be done to force a student to engage internally in gospel learning. Elder Bednar said, “The tuition of diligence and learning by faith must be paid to obtain and personally ‘own’ such knowledge. Only in this way can what is known in the mind be transformed into what is felt in the heart.”

Nevertheless, a significant role of the teacher is to help create a climate where students are more likely to use their agency appropriately as they learn the gospel. This article will suggest the use of narrative-based teaching principles, one among the many available methods to draw upon, as an effective way to invite students to engage inwardly in gospel learning.

The Power of Narrative

One commonly recognized tool for capturing students’ attention is to tell a story. Often, when a student or teacher begins a powerful story, heads are raised and cell phones are put down. Dr. Thomas G. Long, a professor of preaching at Emory University, explained, “Not only do we like stories; we live our lives out of them. We remember in stories, dream in stories, shape our values through stories. And we see the world through evocative images. Long after the rest of a [lesson] is forgotten, many hearers can still recall the stories told and remember the images.”

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that our minds primarily interact with the world through the lens of story: “While we can be trained to think in geometrical shapes, patterns of sounds, poetry, movement, syllogisms, what predominates or fundamentally constitutes our consciousness is the understanding of the self and world in story.”

Despite the power of storytelling, focusing on one method can lead to unbalanced teaching. Rather than encouraging the use of one technique (storytelling), this paper will analyze six elements of narrative that can be used to invite learners to engage as agents. In other words, this article is not concerned with describing how to tell “a good story.” Instead, what follows is a discussion on how some of the elements of narrative can be incorporated into gospel teaching as a whole.

In each section I will illustrate narrative teaching principles using Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s October 2012 general conference address entitled “The First Great Commandment.” This talk draws upon the well-known conversation between the Savior and Peter near the Sea of Galilee when Jesus repeatedly asked Peter, “Lovest thou me?” Elder Holland used this scripture text to help listeners consider their discipleship and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. This talk effectively demonstrated many aspects of narrative teaching and will therefore serve as our model for the principles discussed below.

Anticipation

Narratives capture an audience’s interest by creating a sense of anticipation. Learning to use this principle in the classroom is particularly important for teachers who notice their students becoming fidgety during the last ten minutes of class. If anticipation is created properly, listeners will actually become more engaged as class time comes to a close.

The primary way a narrative creates anticipation is through the use of ambiguity. In other words, stories introduce a problem, conflict, or issue that needs resolving. Speaking of the need to hear a resolution to ambiguity, Dr. Eugene Lowry, a professor of narrative preaching, said, “In mild doses it is a motivator both to attention and to action. One cannot breathe easily until some solution occurs. And when resolution comes, the result is both a knowing and a feeling.”

Normally, teachers understand the need to gain students’ attention at the beginning of class. Teachers will often use activities or questions that send students searching in the scriptures as a way to pique interest. Within the first five to ten minutes of class, curiosity is created and then satisfied. However, in narrative-based teaching, attention is similarly gained at the beginning of class, but resolution is delayed until the end of the time students and teachers are together. For example, notice the sense of conflict created in the introductory paragraph of Elder Holland’s talk. Speaking of the eleven remaining Apostles after the Savior’s Resurrection, Elder Holland said, “Of course, to them [the Savior] hadn’t been with them nearly long enough. Three years isn’t long to call an entire Quorum of Twelve Apostles from a handful of new converts, purge from them the error of old ways, teach them the wonders of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then leave them to carry on the work until they too were killed. Quite a staggering prospect for a group of newly ordained
At the beginning of this talk, the listener is introduced to the ambiguity or conflict of how the Apostles chose to proceed with their lives after the Resurrection. However, the listener is invited to remain engaged throughout the talk as Elder Holland delays the resolution to this ambiguity until the latter part of his address.

When these types of delayed resolution occur, there is often a powerful emotional and mental payoff. As Dr. Lowry has pointed out, “Ambiguity is not known simply as an intellectual matter; it is a mental ambiguity which is existentially felt. It becomes a part of the listener’s existence at that moment in time, and hence when it is resolved and the gospel proclaimed, the good news is not just something one now knows propositionally, but something one now experiences.”

**Distance**

Another important element of narrative that can invite listeners to engage in gospel learning is what Dr. Fred Craddock, a professor of preaching, calls “distance.” Narratives are almost always told in first or third person. This creates an emotional and cognitive “distance” between speaker and hearer because the listener is not directly addressed. The listener is then free to reflect, accept, reject, and decide how the message relates to his or her own experience. The principle of distance may seem counterintuitive—would not storytellers or teachers want listeners to feel directly addressed? Speaking of the Savior’s parables, Richard Lloyd Anderson said:

> The parable is a teaching method recognizing the fact that one sees his own weaknesses better by viewing others who display the same weaknesses. . . . Even the Lord was sparing in confrontation, generally reserving it until he had offered many other opportunities to understand. Even then his final warnings to his enemies used the “case system” to force them to think about his message. This technique should be remembered: an effective method is to use third-person examples that hit close to home. The technique works on the premise that stimulating thought is the most effective teaching tool. It avoids one-sided scorn that too often triggers the self-defense reflexes and helps induce desired self-analysis instead.

Dr. C. Terry Warner explained how the Arbinger Institute (a consulting organization) taps into the power of distance by inviting the participants in their seminars to share true stories regarding the topics that are being taught. He asked, “What happens in such a setting? For the large majority of people, hearing others’ stories enables them to see their own experiences in a new, truthful light. They realize—usually instantaneously—that a story another has told is their own story, only with different details. This realization seems to sneak past their defenses.”

Many instructional theories maintain the importance of creating a sense of relevance in the early stages of instruction. But, if teachers emphasize the relevance of a topic too much, students may have a hard time opening up emotionally. Distance allows a listener to engage in lesson material without feeling coerced or manipulated. In 2012, researchers at Ohio State University published a study that explored a unique phenomenon called “experience taking.” When an individual starts to experience the emotions of a character as he or she reads a story and then begins to incorporate some of that character’s behavior into their own life, this is experience taking. The study found that if a reader identified with a character but was also given a chance to “lose themselves” in the story, then experience taking was more likely to occur. Interestingly, if a participant in the study had a mirror placed next to them as he or she read a story, they were less likely to “lose themselves” in the narrative. It appears that if readers are thinking too much about themselves, their internal defenses will remain intact.

The implications of this study for gospel teachers are profound. Rather than trying to directly show how a student is supposed to connect with content, it might be important to speak in first or third person as long as possible before revealing the meaning of a lesson. For example, Elder Holland’s talk began by only discussing the early Apostles, allowing the listener to “enter” the world of Israel in AD 33. Attention is brought away from the listener, creating a distance that invites internal engagement. Elder Holland began his talk this way: “There is almost no group in history for whom I have more sympathy than I have for the eleven remaining Apostles immediately following the death of the Savior of the world.” Interestingly, Elder Holland did not directly address his audience regarding the main point of his talk until more than two-thirds of the way through when he said, “My beloved brothers and sisters, I am not certain just what our experience will be on Judgment Day, but I will be very surprised if at some point in that conversation, God does not ask us exactly what Christ asked Peter.”

Distance can be created by a teacher when he or she uses the text of the scriptures, metaphors, imagery, parables, or simple examples from the lives of others. This type of content is more likely to stay in first and third person and thus create an emotional distance for listeners that encourages them to engage internally.
Images
Narratives use imagery as a primary way to affect the listener. The Savior consistently used simple imagery throughout his ministry to convey gospel messages. He spoke of common things such as sheep, wheat, coins, banquets, and candles. Imagery is powerful because of its ability to help the listener identify with and internally experience the lesson material being presented. Rather than speaking in bland, general terms, imagery is specific and allows the listener to make connections from his or her own experiences, memories, and emotions. Dr. Craddock explained, “If the sermon revives the memory of the odor of burped milk on a blouse, it evokes more meaning than the most thorough analysis of ‘motherhood.’”

When using imagery, it can be helpful to refrain from overdescription. In other words, distance must be maintained because the listener intuitively senses the teacher trying to help the hearer experience something. Using a few simple descriptive terms allows the listener’s mind to complete the imagery and maintain distance. Craddock said, “For the speaker to supply the total image . . . insults [the students’] intelligence, deprives them of a vital part of the process of arriving at new meaning and insight, and may well cause them to feel some revulsion toward the speaker.”

Elder Holland used imagery when describing the interchange between the Savior and Peter: “Looking at their battered little boats, their frayed nets, and a stunning pile of 153 fish, Jesus said to His senior Apostle, ‘Peter, do you love me more than you love all this?’” Elder Holland also used potent images when he said, “Did you, like they, think the cross and the nails and the tomb were the end of it all and each could blissfully go back to being whatever you were before?”

Far beyond just adding beauty to our lessons, imagery and metaphor connect gospel truths to students’ minds and hearts. Imagery acts much like a visual aid, which Elder Richard G. Scott suggested is “like a hook in the mind to which truth can be carefully secured so that it can be understood, remembered, and used in time of need.”

Identification
Many times in gospel teaching contexts we speak of the end goal as application. Ultimately, we want our students to make specific changes in their behavior or beliefs. But trying to reach application too quickly can sometimes make the lesson feel forced. Narratives may hold a key that can help teachers lead their students to application more naturally.

As mentioned above, distance is essential in helping a listener open up to a gospel message. For instance, when the Savior taught in parables he would use third-person examples. However, as the parable would unfold, the distance would diminish and the listener would begin to identify with the story. It is the combination of both distance and identification that allows the listeners to discover something for themselves and connect to the gospel internally.

The type of identification spoken of here is not created by using the same slang words of the students or by making pop culture references. Identification occurs when students begin to see themselves, their situations, their beliefs, and their feelings in a lesson. In order to encourage identification, teachers must have the gift of empathy. Dr. Patrick Parrish, an instructional-design theorist, said, “The most critical . . . skill [for those who design instruction] is the ability to step outside one’s own perspective and see the design through the learner’s eyes.”

A teacher helps create identification by slowly unfolding how a message relates to the students’ current situations and experiences in life. This is not a guessing game or a teaching gimmick. Rather, the instructor is seeking to help the students discover gospel connections for themselves. As Elder Bednar said, “The most important lessons of life are caught—not taught.” If the teacher seeks to move to application too quickly, then many students may become defensive or may not have a chance to draw conclusions for themselves. In the following examples, notice how the Savior subtly helped his listeners identify with the message of his parables:

The Pharisees may have identified with this line in the prodigal son: “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment” (Luke 15:29).

Luke says the parable of the Pharisees and the publican was directed to those “which trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9). This audience probably heard their own thoughts echoing in the words of the Pharisee in the parable who said, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even this publican” (Luke 17:11).

When hearing the parable of the laborers, the listeners may have heard themselves when the workers in the parable murmur, “These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day” (Matthew 20:12).
It's hard to determine at what point the Pharisees began to identify with the parable of the wicked husbandmen, but Matthew records that “when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them” (Matthew 21:45).

As a gospel teacher unfolds the text or message of the lesson, he or she can use third-person stories, images, metaphors, or parables that maintain distance but also “hit close to home.” Towards the end of the lesson, these third-person examples will begin to reveal in a more obvious manner the message the teacher would like to communicate.

In order to show how the listener could identify with different aspects of Elder Holland’s talk, I will separate the details of the story in John 21 and show how some of the different events touch upon common human experience.

In John 21, the main characters
1. are not in the presence of the Savior physically,
2. fall back into old habits,
3. are not as diligent as they should be in their Christian duty,
4. are given an opportunity to reconsider their love and devotion towards the Savior.

As the details of the story in John 21 unfold, the identification points begin to work internally on the listener. Since the main ideas are not stated directly until the end, the listeners are given a chance to use their agency and choose how they identify with the message for themselves.

