The power of the Atonement to pardon, to sanctify, to give new life, even eternal and immortal life, came to me in a simple but powerful experience some years ago.
“Had Jesus not devoted Himself to the Father and to the Father’s will, throughout His life and throughout His existence prior to this life, He might not have been able to see the Atonement through to its conclusion.”

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

ON THE COVER:
After winter, this beautiful iris emerges from a snowy grave, representing new life the Resurrection and the Atonement afford.

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The Religious Educator is published three times a year by the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. This publication 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 contributions to each issue are carefully reviewed and edited by experienced teachers, writers, and scholars.

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The Religious Educator

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 1
Elder D. Todd Christofferson spoke at BYU on March 26, 2005, offering his unique perspective on the Atonement and the Resurrection. In this landmark address, he bears witness of the Savior’s suffering for our sins, His complete submission to the Father’s will, and the fruits of the Atonement for us.

In “Beyond ‘Recipe Repentance’ and ‘Formula Forgiveness,’” Lawrence R. Flake shares the story of a young woman who broke the law of chastity and then expected quick forgiveness because she had “gone through the motions” of repenting. He rejects the notion of repentance as a to-do list and gives us additional insight into finding peace through the Atonement.

In the first of three articles on the Book of Mormon, R. Mark Matheson draws vital aspects of teaching from this sacred record, including becoming worthy of the Spirit’s influence and learning from the students. Then, in “‘Ye Shall Have Joy with Me’: The Olive Tree, the Lord, and His Servant,” Daniel Belnap highlights the relationship between the Lord and His servant to emphasize our role in gathering Israel. In “Building Lessons Filled with Light,” Robert R. Wallace takes the account of the Jaredites’ boatbuilding and suggests principles for educators, including making our lessons “small, light, and tight” like the Jaredite barges.

In “Teachers as Torchbearers,” Michael K. Parson shares his early dreams of becoming a teacher and an Olympic runner and relates his life-changing experiences in the Vietnam War.

Peter B. Rawlins teaches how discerning and meeting the needs of members was the essence of the Savior’s ministry and suggests that we keep this in the forefront of our own ministry. Tina Taylor Dyches discusses a very practical application of this concept by suggesting ways we can serve ward members with disabilities.

President J. Reuben Clark Jr. offered a charge to religious educators in 1938 that has become a classic. In “Charting the Course,” Scott C. Esplin looks at the lasting influence of this address.

We finish this issue with the first installment in a new series of articles, “Profiles of the Prophets.” The focus this time is Gordon B. Hinckley, fifteenth President of the Church.
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The Atonement and the Resurrection

Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Elder D. Todd Christofferson is a member of the Presidency of the Seventy. This article is adapted from an address given at BYU on March 26, 2005.

I am honored to share a few thoughts on the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I have struggled, as many of you have, with a finite mind to comprehend that infinite sacrifice of the Savior. I do not pretend to be able to plumb the depths of the subject, but I hope I can offer an insight or two that will be helpful and encouraging to us as we think again on the great events of those few days that mean all the difference in our existence.

Imagining Ourselves There

In your mind, try to place yourselves back in time at that first Easter weekend. Today is Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Here we are—the events of yesterday and the day before have made a tremendous impact upon us. It was Thursday evening when the Last Supper took place. Afterward, Jesus passed over the brook and into the Garden of Gethsemane and suffered there in a way that none of us have fully witnessed and certainly none comprehend. It was perhaps into the wee hours of yesterday morning that that continued. Yesterday, He was assaulted and abused by those in authority, both Jewish and Roman. He was condemned finally by Pilate and scourged. It has been less than twenty-four hours since we witnessed the awful scene of His crucifixion, as He hung there on the cross and suffered intensely again. It was a very, very dark time, and it has not been many hours ago. We hurriedly placed His body in the tomb before sunset yesterday. Now, here we are on this Sabbath. It is midday, and we are wondering, in doubt, and confused.
We had thought it was He who would rescue Israel. We had thought it was He who was the Messiah, and yet He is gone; He is dead.

Just before He died yesterday, He uttered these words: “It is finished” (John 19:30). What did He mean? Did He mean He had failed? He would never return? He is gone and it is over? Is there something more? Unbeknownst to you and me in this setting, in this Sabbath of doubt, He, His spirit, has been occupied elsewhere. This morning He entered the world of spirits. Future records will confirm that He was expected there.

[There were assembled a multitude of the righteous] awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world [just this morning], to declare their redemption from the bands of death.

Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy.

While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance . . . , the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful;

And there he preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance. (D&C 138:16–19)

That is what He has been doing this morning. And in the language of President Joseph F. Smith, “He [has] organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men” (D&C 138:30). And thus will the gospel be preached to them that are dead. Now, what awaits tomorrow we do not know. But in good time, joy incomprehensible will come to us. Tomorrow morning, Mary and other women will be at the tomb. They will find it empty. Angels will declare that the Savior, not there, has risen. Peter and John will enter that tomb and find it empty. Later that morning, with the sun perhaps barely up, Jesus Himself will appear to Mary and speak to her, the first mortal ever to see the resurrected Lord. He will show Himself to other women and to Peter individually. He will be with two of you on the road to Emmaus and then, toward evening, show Himself to His Apostles and perhaps some of us, gathered together, wondering and pondering over the marvelous witness of those who saw Him earlier. That is what awaits us tomorrow, and it is glorious to contemplate.
Jesus’s Submission to the Father

I wonder if we appreciate the expectations that devolve upon us because of what He has done and what He now offers to us. In perhaps the earliest reference to Him and His role in our lives, this is the comment from God to Moses: “But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2).