Movement

Perhaps the most fundamental way narrative teaching is different from typical instruction is in its sense of “movement.” In a story, characters begin with a set of beliefs, feelings, and worldviews. As the story advances, however, the characters encounter new ideas and experiences that change the fundamental paradigms of the characters. This reflects how people change in everyday life. Most people do not feel and think differently based on well-argued ideas, fun learning activities, or tightly arranged PowerPoints. Rather, people wrestle with ideas and experiences, moving from one state of being to another.

In book 4 of On Christian Doctrine, St. Augustine discusses what leads to effective preaching. Instead of simply making a series of points, “Augustine leads the reader through an experience of considering and rejecting, as though bridges were being burned behind the traveler through the pages until finally all is consumed except the destination. This focus on the reader puts the writer in the role of narrator, making possible a certain movement for the reader who is overhearing Augustine talk to himself, entertaining and then rejecting his own thoughts. The reader begins to do the same, and the writer’s experience is reproduced in the reader.”

Elder Holland’s talk “moves” from a state of uncertainty regarding Christian duty to a feeling of loyalty to the Lord and his work. One segment of Elder Holland’s talk depicts Peter speaking “to his associates.” During this exchange, Peter is not characterized or stereotyped as lazy or unfaithful. Instead, the listeners can actually identify with Peter’s point as he explains his decision to return to fishing. In Elder Holland’s recreation of the conversation, Peter says, “I don’t know more to tell you than to return to your former life, rejoicing. I intend to ‘go a fishing.’” The listener moves next to a moment of sacred confrontation. Instead of a feeling of complacency, we sense urgency as the Savior seeks to remind Peter of what’s most important: “Looking at their battered little boats, their frayed nets, and a stunning pile of 153 fish, Jesus said,” in Elder Holland’s words, “Peter, do you love me more than you love all this?” Peter responded, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.” The intensity is raised as the Savior responds by saying (again in Elder Holland’s words), “So, Peter, for the second and presumably the last time, I am asking you to leave all this and to go teach and testify, labor and serve loyally until the day in which they will do to you exactly what they did to me.” Next, Elder Holland moves to the application of the message. As listeners hear this portion of the talk, they know they have arrived where they originally set out for: “So we have neighbors to bless, children to protect, the poor to lift up, and the truth to defend. We have wrongs to make right, truths to share, and good to do.” By the end of Elder Holland’s talk, the listener has moved from complacency to a declaration of adoration: “Yea, Lord, we do love thee.” And having set our ‘hand to the plough,’ we will never look back until this work is finished and love of God and neighbor rules the world.”

A sense of movement is essential for learner engagement. Bryan Chappell, author of Christ-Centered Preaching, says, “Listeners need to know that their thoughts and understanding are advancing throughout a message. If a point sounds too much like an idea that has already been covered, or if various points do not seem to build to a higher purpose, interest wavers. . . . [Teachers] must maintain a sense of progression by keeping each point distinct and by making each point advance toward a culminating idea.”
The effective use of movement invites students to make similar “moves” in their own thinking and feeling. Perceptive teachers will carefully discern ways to craft lessons in such a manner that will help listeners act as agents and move from one set of beliefs and feelings to a “fresh view about God, about oneself, and about the world.”

Conclusion

There is no magic formula for teaching the perfect lesson. There are only effective teaching principles that can be learned and applied, such as the elements of narrative. These elements have been used throughout history to engage listeners. It seems as if the human mind and heart cannot help but be engaged internally when a good story is told. As teachers learn and incorporate the elements of narrative into instruction, they will help students engage in lessons more than behaviorally; students will open their hearts and minds to the truths of the restored gospel. When a student’s mind, heart, and behavior are participating in gospel instruction, they are more likely to use their agency in order to be influenced by the sanctifying, enlightening, and edifying power of the Holy Ghost.

Notes

8. Lowry, The Homiletical Plot, 35.
The prophet Jacob, one of the early writers in the Book of Mormon, quotes an extensive allegory known as the allegory of the olive tree,1 which was originally penned by Zenos, an ancient Hebrew prophet. By doing so he purports to answer the question “How is it possible that [the Jews], after having rejected the sure foundation [Christ], can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner?” (Jacob 4:17). He begins with a brief introduction of the main characters: “Thus saith the Lord, I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive tree, which a man took and nourished in his vineyard” (Jacob 5:3). Throughout seventy-seven verses he tells the story of a Lord’s efforts to care for and tend a vineyard that includes an original and various tame olive trees, as well as various wild olive trees. After concluding his narrative, Jacob affirms that it is an allegorical description of the dealings of God with the house of Israel and the fulfilling of his covenants in the latter days (see Jacob 6).

Many studies have been conducted suggesting the meaning of the symbols, characters, and actions of the allegory as representing a literal history of the house of Israel, drawing parallels with historical events and gospel dispensations. These studies focus on the relationship between the tree (as a

---

1. José A. Bamio (jabamio@gmail.com) is an independent researcher in Vigo, Spain.

"Thus saith the Lord, I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive tree, which a man took and nourished in his vineyard" (Jacob 5:3)
The Allegory of the Olive Tree: An Instructional Model for Leaders

representation of communal Israel) and the Lord of the vineyard. Conversely, Dan Belnap explores the relationship between the Lord and his servant in the vineyard, elaborating on the concept that in Isaiah, as well as in other scriptures, “the term ‘Israel’ is used to denote two identities—the individual servant and the collective social group.” In his approach, Belnap “presents the servant as a covenant member of Israel who has responsibilities for the eventual salvation of communal Israel and the greater world.” His approach “allows for the actions of the servant, as a growing, maturing individual, to be just as important in the plan as the trees are.” He shows that the servant’s growth is the result of his working under his master’s directions, following a carefully designed training that gradually leads him to acquire the very traits of his master. Belnap concludes, “The true power of the allegory comes from understanding that He [God] is seeking not only for oneness and good fruit [in the vineyard] but also for servants who become companions, associates, and equals with him.

By considering the servant as representing the individual nature of Israel, this paper follows partially the approach of Dan Belnap, but it focuses rather on the work system exhibited by the Lord of the vineyard and his servant as they tend the vineyard, showing that they follow a recurrent model in their labors. This pattern seems to be an instructional model for leaders worthy to be examined and tested.

Further, by considering the tree as representing the communal nature of Israel, this paper will suggest that the tree represents two facets of communal Israel, which, if understood, would allow for a better appreciation of the labor performed for the benefit of the trees.

The Natural Olive as a Dual Representation

From the outset of the allegory, the Lord defines what the tree represents: “I will liken thee, O house of Israel, like unto a tame olive tree, which a man took and nourished in his vineyard” (Jacob 5:3). The verb “took” indicates that the tree was chosen; the same concept appears in Isaiah 5:2, where the Lord plants the “choicest vine.” There are also wild olives in the story, representing peoples whose fruits are of inferior quality but, once inserted through grafting into the mainstream of the tame olive tree, they improve and match the desired fruit quality.

In many other scriptural references, Israel is compared to plants in a cultivated garden.” The common concepts that stand out in these analogies are “election,” followed by “cultivation,” all this denoting an endearing relationship and a purpose. But nowhere is this analogy so elaborate as in the allegory. And certainly it is not an easy task to depict metaphorically the relationship of God with the house of Israel, with the people “the Lord hath chosen . . . to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:2). The paramount importance of olive trees for ancient cultures in the Mediterranean basin makes them a suitable representation of a people defined as “a peculiar treasure” (Exodus 19:5). So the very initial sentence of the allegory provides not only the context of the story but also the emotional and spiritual framework of a “peculiar” relationship.

But the house of Israel is more than a collectivity, just as a tame olive tree is much more than an uncultivated or wild one. In describing this institution to the early Saints, Peter said that they, “as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, . . . a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, . . . which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God” (1 Peter 2:5, 9, 10). I suggest that in order to represent this complex and purposeful society, its power and workings, the allegory also distinguishes between the branches and the roots of the natural olive tree. The branches represent groups of persons, again differentiating between “natural” and “wild” branches. Some branches are plucked off and transplanted into other grounds, where they keep growing and bring forth fruits. Other branches are grafted into the tree, and some others are plucked off and burned. The branches interact with the roots in a relationship of mutual reinforcement, but sometimes they interact in frank opposition. The Lord of the vineyard endeavors to keep a balance between both entities, striving to retain the roots.

I suggest that we are here dealing with a dual representation. The tree represents the house of Israel in its two facets: on the one hand, the tree depicts the members of the house of Israel (or Church), and as such, it is a representation of individuals, families, and human groups; and on the other hand, the tree is a representation of the Church, as an institution of divine origin, with a structure and priesthood channels. The branches are more suited to represent individuals and families which are able to bring forth fruits (natural or wild ones), while the roots are a good representation of the Church as a divinely approved organization that extracts the nutrients of the gospel out of the soils for the blessing of the families.
The Nourishment from the Roots

Jacob himself mentions in his brief final commentaries, “For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire? Behold, will ye reject these words? Will ye reject the words of the prophets; and will ye reject all the words which have been spoken concerning Christ” (Jacob 6:7–8). This statement makes clear that the word of God, which zeroes in on the doctrine of Christ’s Atonement, is the vital nutrient in the ascending sap from the roots that reaches and nourishes the branches.9 Representations of other components of this sap are not identified in the allegory.10 On the other hand, in the allegory the gardeners recognize the force and influence that the branches have on the roots (see Jacob 5:18, 34, 48).

This interpretation of the branches, the roots, and the nourishment from the roots in the allegory allows for an appropriate representation of the relationship between the three main entities in the plan of salvation: the families, the Church, and the Savior.11

The Labor in the Vineyard

The labor of the gardeners follows a cyclical pattern, each cycle consisting of three stages. The first stage is an assessment and planning session, in which the Lord of the vineyard and the servant evaluate the trees, the fruits, and the general conditions in the vineyard. They discuss the possible causes of the present outcomes and devise an action plan. Next, they perform the horticultural tasks according to their plans, which I summarize under the title “Nourishing,” and then they depart to allow for the trees to act. After a certain time, the cycle starts all over again.

Let’s take a closer look at these three stages:

1. Evaluating/Planning

The first undertaking of both gardeners is to assess the condition of the trees and the quality of their fruits. Diagnosis necessarily must precede prescription. Words or phrases such as “saw,” “said,” “taste of the fruit,” “watch the tree,” “look here,” “beheld it was good,” “according to my words,” “what shall we do unto the tree?,” and “what could I have done?” allow us to recognize this phase of assessment, reasoning, and planning.

Each cycle begins with such a session in which the Lord and servant perform most or all of the following activities:

1. They observe the general condition of the tree/trees, branches, and fruits.
2. They try to understand the reasons for such results; they reason, “Behold, the branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root thereof, that the root thereof hath brought forth much strength” (Jacob 5:18).
3. They assess the effects of their former labors for the trees: “if we had not grafted in these branches, the tree thereof would have perished” (v. 18).
4. They devise new plans leading to the desired fruits: “Let us prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it a little longer, that perhaps it may bring forth good fruit” (v. 27).
5. They repeat this procedure for each tree in the vineyard in each zone where they have planted trees.

These sessions also exhibit several traits that are worth mentioning:

• These sessions seem to be used by the Lord of the vineyard to communicate instructions to the servant. But there is also an open and respectful two-way communication between both individuals, with questions and answers from both parties, with speaking and listening,
proposals and counterproposals, assignments and reports. Final decision making rests on the Lord of the vineyard, as could be expected.

- As Dan Belnap has shown, the information handled in the sessions grows in complexity in the course of time, evidencing an increase in the capacity of the servant to understand the processes and to understand that he is getting more reliable. The scope of the tasks also increases from working solely on the mother tree to all the trees in the vineyard.

- The agents conducting the assessment observe conditions, question results, and reason about the causes. But there are feelings and emotions all the way too: “It grieveth me that I should lose the trees” (v. 51), says the Lord of the vineyard to the servant. He speaks of joy, “that I may rejoice exceedingly” (v. 60), and promises, “ye shall have joy with me” (v. 75). At a very frustrating time in the vineyard, there is even mourning: “And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard wept” (v. 41). This shows that they are not merely concerned about production or numbers, but they are concerned about the trees as living entities continuously immersed in a life-and-death struggle. They want to obtain good fruits but are also concerned about preserving the roots and the branches (v. 60).

2. Nourishing (cultivating or nurturing)

Under this title are grouped all of the horticultural tasks that are carried out by the agents in the allegory to the benefit of the trees in the vineyard. These labors make the difference between a wild and a cultivated olive tree. The cultivated olive trees bring forth bigger and high quality fruits. In order to achieve such outcomes, the gardeners do the following tasks:

- **Pruning:** cutting or removing dead or excessive foliage. One purpose is to keep the tree’s top equal to its roots; i.e., to keep a balance between them.
- **Digging:** loosening the soil to make nutrients and moisture available to the roots.
- **Nourishing:** adding fertilizers to the ground.
- **Grafting:** propagating by inserting branches into a growing tree.
- **Transplanting:** transferring branches to be replanted somewhere else.
- **Burning:** destroying old and removed branches.
- **Clearing the ground:** removing infected materials and debris from the ground, usually by fire.
- **Dunging:** fertilizing with organic materials.

We can arrange these tasks in two groups according to their effects on the trees: the tasks aimed to foster their growth and the ones that seek to remove obstacles that hinder or delay progress. In this context, the tasks that provide the tree with nutrition or add something to improve its quality (nourishing, dunging, grafting) constitute a driving force, while the tasks that reduce or remove what blocks the trees from nourishing or growing well (digging, pruning, uprooting, transplanting, burning, clearing out obstructions) are unblocking forces working to reduce the effect of restrictive forces in the system. The Lord of the vineyard is aware of the need of both kinds of efforts.

He is also aware of the existence of a circuit within the tree, whereby nutrients flow from the roots up to the branches and back from the leaves to the roots. “And he said unto the servant: Behold, the branches of the wild tree have taken hold of the moisture of the root thereof, that the root thereof hath brought forth much strength; and because of the much strength of the root thereof the wild branches have brought forth tame fruit” (v. 18). And at a time of general corruption in the vineyard, the servant tries to find an explanation: “Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard—have not the branches thereof overcome the roots which are good? And because the branches have overcome the roots thereof, behold they grew faster than the strength of the roots, taking strength unto themselves. Behold, I say, is not this the cause that the trees of thy vineyard have become corrupted?” (v. 48). The Lord of the vineyard responds by instructing the servant to dig, prune, and dung once more and to reinsert branches into their original trees, and then pluck or “clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and ye shall not clear away,” he continues, “the bad thereof at once, lest the roots thereof should be too strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish” (v. 64–65). Wilford Hess provides a botanical explanation for this: “There is a distinction between mineral uptake by roots, particularly the influence of nitrogen compounds, which are necessary for wood growth, and carbon assimilation by photosynthesis, which takes place in the leaves and supplies carbon for the forming of the plant body, including the fruit. In order to get a full crop of olives an equilibrium must be maintained between these two processes.”

In summary, an important criterion the Lord of the vineyard uses to determine the due proportion of driving/unblocking forces is internal equilibrium, maintaining balance between the contributions from the top and the roots of the tree. This criterion is especially interesting when the tree is seen...
as I suggest in this paper: as a dual representation of the Church, where the branches stand for the members and the roots symbolize the Church as an institution with its priesthood channels.

3. Allow acting

Once the gardeners have labored in the vineyard according to their plan, they leave and allow the trees to act. Attention is called to the fact that the outcomes of their work are not guaranteed, as attested by the italicized words in these verses: “I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it, that perhaps it may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not” (v. 4). “And this will I do that the tree may not perish, that, perhaps, I may preserve unto myself the roots thereof for mine own purpose” (v. 5). “that, perhaps, the trees of my vineyard may bring forth again good fruit; and that I may have joy again in the fruit of my vineyard, and, perhaps, that I may rejoice exceeding that I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit” (v. 60; emphasis added; see also vv. 11, 27, 54). The gardener’s actions in favor of the tree do not warrant the fruits but create an environment where the trees may develop to their fullest potential.

The allegory right from the beginning sets the scenery where the olive trees perform their acting: “a tame olive tree, which a man took and nourished in his vineyard; and it grew, and waxed old, and began to decay” (v. 3). Throughout the allegory, the nature of the vineyard works constantly as a restricting force against the development of the trees and the improvement of the fruits. Zenos’s, Jacob’s, and latter-day audiences would readily recognize that these restricting forces are related to the aftermaths of the Fall of Adam, at least in its physical aspects. But a representation of the spiritual consequences of the Fall are also presented in the allegory as restricting forces, and Jacob himself and the text of the allegory make clear that each one of these restricting forces has its counterpart or propelling force:

The restricting force of the physical Fall

The allegory shows a vineyard that needs constant care and work in order to counteract its natural tendency to decay and decompose. Hugh Nibley said, “That is the second law of nature, but according to Jacob, it is the first to which nature is subjected—the inexorable and irreversible trend toward corruption and disintegration; it can’t be reversed. It rises no more, crumbles, rots, and remains that way endlessly, for an endless duration.” This is also known as the entropy principle, which describes that everything tends, if no new energy is added, to assume a lesser degree of organization and an inferior quality of energy, till it becomes useless. For an olive tree to become domesticated, it must receive a good amount of energy and care during a long time; left alone, it will lose its higher properties and degenerate and very likely die. The gardeners work to reverse this degrading process. They toil in an apparently hopeless cause, but at several periods they overcome opposition and achieve the desired fruits. Their actions are based on the knowledge of propelling forces in the system that operate in the opposite direction of the restricting forces.

The driving force

In other writings in the Book of Mormon, Jacob refers to the terrible fate of the earth and its inhabitants after the Fall: “There must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; . . . wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more” (2 Nephi 9:6–7). In his final comments on the allegory, he identifies again the Atonement as the driving force that counteracts entropy. He asks his audience the following
The Allegory of the Olive Tree: An Instructional Model for Leaders

Atonement of Christ and the moral agency of man. The importance of the latter is shown in the allegory through the extensive periods of time the gardeners concede the trees to act for themselves. The all-encompassing nature of the effort needed to combine both forces can be appreciated in the stirring concluding plea of Jacob to his people: “I beseech of you in words of soberness that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you” (Jacob 6:5).

The Leadership Pattern of the Allegory in Current Church Practices

Scott H. Faulring pointed out how the Book of Mormon instructed Joseph Smith in the task of restoring and organizing the Church in this dispensation.17
In this regard, it would not be an overstatement to highlight the contribution of the allegory in terms of exposing key leadership principles and processes that have been hallmarks of the restored Church. Richard Lyman Bushman has shown that the form of government in the Church restored by Joseph Smith differed from the other religious institutions of Joseph’s time.18 Very early there occurred in the Church a transferring of power from the prophet to councils at every level, where members would assess their needs, reason and plan together, give reports, and seek revelation—all functioning under the direction of priesthood keys with sufficient autonomy.19

Shown in figure 2 are some parallels between the leadership process exhibited in the allegory and the traits of government and functioning established in the LDS Church, most of them since its very first days.

Conclusion

Commenting about the allegory, Jacob bears testimony “that the things which this prophet Zenos spake, concerning the house of Israel, in the which he likened them unto a tame olive tree, must surely come to pass” (Jacob 6:1). Besides dealing with prophecy, this allegory delivers much more than prophetic and historical information about the dealings of God with the house of Israel and the world. The fact that the Lord prepared a way for us to receive Zenos’s allegory in this dispensation, a jewel that has been lost to the world for centuries, places upon us the burden of studying and learning from it as much as we can. This article identifies some useful lessons on leadership by pointing out a pattern followed by the Lord of the vineyard and his servants in their labors: (1) assessing and counseling about a plan, (2) performing diverse tasks that aim to nourish the trees or to release them from the things that impede nourishment and growth, and (3) granting a period of time for the trees to respond to their labors, after which the process starts over again. The chief aim of the labor is to bring the branches into contact with the life-giving sap of Christ’s Atonement and to create the necessary conditions for growth, synergy, and oneness in the garden. This pattern is a valuable teaching model for leadership, and I have briefly outlined some ways that the restored Church has adopted this model and has been applying it since the early days of the Restoration.

In addition, the interpretation suggested here of the branches representing the families and human groups that belong to the Church, and the roots standing for the Church as divine institution, allows us to understand the emphasis given in the allegory to the internal interactions within the trees. The actors involved in the drama of the allegory would now be four instead of three: the Lord of the vineyard, the servant, the branches, and the roots, where the servant could be but an individual manifestation of the branches and the narrative of his performance a perusing of some of the workings that are expected from the branches.

Under this premise, the roots represent the need for a figure (the Church) in receiving and distributing the proper nourishment to the individual members interacting with them in a life-giving circuit, where branches and roots are supposed to support each other. We are informed from the very start that the original tree had been chosen and tamed (see v. 3), which may be a way of representing its qualification or divine provenance. Throughout the text, the Lord of the vineyard expresses his desire for high-quality fruits, but he is also committed to preserving the roots. This suggests at least two things: First, the indispensability of a “living” connection between the soils and the branches through a good root structure. No branch can survive feeding from dead roots. Second, the roots are to preserve their domesticated traits in order to serve as worthy conduits of the “living water” that will bring forth quality fruits out of even wild branches. Translated, each dispensation requires living and authorized oracles, living true prophets and witnesses, to carry the nutrients of the gospel to the families. No wonder Jacob extols God in his final comments of the allegory: “And how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches” (Jacob 6:4).

Finally, the allegory locates the house of Israel in a setting that represents the “garden” that came after the Fall, a garden of the second state, in contrast to the paradisiacal garden of the Creation. The allegory introduces the forces that are present in this environment: the restrictive forces that are consequences of the Fall and subdue everything. According to Jacob, the branches can counteract these forces and yield high-quality fruit only through accepting the good word of the Atonement of Christ that ascends from the roots—the living witnesses—and by aligning and interacting positively with the roots in a circuit ever improving, that now tends to oneness, to Zion.20

Notes

1. For the sake of brevity, hereafter referred to as the allegory.
6. Paul, in an allusion to an apparently known notion of olive trees representing people, wrote, “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles. . . . And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them partaketh of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Romans 11:13, 17).
7. David Rolph Seely provided this insight: “Also prominent is the comparison of Israel as a plant and the Lord as the gardener: ‘Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance’ (Exodus 15:17); ‘As the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters’ (Numbers 24:6); ‘Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them’ (1 Samuel 7:10); ‘For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant’ (Isaiah 5:7); ‘The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit’ (Jeremiah 11:16); ‘And I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul’ (Jeremiah 23:4). This agricultural metaphor emphasizes the dependence of Israel on her God, the care which he gives to his plants, and the expectation of productivity measured by the quality and quantity of the fruit at the harvest. Clearly the closest parallel to Zenos’s allegory is found in Isaiah’s song of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1–7) where Israel is compared with an unproductive vineyard that the Lord attempts to make fruitful but finally allows to be destroyed by its enemies and lack of rain.” David Rolph Seely, “The Allegory of the Olive Tree and the Use of Related Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament,” in The Allegory of the Olive Tree, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 299.
8. For a detailed explanation of the importance of the olive culture, see John Gee and Daniel Peterson, Graft and Corruption: On Olives and Olive Culture in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean, in The Allegory of the Olive Tree, 186–15.
9. Boyd K. Packer highlights the life-sustaining property of the Atonement while making another analogy with roots and branches in a comment as afterthought of his own parable “The Mediator” : “Through Him [Christ] mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice. This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.” Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, April 1977, 80.
10. Dallin H. Oaks, for instance, explains that the Church provides the families, among other things, with the doctrines, ordinances, and priesthood keys. See Dallin H. Oaks, Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church, in Conference Report, October 2005, .
11. “We begin by affirming three fundamental doctrinal principles. First, both the Church and the eternal family are presided over by priesthood authority. The government and the procedures of the Church and the family are different, but the foundation of authority—the priesthood—is the same. Second, the Church organization and the family organization support one another. Each is independent in its own sphere, but each has the same mission—to help accomplish God’s purpose to bring to pass the eternal life of His children. (see Moses 1:39.) Third, the Latter-day Saint family and the Church both draw their nourishment and their direction from our Lord Jesus Christ.” Dallin H. Oaks, “The Priesthood and the Auxiliaries,” Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, January 2004, .
12. Following is a list of the verses where these labors are mentioned: pruning (vv. 4, 5, 11, 27, 47, 62, 64–66, 69, 76); pruning in order to keep the top and the root equal (vv. 37, 48, 65, 66); digging (vv. 4, 5, 11, 27, 47, 61, 64); nourishing (vv. 5–5, 11, 12, 10, 12–15, 27, 18, 11, 34–47, 58, 61, 71, 75, 76); grafting (vv. 8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 30, 34, 52, 54–57, 60, 61–65, 67, 68); transplanting (vv. 21, 21–25, 43, 44, 52, 54); burning (vv. 7, 9, 16, 17, 42, 45–47, 49, 58, 66, 77); clearing the ground (vv. 44); dunging (vv. 47, 64, 76).
15. “If both ‘tame’ and ‘wild’ trees receive the same cultural attention by growers, the ‘tame’ or domesticated tree will, almost without exception, yield fruit of superior quality and size. On the other hand, if the same trees, both ‘tame’ and ‘wild,’ are left without attention, the ‘wild’ is more likely to survive, even though the fruit will be genetically inferior.” Wilford M. Hess, Daniel Fairbanks, John W. Welch, and Jonathan K. Driggs, Botanical Aspects of Olive Culture Relevant to Jacob 5, in The Allegory of the Olive Tree, 10–11.
16. If we compare this allegorical depiction with scriptural real descriptions of apostasy periods, we can see interesting parallels: “And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches, yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, . . . making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions, . . . and because of this their great wickedness, and their boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength; . . . and they saw that they had become weak, like unto their brethren, the Lamanites, and that the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them” (Helaman 4:12, 13, 24).
19. “The concept of a council in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints embodies both a philosophy of administrative behavior and an organizational body or unit. . . . Church councils coordinate and schedule activities, gather information, plan future programs or events, and make decisions and resolve problems for their units. . . .” The philosophy of a council is what sociologist Thomas O’Dea called a ‘democracy of participation’ in Mormon culture. The Mormons (Chicago, 1964), . At periodic council meetings both individual and organizational needs are considered. Recognizing the unique circumstances surrounding a particular unit, geographical area, or set of individuals, the council identifies the programs and activities that need to be planned and correlated. (The council does not have final decision-making power, this resides with the unit leader, such as the stake president or bishop.)
20. “Councils are more than operational coordinating mechanisms. They also serve as vehicles for family, ward, stake, region, area, or general Church teaching and development. As members participate in councils, they learn about larger organizational issues. They see leadership in action, learning how to plan, analyze problems, make decisions, and coordinate across sub unit boundaries. Participation in councils helps prepare members for future leadership responsibilities.” Priesthood Councils, in Encyclopedia of Mormonism, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 1:141–42.
Where were you when John F. Kennedy was assassinated? Where were you on September 11, 2001? These were unforgettable, defining moments in many of our lives, so significant that we even mark time by them: “Pre-911 America,” “post-911 world,” and even “911 generation.” President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “Often we mark the span of our lives by events that leave imprints on our minds and hearts. There are many such events in my life, one of which happened in 1989 when I heard a timeless sermon by President Ezra Taft Benson, ‘Beware of Pride.’”

Because eighty-five-year-old President Benson was in poor health, the talk was read in general conference by President Gordon B. Hinckley, his first counselor (but President Benson attended the session). Although the talk included themes and referred to topics he had previously addressed, the aptness and intensity of this sermon broke new ground.

In subsequent years President Benson’s words have been quoted often at both general and local levels. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin referred to the talk in his conference address in October of 2004, and Elder Marlin K. Jensen mentioned it when he spoke in general conference in April of 2001. In
addition, President Benson’s words have surfaced in Latter-day Saint lesson manuals and Brigham Young University devotionals, as well as in many sacrament meeting talks given by leaders and members throughout the world. In 1993 this talk became a central focus for two videos in the seminary Book of Mormon series, viewed by hundreds of thousands of youth.

As the prophet for the Church, President Benson was sharing a message that was inspired by the Lord. He wrote, “This message has been weighing heavily on my soul for some time. I know the Lord wants this message delivered now.” This article will examine President Benson’s general preparation for this message, then focus on four particular themes he studied in developing the address.

Preparation for This Landmark Address

Typical of his approach to all his gospel responsibilities, President Benson carefully prepared himself for the inspiration he would need to deliver this message on pride. He studied topics extensively, inviting members of his family to join with him.

Habits of study

Throughout his life Ezra Taft Benson had applied to his own ministry the Lord’s instruction to Oliver Cowdery: “But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:7–8). In her 1987 biography of President Benson, Sheri Dew described the prophet as a twenty-one-year-old missionary: “Ezra studied voraciously, usually in preparation for speaking assignments. His range of topics was as diverse as it was demanding. . . . He faithfully recorded his ‘Index to Antidotes [Anecdotes] Happenings,’ a compilation of stories, quotations, and object lessons pertinent to gospel topics.”

Resources provided by the Benson family

We learned more about these habits of study and preparation when members of President Benson’s family shared with us boxes of materials containing his eighty-four-year-old “Index to Antidotes Happenings”—a large box of files containing scriptures, quotations, prior speeches, drafts of speeches shared with family members, and, yes, a few happenings that he collected as he prepared himself to teach the subject of pride. Obviously he had applied his mind to a variety of materials.

As members of President Benson’s family were studying and reflecting on the topic with him, some of their scripture compilations are included in the folders we received. The box contains a folder with scriptures and aspect ideas from his oldest son, Reed, and several folders with scriptures and suggestions from other members of Reed’s family. Another folder contains what are apparently copies of earlier drafts with highlighting and notes. Two are marked with Reed Benson’s name, and another is marked as an “original copy sent to Mark” (President Benson’s other son). Family members were willing to share these resources but modestly asked that specific details about their personal experiences not be described.

Content of folders

The materials furnished by the Benson family included eight folders filled with materials on pride—carefully grouped, categorized, and labeled. Marking and brief handwritten annotations show President Benson’s consideration and study. Table 1 represents the materials by number and type. President Benson’s labels and some of his themes are given to simplify examination of an extensive variety of sources.

Table 1: President Benson’s Folders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Number and type</th>
<th>Labels and themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional scriptures</td>
<td>3 additional file folders</td>
<td>“Pride Standard Works” (Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants), “Pride Miscellaneous” (similar list adding Old and New Testaments), “Index Scriptures of Pride” (index to triple combination with headings and scriptures related to pride underlined in red)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of resources

As table 1 indicates, over 900 scriptures were included on President Benson’s various lists (some with multiple occurrences), and 107 of them were actually used in the talk. President Benson was concise, efficient, and purposeful in the ways he used scriptures. The following are ways in which President Benson used the scriptures in his pride sermon:

- **Direct quotations.** President Benson placed strong, relevant direct quotations—those from primary witnesses and high authorities—to give particular emphasis to important points.
- **Allusions.** Occasionally President Benson made a casual reference to a person, place, incident, or phrase that would immediately provide a mental picture, feeling, or other association.
- **References.** President Benson provided parenthetical references to additional scriptures that he did not quote or allude to, strengthening and giving additional credence to other scriptures or to points and admonitions not being presented as scriptural but having doctrinal bases in the scriptures.

Although the scriptures were obviously the basis of President Benson’s thinking and expression, the prophet used a wide range of sources for additional perspectives and ideas. As shown in table 1, quotations and photocopied pages were included in three of his folders: “Pride Miscellaneous” (6 pieces), “Humility” (8 pieces), and “Pride” (1 piece). These items show that President Benson read widely from materials not produced by the Church, truly seeking wisdom out of all of the best books. As he sought for and made connections between doctrine and practice, the prophet selected literature portraying active faith, which extended his thoughts on the nature of pride and humility.

One of President Benson’s folders contained several pages copied from a dictionary with words relevant to pride, including *enmity, heart, humility, competition, meekness, rival,* and *pride*—all marked along with their definitions. Many of these words were used in “Beware of Pride,” but President Benson offered a specific definition for only one: *enmity,* a major theme in his address.

Church history sources were included in President Benson’s folder labeled “Pride Miscellaneous.” We found seven pages of typed references to forty-five incidents involving pride. Two instances were detailed in typescript: the apostasies of Thomas B. Marsh and Simonds Ryder. Neither Marsh nor Ryder was discussed in “Beware of Pride,” although Marsh was included in a group of proud apostates in an earlier manuscript.

As indicated in table 1, a folder labeled “Pride—General Authorities” contained almost 250 pages of typed excerpts from works of early and
then-current General Authorities of the LDS Church. Those quoted most often in this collection were Neal A. Maxwell (152), Bruce R. McConkie (86), Dallin H. Oaks (83), Spencer W. Kimball (77), and David O. McKay (45). Hugh Nibley’s name was also written on the tab of the folder—he was the only writer represented who was not a General Authority, and 50 quotations from his collected works were included. Although none of these authorities were directly quoted in “Beware of Pride,” President Benson had underlined many excerpts for closer attention, indicating particular emphasis for some of them. In examining the underlining and other symbols and brief notes he added, we found a rich source of thinking and influence in these quotations.

In a folder he designated as “Pride—President Benson,” the prophet included two earlier addresses and an unpublished typescript in which he had previously explored scriptures and ideas related to pride. “To the Humble Followers of Christ,” delivered April 4, 1969, was an address warning humble Saints about some forms of worldliness that threatened them, rather than commenting specifically on humility or pride. This talk would have been a form of preparation for “Beware of Pride” in the sense that the dangers represented in the talk showed aspects of a pride-filled society, although President Benson did not state this explicitly.

“Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson’s first general conference address as President of the Church, was delivered in April 1986. The prophet later commented in a note (found in one of the files) to his son Reed, “I spoke on the need of cleansing the inner vessel by conquering pride. I said at that time that the sin of pride deserved more consideration.” He mentioned the address “Beware of Pride” as being further consideration and described additional work he had planned on the topic, which he did not live long enough to complete. The last two columns of the published version of “Cleansing the Inner Vessel” foreshadowed very specifically many points continued in “Beware of Pride.” These will be discussed further in the treatment of themes.

An apparently unpublished typescript labeled “Humility,” found in the same folder, included many ideas and scriptures developed in both of the pride talks, ideas which will also be treated with the themes. In a folder labeled “Pride—Benson Conference Addresses,” we found a draft of a talk that was intended for the priesthood session of general conference the evening after “Beware of Pride” was given. Although the talk was not delivered because of President Benson’s health, we include it in this article because themes that resurfaced provide further evidence of the strength of the prophet’s convictions in those areas.

We cannot know the nature and form of the inspiration and guidance President Benson received as he applied his mind to the topic of pride. However, reviewing these materials has enabled a rare glimpse into the scriptures and other resources that influenced his teachings, the themes of his study and reflection, and his personal study methods and procedures. It has allowed us to better appreciate all that contributed to this classic sermon.

Since the speech is well known and has been included in the priesthood and Relief Society study manual for 2015, we will examine major themes in the talk in relation to the preparatory study materials that may have influenced President Benson’s thinking and the way his materials seem to have come together. We discuss materials found on the following themes: (a) the nature of pride as enmity, (b) types of pride, (c) consequences of pride, and (d) “the antidote to pride.”

**Nature of Pride as Enmity**

Many of the materials President Benson read and underscored as he prepared for “Beware of Pride” associated pride with enmity. He quoted a small fragment of the dictionary definition of *enmity* that he had marked in the copied dictionary pages: “hatred toward, hostility to, or a state of opposition.” The dictionary definition also included “ill will,” “state of being an enemy,” and “the opposite of friendship.” But President Benson focused only on one aspect of the definition. He added to it this powerful statement: “It is the power by which Satan wishes to reign over us.” He had underlined in a copy of a section of *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis the statement “pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.” President Benson went beyond C. S. Lewis’s definition to identify enmity as “the central feature of pride.” Popular concepts of pride include “self-centeredness, conceit, boastfulness, arrogance, or haughtiness,” but “the heart, or core” of pride is enmity.

**Enmity against God**

Quoting Philippians 2:21 and citing Alma 38:12 and 3 Nephi 12:30, President Benson warned, “We pit our will against God’s.” He used a memorable reversal (which he began working with in “Cleansing the Inner Vessel”): “In the spirit of ‘my will and not thine be done.’” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel”
President Benson had reinforced this statement with “Christ removed self as the force in His perfect life.” However, he did not repeat this extension in “Beware of Pride.”

Looking at his preparatory folders, we found that many of the things President Benson was reading agreed with this position concerning pride as enmity (though not necessarily using the word). Passages he had marked by Neal A. Maxwell were forceful, referring to pride as “the antithesis of submission to God’s will” and stating that “submission to God . . . requires us to strip ourselves of our pride in order to be obedient to Him.” An underscored passage in *Mere Christianity* further intensified the concept, referring to pride as “the complete anti-God state of mind.”

In designating pride as “anti-God,” Lewis asserted, “Pride leads to every other vice.” Other clippings in the Benson files included the same concept. In the “Pride Miscellaneous” file, a scrap of paper furnished a quotation by John Ruskin: “I have been more and more convinced the more I think of it that in general pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes.” President Benson included this quotation both in his humility typescript and in “Beware of Pride.” He underscored a quotation by Neal A. Maxwell from the “Pride—General Authorities” file: “Just as meekness is in all our virtues, so pride is in all our sins.” He drew a box around his underlining of the Maxwell quotation, reiterating that “pride . . . is surely present in all our sins.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

President Benson used scriptures 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27 with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”

In “Beware of Pride” President Benson declared, along with the scriptural references mentioned above, “In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, ‘a son of the morning.’” Later in the sermon he returned to and expanded this point, lacing it with referenced scriptures: “Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See *Moses* 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Nephi 24:12–15 and D&C 76:25–27) with this line of thinking, and he seems to have considered LDS implications using comments by Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to “the adversary with his immense ego and selfish pride” and asserted that “Lucifer deeply desired to be ‘worshipped’ in ‘act one’ of our premortal life, as well as later.” In “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” President Benson seems to have brought these ideas together in the statement “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.”
In the priesthood address he prepared, President Benson gave clear priority to the competitive nature of pride, stating that when we understand this dimension, "we are on the path to overcoming it." In "Beware of Pride," he included a quotation from Mere Christianity: "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. . . . It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest." President Benson built on this concept: "The proud depend upon the world to tell them whether they have value or not. Their self-esteem is determined by where they are judged to be on the ladders of worldly success. They feel worthwhile as individuals if the numbers beneath them in achievement, talent, beauty, or intellect are large enough. Pride is ugly. It says, ‘If you succeed, I am a failure.’" Obviously this had been a matter of deep concern to President Benson: he had in his folders 31 scriptures which he labeled "Fear of Men's Judgments" (7 of which were included in "Beware of Pride").

Another aspect of pride as competition that was of particular concern to President Benson was what he referred to as "From the Bottom Looking Up." He had collected 34 scriptural references on this, though he cited only four in "Beware of Pride." He stated this position in a single paragraph:

Pride is a sin that can readily be seen in others but is rarely admitted in ourselves. Most of us consider pride to be a sin of those on the top, such as the rich and the learned, looking down at the rest of us. (See 2 Nephi 9:4-2.) There is, however, a far more common ailment among us—and that is pride from the bottom looking up. It is manifest in so many ways, such as faultfinding, gossiping, backbiting, murmuring, living beyond our means, envying, coveting, withholding gratitude and praise that might lift another, and being unforgiving and jealous.

Apparently, President Benson needed no authorities or publications beyond 34 scriptures to verify his thinking on that point. We need only to remember that he—as the hardworking son of struggling farmers, an underfunded graduate student, a young man representing and serving farming communities during war and peace, a man who served within war-ravaged countries no one else was able to enter following World War II, and a US presidential cabinet member required to live a government representative's lifestyle—had observed human beings in varied situations. As he visited worldwide, he went into the fields to talk with and work beside the farmers. He had personally seen the bottom and the top—and his warning extended to both.

With pride, competition easily merges into contention. President Benson collected 24 scriptures on this subtopic (although he only used 2 in "Beware of Pride"). In "Cleansing the Inner Vessel," he asserted that "pride is manifest in the spirit of contention." In "Beware of Pride," he expanded to make practical applications to the lives of his listeners, which seemed to be a tendency in his thinking and expression. He told his audience, "Contention ranges from a hostile spoken word to worldwide conflicts." He then became more specific: "Arguments, fights, unrighteous dominion, generation gaps, divorces, spouse abuse, riots, and disturbances all fall into this category of pride." A quotation he had marked by Dallin H. Oaks expressed the point with a cause and a summary: "Pride does not look up to God and care about what is right. It looks sideways to man and argues who is right."

In his talk for the priesthood session, President Benson made a frightening statement: "A proud person hates the fact that someone is above him. It lowers his position. Most often he feels that he has to disobey, to prove that he is just as valuable as someone else."

Tragedy of the Nephites: enmity toward God and toward man

One of the most vivid illustrations of the tragedies of enmity is the chronology and destruction of the Nephite nation, which extends throughout most of the Book of Mormon. In both "Cleansing the Inner Vessel" and "Beware of Pride," President Benson quoted Mormon's summation: "Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction" (Moroni 8:27). He also quoted D&C 38:39: "Beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old." The materials in his files reflected strong criticism of Nephite pride. James E. Talmage, Bruce R. McConkie, Spencer W. Kimball, and Hugh W. Nibley were among those whose comments were marked by President Benson to consider with the role of pride in the fall of this civilization.

Nibley gave examples of pride and punishment in several Book of Mormon time periods and contexts, concluding, "The Book of Mormon labors [the issue of pride] for our special benefit." He referred to pride as "the Nephite disease" and warned that "we have it." Again carrying frequently made points to more specific levels, President Benson mentioned a particular "fruit of the sin of pride . . . [which] has been and will yet be the cause of the fall of many nations"—secret combinations "built up to get power, gain, and glory of the world." He referenced a group of scriptures (Helaman 7:5; Ether 8:9, 16, 22–23; Moses 5:31) to give his audience additional information and examples.
Types of Pride

President Benson referred to pride as “a damning sin”; in his files he used this label for a list of 35 scriptures. In the priesthood address he prepared, he mentioned some ways that pride blocks our progression: “Pride is devastating to the spirit of the heart harboring it. It is also devastating to our peace of mind, peaceful neighborhoods, and peaceful communities and countries.” In his photocopies of materials from *Mere Christianity*, the prophet had underscored a metaphor that agreed with his thinking: “For pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love or contentment or even common sense.” Under the label “So You May Count the Cost/Consequences of Pride,” President Benson included 65 scriptures as relevant. Manifestations of pride are, of course, as varied as the individuals who practice them.

Individuals have grouped and classified the types of pride differently (e.g., Oaks, Benson). In a devotional address at Brigham Young University, President Benson expressed this position: “The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich. The learned may feel the prophet is only inspired when he agrees with them; otherwise the prophet is just giving his opinion—speaking as a man. The rich may feel they have no need to take counsel of a lowly prophet.” Five years later, in “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” he applied this to the scriptures, referring to “the two groups in the Book of Mormon that seemed to have the greatest difficulty with pride” not as the Nephites and Zoramites, but as the “learned and the rich.”

In “Beware of Pride,” the prophet carried this into causality: “Pride fades our feelings of sonship to God and brotherhood to man. It separates and divides us by ‘ranks,’ according to our ‘riches’ and our ‘chances for learning.’” His use of quotation marks around *ranks, riches, and chances for learning* seems to indicate that he was saying “so called”; he did not put the same meaning or value on these terms as proud individuals might. Since these categories were also discussed in many of the quotations President Benson marked for further attention and were well developed in “Beware of Pride,” it seems useful to consider these two categories in discussing the Benson materials.

Pride in learning and position

President Benson was concerned about the pride of those who are “learned”; in “Beware of Pride” he told how the proud “[pit] their intellects, opinions, works, wealth, and talents, or any worldly measuring device against others”—including only one item that is not linked to education. In examining the source materials lent to us, we found that this point was stimulated, enhanced, or reinforced at different phases of President Benson’s thinking by authorities whose ideas he had marked in his quotation folder. Dallin H. Oaks chastised those who were proud of their “differences in knowledge, prominence or position.” Hugh Nibley disparaged the classes that developed among many people’s favorite pride model, the Nephites, during one of their proudest periods: “Careerism became the order of the day in a business-society of ‘many merchants . . . and also many lawyers, and many officers’” (3 Nephi 6:11). The ranks and resulting inequities troubled Nibley. Neal A. Maxwell gave this pride of education or position a scriptural application: “Those who fear losing face cannot have His image in their countenances.”

President Benson emphasized spiritual aspects of pride in learning. In his typescript on humility he praised the humble as being teachable. In this same document he took the point further: “The so-called ‘learned’ may say that they’ll follow the prophets when they feel that the prophets know as much on the subject as they do.” He seems to have responded to Elder Maxwell’s metaphor with a simile of his own: “We know that if we are educated without spiritual principle we may simply become like clever devils. And if our learning leads us to rebellion, a stiff neck, a proud look and resistance to the counsel of the Lord, then we will lose the prize.”

Pride in wealth

Pride in wealth and its trappings, a major theme in “Beware of Pride,” was a major theme in President Benson’s collection of writings from Church leaders. For example, Harold B. Lee counseled, “The prophets have issued a clear signal of warning to those who are lifted up in the pride of their hearts because of their ease and their exceeding great prosperity.” President Benson’s support of this point (whether he wrote it before or after reading it) can be seen in scriptural examples: he joined Church leaders McConkie, Maxwell, and others in choosing Sodom as a classic example.

In the quotations President Benson had marked, Hugh Nibley had been particularly outspoken about pride in riches. In quoting Alma’s description of the characteristics of the proud Nephite society, he remarked, “Along with this, of course, everyone dresses in the height of fashion, the main point being always that the proper clothes are expensive—the expression ‘costly apparel’ occurs fourteen times in the Book of Mormon.” Dr. Nibley created the term
Samuel’s law, alluding to the warnings of Samuel the Lamanite: “When ‘the Economy’ becomes the main and engrossing concern of a society . . . the economy will self-destruct” (which, of course, the Nephite economy did, and by Nibley’s implication ours might). Nibley concluded, “Note well the sequence of folly: first we are well pleased with ourselves because of our wealth, then comes the game of status and prestige, leading to competitive maneuvers, hatred, and dirty tricks, and finally the ultimate solution. Where wealth guarantees respectability, principles melt away as the criminal element rises to the top.” Many passages by Dallin H. Oaks commenting similarly on pride of riches in this period of Nephite history were also marked by President Benson.

Thus pride in education, position, and riches were heartily condemned in the scriptures and quotations marked for special attention by President Benson. He found abundant precedent and support for the positions to which he gave striking applications and explanations in “Beware of Pride.” His statements were bold, but he had plenty of gospel support behind them. Similarly, he spoke boldly of principles he had studied carefully as he discussed consequences of these forms of pride.

Consequences of Pride

In the talk he prepared for the priesthood brethren, President Benson referred to pride as a “degenerative disease of the spirit” that brings us “spiritually decaying temptations.” To solidify the relationship of pride to destruction, he made scriptural allusions that would bring images, incidents, and emotions to his listeners, mentioning the Pharisees who orchestrated the Crucifixion of Christ (see John 11:53), Saul (see 1 Samuel 18:6–8), Herod (see Matthew 14:9), and King Noah (see Mosiah 17:11–12). The proud became part of a scriptural hall of shame. President Benson found references to a variety of dangers and consequences within the scriptures and other sources he consulted.

Exposure to worldly temptations

Throughout his 1969 talk “To the Humble Followers of Christ,” Elder Benson mentioned a series of worldly temptations to which those who are not humble followers are subject: they live in disharmony with the Church and its members and publish their criticisms of the Church; they are deceived by “precepts of men, desiring to bring worldliness into the Gospel”; and they are distracted and deceived by “subversion of the educational system” and by “demoralizing” forms of art, literature, music, and drama. As President Benson collected information on the subject of pride that would eventually have some potential impact on his addresses, he found much support for this area of thinking. He listed 15 scriptures under the heading “Pride Makes Righteous Living Very Difficult” and 47 under what he considered the related topic of “Self-Will.” Quotations underlined from Neal A. Maxwell included resulting behavior: “Those who are puffed up need constantly to be reinflated, hence the tendency of some to ‘play to the galleries.’” President Benson’s close friend and colleague Spencer W. Kimball considered behavior as well, suggesting that the proud have a tendency to become defensive and rationalize their failures. Perhaps the ideas generated by “play to the galleries” and the defensiveness-rationalization pairing impacted President Benson’s statement that “the world shouts louder than the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. The reasoning of men overrides the revelations of God, and the proud let go of the iron rod”—their lifeline to spiritual growth.

Loss of the Spirit

In 1964 Elder Benson had written in Title of Liberty, “Too many of us have been so drunk with self-sufficiency as no longer to feel the need of prayer.” Over the years many General Authorities expressed similar sentiments, which President Benson underlined in his collection of quotations. Bruce R. McConkie expressed bluntly, “When a man engages in self-exaltation because of his riches, his political power, his worldly learning . . . or even his works of righteousness, he is not in tune with the Spirit of the Lord.” Harold B. Lee was saddened that an individual’s wealth or worldly success would cause one to “think himself independent of his spiritual need.” Spencer W. Kimball explained a result of this loss: “Wealth and pride, wit and physical charm, popularity and flattery are the shadows of the nothingness that can bring us only disappointment and frustration.” In “Beware of Pride,” President Benson encompassed and extended such points: “The proud wish God would agree with them. They aren’t interested in changing their opinions to agree with God’s.” In the address he planned for the priesthood session that evening, he expressed the final penalty: “The scriptures testify that the proud are cut off from the presence of God and that Satan has power over them, and that the Spirit of the Lord will cease striving with them. The proud suffer a spiritual death, they die pertaining unto righteousness.”
Damage to relationships

President Benson was particularly concerned over the effects of pride on relationships. In “Beware of Pride” he warned, “Pride adversely affects all our relationships—our relationship with God and His servants, between husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, teacher and student and all mankind.” Some antecedent or confirming statements can be found in quotations he marked from other General Authorities. Neal A. Maxwell had written that “our pride and insensitivity inevitably have an adverse impact on others.” Elder Oaks specified “a withdrawal from concern for others,” which may lead to persecution and other forms of oppression.

President Benson showed particular concern for effects of pride on the family. He exclaimed, “Think of the repentance that could take place with lives changed, marriages preserved, and homes strengthened, if pride did not keep us from confessing our sins and forsaking them.” Perhaps he thought of Spencer W. Kimball’s comment, which he had marked in his notes, “When problems affect a couple the easy thing is to stand on one’s pride and quarrel . . . and to permit those differences to continue to get bigger. . . . Finally [there is] a dissolution of the marriage.” In both his priesthood address and “Beware of Pride,” he stressed pride problems that occur largely in families: “arguments, fights, unrighteous dominion, generation gaps, divorces, [and] spouse abuse.” He also specified, “Contention in our families drives the Spirit of the Lord away. It also drives many of our family members away.”

President Benson went into some depth as he studied relationship problems rooted in pride. He was particularly concerned with the pandemic practice of taking offense. He marked passages taken from three different books by Neal A. Maxwell. In We Talk of Christ, Maxwell had written, “Another dimension of pride—which can compound the cares of the world—is to be found in the way in which trivial matters are allowed to escalate far out of proportion to their importance.” President Benson also marked Elder Maxwell’s elaboration in Meek and Lowly (“There are many persons just waiting to be offended: certain they will not be treated fairly, they almost invite the verification of their expectation”) and conclusion expressed in Men and Women of Christ (“For pride, nothing is too petty to be seized upon”).

President Benson also marked a statement by Phillips Brooks, quoted in a talk by Spencer W. Kimball: “You who are keeping wretched quarrels alive because you cannot quite make up your mind . . . now is the day to sacrifice your pride and kill them.” However, a passage from the positive view in Faith Precedes the Miracle was also marked: “It is gratifying to find numbers of good people who, in their bigness of soul, have straightened out their thinking, swallowed their pride, forgiven what they felt were personal slights and who have returned to good feeling for the sakes of themselves and their posterity.”

Those who easily take offense are particularly resistant to attempts made by others to teach or counsel them. Statements marked from Maxwell again hit hard: Although love may guide the counsel, one who is “chained by pride” responds by criticizing the counselor. Elder Maxwell bluntly asserted, “A mind hardened in pride is impervious to counsel. . . . [It stands] resolutely and stupidly at its post.” Elder Oaks used the phrase “too wise to be taught” to describe this mindset. In “Beware of Pride,” President Benson seems to have applied these concepts (earlier or later) in two ways. His reference to “many who are less active members of the Church because they were offended and their pride will not allow them to forgive or fully sup at the Lord’s table” was later rephrased in positive terms: “We can choose to humble ourselves by forgiving those who have offended us. (See 3 Nephi 13:11; D&C 64:10.)” Both scripture references included here are from the list President Benson titled “Cures for Pride.” He followed this by saying, “We can choose to humble ourselves by receiving counsel and chastisement.” This statement was followed by references to eight scriptures from his “Humility” list.

Risk of apostasy

An additional risk President Benson considered in his notes and marked passages and ultimately treated in “Beware of Pride” was a frequent outcome of taking offense: apostasy. In his folder labeled “Pride Miscellaneous” he included seven typed pages of references to forty-five examples of apostasy from Church history. Two of these, the apostasies of Thomas B. Marsh and Simonds Ryder, were typed as stories—both of which illustrated the “nothing is too petty” statement of Elder Maxwell quoted earlier. President Benson did not use Ryder in his talks or typescripts, but he included Marsh along with Emma Smith and Oliver Cowdery in his typescript on humility, with quotations from the Doctrine and Covenants rebuking each of them. Emma Smith and Oliver Cowdery were also mentioned in “Cleansing The Inner Vessel.” President Benson did seem to allude in “Beware of Pride” to an example from Zion’s Camp that was on the list of forty-five incidents. A plague of illness had come upon the camp due to indulgence in pride. When the men humbled
themselves, the plague abated, and their obedience was affirmed. Although President Benson did not give specific details from the incident, the impact of the happening was clear: “My dear brethren and sisters, we must prepare to redeem Zion. It was essentially the sin of pride that kept us from establishing Zion in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith. . . . Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion.”90

In a devotional address at Brigham Young University in 1971, President Benson had warned, “Sometimes in our attempts to mimic the world and contrary to the prophet’s counsel, we run after the world’s false educational, political, musical, and dress ideas. New worldly standards take over, a gradual breakdown occurs, and finally, after much suffering, a humble people are ready to be taught once again a higher law.”91 The prophet was anxious to provide an antidote to pride’s serious conditions.

Antidote to Pride

President Benson stated specifically that “the antidote for pride is humility . . . the broken heart and contrite spirit,” suggesting that hearers or readers of his address would benefit from eight scriptures: Alma 7:23; 3 Nephi 9:20; 3 Nephi 12:19; D&C 20:37; D&C 59:8; Psalm 34:18; Isaiah 57:15; and Isaiah 66:2.92 In the lists in his folders he had included 59 scriptures under the title “Humility,” 69 under “Consequence of Humility,” 42 under “What Is Humility,” and 34 under “Humility Is.” In addition, he had included 133 under “Cures for Pride.” His teachings on humility were obviously based on extensive scriptural support.

Humility in greatness

Perhaps impacting and definitely supporting his statements on the importance of this antidote, President Benson consulted articles from non-LDS sources, which he included with LDS sources in a file labeled “Humility.” Marked passages in the article “The Best Advice I Ever Had” by Carlos P. Romulo, chair of the Philippine Delegation to the United Nations, read, “In my contacts with men of all walks of life I observed that it is always the small man, the mediocre, who is arrogant and conceited, who does not know how to bend. The truly great man is tolerant, humble and modest.” He concluded that “only where there is humility can there be peace.”93 President Benson included in his research another non-LDS author who praised the importance of humility to greatness: Rudyard Kipling, who wrote the poem “Recessional” to remind his countrymen of the need for humility during their times of excessive national pride. The poem became the text for a hymn included in the LDS hymnbook under the title “God of Our Fathers Known of Old.” In “Beware of Pride,” President Benson included the second stanza of the poem in its entirety:

“The Tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the kings depart.
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget.”94

Nature of humility

In his typescript labeled “Humility,” President Benson referred to humility as the “mother of all virtues.” He had marked on his list of quotations a statement by Bruce R McConkie giving it similar reverence as “an attribute of godliness possessed by true saints lead[ing] to salvation.”95 His thinking was also similar to a quotation he had marked by Spencer W. Kimball: “You must begin as a little child, clean, teachable.”96 President Benson began his typescript on humility emphasizing humble persons as “teachable,” and in “Beware of Pride” he stated that one must be “as a child, submissive, meek, and humble.”97 As he thought through characteristics of humility while writing his typescript on
the topic, he put meekness and submissiveness in perspective: “The Lord has said that no one can assist with this work who is not humble and full of love. But humility does not mean weakness. It does not mean timidity; it does not mean fear. A man can be humble and fearless. A man can be humble and courageous. Humility is the recognition of our dependence upon a higher power, a constant need for the Lord's support in His work.” Similarly, in “Cleansing the Inner Vessel” he asserted that while pride responds to self-will, “humility responds to God’s will—to the fear of His judgments and the needs of those around us.”98 But humility of this caliber does not always evolve naturally for the “natural man.”

Humility as choice

In “Beware of Pride,” President Benson urged, “Let us choose to be humble.” He followed this by saying, “Let us choose to be humble” eight times, each time indicating a specific desired change.99 Examining his earlier writings and his files of notes, we found that the focus on humility as deliberate change had long been an aspect of his thinking. In his study materials President Benson had marked a statement from Spencer W. Kimball: “To gain eternal life there must be a rebirth, a transformation, and an unburdening self of pride, weaknesses, and prejudice.”100 Another author he had marked extensively, Hugh Nibley, had explained a process that often occurs and the ultimate effect of this transformation: “As soon as [an individual] grasps the seriousness of his situation in one clear-sighted instant and repents of his rashness and folly, then he is ready to receive the proferred hand—his pride gives way to humility, and he joyfully accepts salvation. . . . God does not play cat and mouse with us.”101 Neal A. Maxwell summed the process up with a scriptural phrase, also marked by President Benson: “The best way to swallow our pride is to be ‘swallowed up’ in the Father’s will, as was Jesus.”102

Along with such concepts, President Benson brought in extensive scriptural references with his ability to find practical applications for gospel principles and teachings. In “Beware of Pride,” he quoted Alma’s words to the Zoramites, “Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble” (Alma 32:16). All but one item on his “let us choose to be humble” list were supported with referenced scriptures selected from his well-stocked files: “conquering enmity toward our brothers and sisters” (3 scriptures), “receiving counsel and chastisement” (9 scriptures), “forgiving those who have offended us” (4), “rendering selfless service” (1), “going on missions” (3), “going to the temple more frequently,” “confessing and forsaking our sins and being born of God” (3), and “loving God, submitting our will to His, and putting Him first in our lives” (3).103 Thus the humility advocated by President Benson takes volition and effort; but its blessings are many and precious.

Blessings of humility

President Benson underscored on his quotation list a statement by Bruce R. McConkie referring to the “blessed virtue of humility.”104 The prophet included in his works a variety of blessings that come from humility.

President Benson’s focus on blessings is based on and reinforced by scriptures. Near the end of “Cleansing the Inner Vessel” he made the same statement: “With pride, there are many curses. With humility, there come many blessings. For example, ‘Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers.’ (D&C 112:10.) The humble will ‘be made strong and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge.’ (D&C 1:28.) The Lord is ‘merciful unto those who confess their sins with humble hearts. (D&C 61:2.) Humility can turn away God’s anger. (See Hel. 1:11.)”105

President Benson agreed with these words of Spencer W. Kimball on the relationship of learning to humility: “God will make [the truth] known to you once you have capitulated and become humble and receptive. Having dropped all pride of your mental stature . . . and having surrendered yourself to the teachings of the Holy Spirit, you are ready to begin to learn.”106 A marked comment by Neal A. Maxwell suggested why this might be true: “The humble individual can see and feel things and can admit things . . . in ways that the proud person cannot do.”107 In his typescript “Humility,” President Benson gave particular meaning to such ideas on humility and learning: “If our learning leads us to greater humility, then we are on the road to exaltation.” Another underscored comment of Elder McConkie, “All progress in spiritual things is conditioned upon the prior attainment of humility,”108 may have impacted a statement in the typescript: President Benson affirmed that certain blessings for the humble—enlightenment, mercy, strength, and joy—come in addition to “direction and answered prayers,” “a great endowment and blessing,” and the “opportunity to see God.”
Conclusion

Extensive use of scriptures, inclusion of varied perspectives, and inspired applications and insights brought a lasting impact to “Beware of Pride” unusual even for a general conference address. Church members worldwide have thought more urgently about pride, perceived it differently in their own lives, and made changes in their behavior. As he realized the intensive impact of the address and the extensive need for more instruction on the topic, President Benson felt that he needed to do more. In a file of materials collected by his son Reed, we found a handwritten draft of a letter addressed to “My beloved brothers and sisters and friends.”

Recently at the opening session of General Conference my address was completely devoted to pride. It was captioned “Beware of Pride,” a phrase the Lord uses three times in the Doctrine and Covenants.

The response to that message has lifted my heart. It was a response by the saints from those eager to put their life in order [by] overcoming a sin they rarely considered and hardly understood. To the end of trying to further help them on this most vital matter, I considered giving a series of talks in General Conference along with First Presidency Messages in the Ensign. . . . I do not know that I will live long enough for that to happen.

President Benson mentioned that due to this concern he was also thinking of writing a book so that the further instruction he planned on pride would be available. He shared with Reed a list of possible chapters he had in mind:

1. The friendship of the world is enmity to God
2. From the top looking down
3. Pride from the bottom looking up
4. Fear of men’s judgments
5. Pride makes living gospel principles difficult
6. Unrighteous judgments—expressions of pride
7. Pride—the source of the world’s unhappiness
8. Pride, a damning sin
9. Cure for pride

All of these areas were included in “Beware of Pride,” though perhaps worded differently. As is evident in the indications of folder content and the ways in which President Benson selected and appears to have worked with various materials, he had a good start on those chapters. Unfortunately, his health difficulties did not allow him to carry out these plans. However, knowing what those plans were like enables us to further understand the areas and perspectives he stressed in his thinking and research.

Examining this prophet’s preparatory materials and apparent thought process and, as a result, thinking intently about his treatment of the critical subject of pride have provided a deeply moving and inspirational experience for us. We are grateful for this unique opportunity and for the enduring impact of President Benson’s teachings.

Notes

4. See Church Educational System, Eternal Marriage Student Manual (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 169–73; Book of Mormon Student Manual (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 165.
6. Videos connected to Jacob 2 and Helaman 7–10.
9. See D&C 88:118.
12. These intentions will be further described at the end of this article.
21. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 122.
22. John Ruskin, Selections from the Writings of John Ruskin (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1871), 148. (Benson did not give the reference he used for the quotation.)
23. Neal A. Maxwell, Meek and Lowly (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 50.
24. Neal A. Maxwell, We Talk of Christ, We Rejoice in Christ (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 47.
27. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 122.
29. Maxwell, We Talk of Christ, 83.
30. Maxwell, Meek and Lowly, 19.
Beware of Pride: Prophetic Preparation for a Classic Address

13. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 124.
14. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 122.
22. Maxwell, Meek and Lowly, 85.
23. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 122.
33. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 125.
38. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 124.
40. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 123.
42. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 125.
47. Benson, ”Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” 1982
50. Benson, Cleansing the Inner Vessel, 7.
Considering that the discipline of human anatomy was quite rudimentary when the scriptures were written and compiled, it is surprising that there are 9,123 references to the subject in the LDS standard works, which results statistically in a reference every 4.6 verses. In comparison, the King James Version of the Bible alone contains 6,525 references, yielding a reference every 4.7 verses. In the standard works, the top five anatomical parts mentioned are the hand, heart, eyes, mouth, and flesh; in the King James Version they are hand, heart, eyes, mouth, and feet.

Why are there so many references to human anatomy in holy writ? What does this number of references say about the human body? And what can we learn from these references? Here are eight reasons for the frequent anatomy references:

1. Everyone has a body, so it is an effective teaching tool to reference. Our physical bodies are ideal teaching tools; our possession of a body remains constant, whereas language, culture, and the environment all change over time.
2. One of the primary purposes of mortality is to gain a body.

Joseph Smith revealed that God has a body of flesh and bones (see Joseph Smith—History 1:30–31) and that we are created in his image (see Moses 2:27; 6:8–9), so it is no surprise that gaining a mortal body is a necessity for exaltation (see Doctrine and Covenants 93:33–34).

In the King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith taught, “God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself.” Gaining a body ultimately leads to spiritual progression, and learning about the symbolism of our bodies through the scriptures seems to be a nice pairing spiritually speaking.

3. The physical body is the temple of our spirits.

Our physical bodies are a great gift in mortality, and they are the constant companions of our spirits. As Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote, “Through the body the spirit speaks, and through the body the experiences of earth are made the possession of the spirit. It is well that we give due care and consideration to the welfare of the body, which is the one great characteristic of this epoch in our eternal journey.”

Wishing we were taller, fifteen pounds lighter, or had more defined muscles is surely a distortion of the body’s significance, encouraged by one who does not possess a miraculous physical body. A group of senior citizens who toured the Bodies Filled with Light exhibition commented that they were grateful for their bodies, even though all were suffering physical ailments due to old age and entropy. Their bodies had allowed them to have a wide variety of life experiences and had enabled them to learn many lessons over the years.

4. Heavenly Father invested a lot of time and effort in creating our bodies.

Through modern revelation we learn that to some extent Heavenly Father delegated the creation of the earth, but there seems to be no mention of his delegating the creation of our bodies (see Moses 2:27). Perhaps that was because he was the only one who actually possessed a physical body at the time and so he was teaching his children about bodies as they were created.

Still, why would so much time and energy need to be invested in our bodies? One of my students answers this question by discussing the physical senses. He believes our five senses are meant to enhance our overall joy in
mortality. Heavenly Father made something as delicate and intricate as our eyes, ears, nose, taste buds or sense of touch because these faculties contribute to our enjoyment since they enhance overall communication. Several even facilitate relationship-building and closeness with others.5

5. The physical body helps us learn to pace and regulate our lives in mortality.

Our physical bodies require water, food, rest, recreation, and quite a bit of maintenance in the form of washing, clipping, cutting, and shaving. Pacing ourselves and regulating our lives have many additional applications to both the temporal and the spiritual. For example, Doctrine and Covenants 88:124 counsels, “Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.” Through present-day scientific research, we are beginning to understand not only the importance of sleep but also of maintaining a regular schedule and all the benefits that can yield for the body.6

Other facets of life, such as building a testimony or maintaining relationships, can also benefit from regular pacing and diligent attention. Perhaps that is why we are instructed to not “run faster” than we have strength (Mosiah 4:27).

6. Along with agency and the Atonement, our bodies are one of our three greatest gifts.

We know that agency—the gift to act for ourselves and to choose—is an eternal principle that comes with a great responsibility to exercise it properly, so it can benefit us fully. Similarly, we know that Christ’s Atonement for sins is a phenomenal gift that many of us only begin to understand in mortality. Not everyone uses their agency wisely or takes full advantage of the Atonement, yet we all experience the wondrous gift of a human body.

In speaking about this subject, Elder Russell M. Nelson explained:

Each organ of your body is a wondrous gift from God. Each eye has an autofocusing lens. Nerves and muscles control two eyes to make a single three-dimensional image. The eyes are connected to the brain, which records the sights seen. Your heart is an incredible pump. It has four delicate valves that control the direction of blood flow. These valves open and close more than 100,000 times a day—36 million times a year. Yet, unless altered by disease, they are able to withstand such stress almost indefinitely. In response to infection, it generates antibodies. The skin provides protection. It warns against injury that excessive heat or cold might cause. The body renews its own outdated cells and regulates the levels of its own vital ingredients. The body heals its cuts, bruises, and broken bones. Its capacity for reproduction is another sacred gift from God. . . . Anyone who studies the workings of the human body has surely ‘seen God moving in his majesty and power.’ Because the body is governed by divine law, any healing comes by obedience to the law upon which that blessing is predicated.”7
7. Physical bodies invite us to learn self-mastery.

The scriptures tell us that “the natural man is an enemy to God . . . unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” (Mosiah 3:19). And as Elder Erastus Snow said, “It is the duty of the spirit to subdue the flesh and the lusts and desires thereof [Galatians 5:24], and to bring it into subjection to the law of the spirit. This is the warfare and the struggle of our lives.”

Fortunately, we can overcome our natural human through embarking on a course of self-mastery. Some of this comes through general spiritual obedience to the commandments as well as physical and temporal obedience to the Word of Wisdom, the law of the fast, and moral cleanliness—all of which involve our bodies.

8. Physical bodies give us a measure of power over Satan.

Quoting Joseph Smith, Truman G. Madsen declared, “‘The express purpose of God in giving it (the spirit) a tabernacle was to arm it against the power of darkness.’ And elsewhere he taught that unembodied intelligences did not have power to defend themselves against those that had a tabernacle. It is a privilege to be in the body, even a crippled, handicapped, diseased body.” Of course, Satan is jealous of a human body, which leads him either to spread lies and deceptions about it or to try to enslave it with various addictions, physical indulgences, or even infirmities. Thus, our bodies are contested territory by the adversary and he tries to turn us against our bodies in varying ways—however, we simply need to remember that we ultimately have power over him because we possess a physical body.

Conclusion

According to Joseph Smith, “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the Celestial Kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The Devil has no body, and herein is his punishment.” Think of all the joy you are able to experience through your body. Where do you feel love? Peace? Gratitude? Happiness? Most of us feel warmth in the torso, usually around the region of the heart. Could we ever experience these good emotions to such a spectacular degree without a physical body? Probably not. Perhaps that is at least part of the reason for there being so many references to human anatomy in the standard works.

There are a minimum of eight reasons for the high frequency of references to human anatomy in the scriptures. In summary, our bodies are divine gifts that help us navigate our mortal journeys and give us knowledge and power—a purpose shared by the scriptures themselves. However, this is a large topic with a lot of room for research and insight.

Notes

1. One can speculate that any future scripture we receive may have a similar ratio of references to human anatomy.

2. This difference likely has to do with the narratives recorded in the different books of scripture. Much of the Old Testament narrative is concerned with the children of Israel leaving Egypt and entering the promised land. Much of the narrative in Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants is focused on the purpose of mortality. The comprehensive reference corpus, published online at bodiesfilledwithlight.byu.edu, begins at the top of the head and moves down to the bottom of the feet, as an anatomist would. My student assistants carefully omitted references to animal or idol body parts. Special thanks goes to my research assistants: Jacob Bromley, Jordan Bromley, Leica Clayton, L. Scott Frandsen, Nathan Harris, Allyssa Jex, Chris Kinghorn, Elise Leavitt, Emily Adawi Maxfield, David McLaughlin, Sebastian Romero, Reggie Voice, and Kaley Weight.


11. Readers are invited to browse through the corpus of scripture references to human anatomy at bodiesfilledwithlight.byu.edu and embark on their own advanced study. Please send comments and feedback to educationinzion@byu.edu with the words “human anatomy” in the subject line. And if you are on BYU campus before April 30, 2016, please visit the Education in Zion Gallery in the Joseph F. Smith Building to see the Bodies Filled with Light exhibition.
New Publications

To purchase any of the following publications, please visit www.byubookstore.com and search by book title or ISBN number, or call the BYU Bookstore toll-free at 1-800-253-2578.

**Provo's Two Temples**
Richard O. Cowan and Justin R. Bray

Provo, Utah, is the home of two LDS temples, each with a distinctive story. This volume includes a comprehensive account of each of these two temples, which have very different histories. One temple was built from the ground up and dedicated in 1972. The other is like a phoenix, born again of the ashes of a building destroyed by fire. This book includes richly illustrated pictures and text that traces the unique construction, history, and many other details that help tell the stories of each of Provo's two temples.


**Rediscovering the Sites of the Restoration: The 1888 Travel Writings of Mormon Historian Andrew Jenson, Edward Stevenson, and Joseph S. Black**
Edited by Reid Neilson, Justin R. Bray, and Alan D. Johnson

On September 6, 1888, three Church history missionaries—Andrew Jenson, Edward Stevenson, and Joseph S. Black—left on a fact-finding mission to the Church’s historic sites in Missouri, Illinois, New York, Ohio, and Iowa, spending a majority of their time visiting the sacred spaces of the Restoration. The observations they made were the subjects of a lengthy correspondence to the Deseret News. These letters were later compiled into a pamphlet, allowing the Saints in the west to vicariously experience the early days of the Restoration. Some notable historical themes included in their observations include a desire for the establishment and redemption of Zion and the promise that righteous Saints would be restored to their lands to build up Zion.


**Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World**
Edited by Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges

This volume is a collection of essays by prominent LDS scholars—including Richard Bushman and David Holland—who discuss the interest in the ancient world shared by Joseph Smith and the early Latter-day Saints. Topics include Joseph Smith’s fascination with the ancient Americas, his interaction with the Bible, his study of Hebrew and Greek, his reading of Jewish and Christian apocryphal writings, and his work with the Book of Abraham in the context of nineteenth-century Egyptology. Together, these essays demonstrate that Joseph Smith’s interests in antiquity played an important role in his prophetic development as he sought to recover
ancient scripture, restore the ancient Church, and bring the Latter-day Saints into fellowship with the sacred past.


A Missionary’s Story: The Letters and Journals of Adolf Haag, Mormon Missionary to Switzerland and Palestine, 1892
Edited by Larry W. Draper and Kent P. Jackson

This personal narrative of missionary Adolf Haag, a German immigrant living in the small community of Payson, Utah, when he was called to be a missionary in Switzerland and Germany. This book contains the journals Haag kept during his mission, letters he sent in preparation for it, and all the known letters he sent home while he was serving. These documents chronicle the willingness of a young man to accept a call to serve the cause of a religion he fervently believed in. They record the challenges he faced leaving behind his home, his business, and his wife and two young children. His letters in response to problems at home may show him at his missionary best. They read, in large part, like sermons, extolling the virtues of trusting in God, exercising patience and forbearance, and staying true to the faith.


Against the Wall: Johann Huber and the First Mormons in Austria
Roger P. Minert

This is the fascinating and inspiring story of Johann Huber, one of Austria’s earliest LDS converts. Huber was a controversial political figure in Haag but soon went from the frying pan into the fire when he informed his neighbors of his LDS baptism in Munich in 1900. For the next decade, he weathered relentless persecution from friends, neighbors, Catholic clerics, the local public school, and government officials. Despite attacks from determined opponents, Huber was extraordinarily loyal to his adoptive faith and played a lead role in laying the foundation of the Church in Austria and its ongoing legacy.


From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon
Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat

This book was written to provide a detailed explanation of how Joseph Smith and the scribes who served with him described the process of translating the gold plates and the difficulties encountered as they sought to publish the completed book. Although both members and academics alike often think of this story as well known, recent insights and discoveries associated with the efforts by the Church History Department to publish The Joseph Smith Papers have provided a fuller, richer understanding of the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon.


Conversations with Mormon Historians
Edited by Alexander L. Baugh and Reid L. Neilson

The interviews in this volume tell the stories of remarkable men and women who have made careers out of researching, writing, and teaching about the past. Friends and colleagues conducted these conversations over a decade or so. All were subsequently published in the Mormon Historical Studies journal or Religious Educator periodical, and now are brought together as a single book of personal essays. As we review and reflect on the personal lives and remarkable careers featured in this volume, we sense that many of these historians feel that they were prepared or given a definite sense of mission and professional calling that stretches well back in time.

Upcoming Events

**Sidney B. Sperry Symposium**  
*Friday and Saturday, October 21–24, 2015*  
The 44th Annual BYU Sperry Symposium will start in the Joseph Smith Building (JSB) auditorium on BYU campus. The title of this year’s symposium is “The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder.” Presentations will cover the Book of Mormon’s role in restoring doctrinal truths, the translation process, the witnesses, and the printing of the book.

**Religious Education Student Symposium**  
*Friday, February 19, 2016*  
This event is held in the Wilkinson Student Center from 9:00 to noon. The annual student symposium provides a forum for students to research, write, and present papers about religious subjects from a faithful perspective. For more information, visit http://rsc.byu.edu/studentsymposium.

**2016 Church History Symposium**  
*Thursday and Friday, March 3–4, 2016*  
The 2016 theme is “Beyond Biography: Sources in Context for Mormon Women’s History.” Scholars of Mormon women’s history have long demonstrated a commitment to and an interest in biography. The resulting narratives have helped to recover and preserve voices that would have otherwise been lost to modern awareness.

These events are free of charge, and registration is not required. Some event details are subject to change. For more details, please visit us online at rsc.byu.edu/conferences or contact Brent Nordgren at 801-422-3293.

---

Staff Spotlight

**Research Assistant**  
Leah Emal is a junior from Destin, Florida, and the oldest of five children. She is majoring in English and hopes to pursue a minor in editing. After graduation from BYU, she hopes to get her master’s degree in an education-related field. She has worked for Religious Education since her freshman year in 2013. She has worked for the RSC since May of 2015 and absolutely loves it. Leah enjoys reading, sports, hiking, watching Netflix, and spending time with her husband, Blake.

**Student Editor**  
Leah Welker is a senior studying English language, with minors in editing and modern Hebrew. She can’t decide where she is “from,” having spent about an equal amount of her life in Utah, Maryland, Texas; to make matters even more confusing, her family currently lives in Virginia. She loves to travel, having gone on many cross-country road trips and visited eleven countries. Her passions are reading, writing, and editing—hence why she’s currently busy running a student journal, writing an honors thesis, and starting the first student chapter of the LDS Publishing Professionals Association. In her spare time, she loves watching movies, going to BYU concerts, and spending time with her two sisters, who are her roommates and best friends.
Submission Guidelines

The Religious Educator serves the needs and interests of those who study and teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis. The distinct focuses are on teaching the gospel; publishing studies on scripture, doctrine, and Church history; and sharing outstanding devotional essays. The beliefs of the respective authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Complete author guidelines are provided at rsc.byu.edu/RSCStyleGuide.pdf. All manuscripts should be submitted electronically to rsc@byu.edu. Hard-copy submissions are accepted only if an electronic copy is included.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced, including quotations. Authors should follow style conventions of The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, and the Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3rd edition, as reflected in a recent issue of the Religious Educator.

Manuscripts will be evaluated by the following questions:

1. Does the manuscript address a clear thesis? Does the argument proceed cautiously and logically? Is the writing clear? Is it engaging and interesting? If not, why?

2. To what degree is the author knowledgeable on the topic as a whole, as shown, for example, by content, phrasing, contextualizing, thorough use of the best sources, and bibliography? Does the author adequately acknowledge and deal with opposing views? If not, why?

3. Does the manuscript present significant new data or new perspectives? What is its main contribution? Will people want to read this ten years from now? Does it make a contribution without resorting to sensationalism or controversy?

4. Does the author follow the canons of responsible scholarship (uses sound and fair methodology; documents arguable facts)? If not, why?

5. Is the manuscript faith-promoting? Is the piece in harmony with the established doctrine of the Church?

If a manuscript is accepted, authors will be notified and asked to provide photocopies of all source materials cited, arranged in order, numbered to match the endnotes, and highlighted to show the quotations or paraphrases. Photocopies of source material must include title page and source page with the highlighted quotations.

Editorial Questions

For questions or comments, e-mail us at rsc@byu.edu or write to Religious Educator, 167 HGB, Provo, UT 84602-2701.
Subscriptions

**Online (preferred method)**
Place orders online at subscribe.byu.edu.

**By Mail**
Fill out the subscription form online at tre.byu.edu. Click “Mail-in Order Form.” Print the form and include a check for the amount shown on the form. Mail both to the address shown on the form.

Failure to inform Religious Educator of an address change in a timely manner may result in missed issues without compensation or replacement. If a subscription is placed after the first mailing of an issue, there may be a delay until the second mailing occurs.

**Subscription Questions**
Subscription questions should be sent via e-mail to rsc@byu.edu and should include “RE Subscriptions” in the subject line.

**Back Issues**
Back issues are available for a limited time online. Available back issues are listed on the subscription page and may be purchased with or without a subscription. If an issue is not listed, it is out of print but may be viewed in our back issues archive at tre.byu.edu. Back issues may be purchased for $5 each (shipping and handling included).