In one simple sentence, I believe the Savior revealed what was and always has been His overriding purpose and His motivation. His purpose is to do the will of the Father, and His motivation is to glorify the Father. I believe it required all of that devotion, the full measure of His devotion to doing the will of the Father and the motive of glorifying the Father, for Him to be able to endure what He had to endure and see the Atonement through to its conclusion.

The accounts of His suffering found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, speaking of Gethsemane, emphasize how much He endured. (It has interested me that there is no account of Gethsemane in John, at least in what we have of John. I wonder if it was something he felt too sacred to touch or just too tender to recount.) At least three times, it appears, He pled with the Father that He might not have to drink the bitter cup. In Matthew, the account is as follows:

He went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:39–44)

This really is all we have (repeated in a varied form in Mark and Luke) of that prayer. I am sure there was much more. But that was the most compelling, saying essentially: “Father, if it be possible, take this cup from me. If there is any way that this can be accomplished short of my having to drink it, that is what I plead with thee to do. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”
Luke records that because of His agony, “His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). The Savior Himself, when He described it to the Prophet Joseph Smith, said it was not sweat but, in fact, blood, that He bled from every pore (see D&C 19:18). Luke records that an angel came to strengthen Him in that ordeal (see Luke 22:43). And later as that suffering resumed on the cross, it seemed compounded as the Father withdrew His Spirit so that the Son might tread the winepress alone. “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

Always, however, in all of this agony and all of this pleading for relief, was His submission to the Father’s will—“Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). “Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (Matthew 26:42). As He described the Atonement and the concern that He not shrink and fail fully to drain that bitter cup, He expressed once again the overriding motivation that saw Him through that incomprehensible suffering: “Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:19; emphasis added).

Had Jesus not devoted Himself to the Father and to the Father’s will, throughout His life and throughout His existence prior to this life, He might not have been able to see the Atonement through to its conclusion. As He expressed it in John: “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him” (John 8:28–29).

In the Book of Mormon, He stated: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:10–11).

Later, in that same book of 3 Nephi: “Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Nephi 27:13). And Abinadi’s unforgettable words: “Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:7).
Offering Our Own Sacrifice

I believe that we, in order to hold on our way, to persevere and endure to the end, to reap the full benefits of His Atonement, must similarly devote ourselves to the will and glory of the Father and the Son. Is it not logical that you and I, to be able to receive what He offers, would have to do as He did and make our greatest ambition to do the will of God and our greatest desire to glorify Him?

I read earlier some verses from section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants, referring to the Savior’s advent in the spirit world before the Resurrection. There is an interesting description given there of the body of righteous people who were awaiting that advent. Here is how they were described: “There were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality; and who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name. All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ” (D&C 138:12–14).

What interests me particularly there is that phrase “who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God.” They had not offered an equivalent sacrifice but something in the similitude, of the same nature. And because of that, they were firm in the hope of a glorious or celestial resurrection. What would be an offering in the similitude of the great offering of the Son of God?

We have the familiar statement given to Adam: “And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me. And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou dost in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:6–8; emphasis added).

We know that when He appeared in this hemisphere, following His resurrection and ascension, He ended that kind of sacrifice in the similitude of the Only Begotten—that is, the animal sacrifice. But He reemphasized one aspect of the commandment to Adam—“Thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore”—when He later said, “Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And
whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 9:20). It is, then, our sacrifice in the similitude of His that, with broken heart and contrite spirit, we would submit ourselves entirely to God.

As it says in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “Wherefore, the Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son, as it is written in those scriptures which have been given of him. He suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them. He was crucified, died, and rose again the third day; and ascended into heaven, to sit down on the right hand of the Father, to reign with almighty power according to the will of the Father. [For what purpose?] That as many as would believe and be baptized in his holy name, and endure . . . to the end, should be saved” (D&C 20:21–25).

That is our sacrifice in the similitude of His, being baptized in His holy name and enduring to the end. May I remind you of two familiar verses from a sacramental hymn, “God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son.”

God loved us, so he sent his Son,  
Christ Jesus, the atoning One,  
To show us by the path he trod  
The one and only way to God.

And then the fourth verse that we rarely sing:

In word and deed he doth require  
My will to his, like son to sire,  
Be made to bend, and I, as son,  
Learn conduct from the Holy One.¹

Learning to Submit to God

That learning—that submission to Him and to His will that would permit us to reap the benefit of the Atonement—may involve a number of things. The one revelation recorded in the canon of scripture that was given to Brigham Young includes this verse: “My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom” (D&C 136:31).

Early in my tenure as a Seventy, I was companion to Elder Russell M. Nelson in a stake conference. We had a wonderful experience together, and as we finished and were driving home, I said to him, “Elder Nelson, I hope if you ever see an error in me or some shortcoming, you would tell me about it.” He replied, “I will.” I was a little unnerved by his seeming anxiousness to comply with my request, but then He said,
“That is one of the ways we show our love for one another.” And I believe that is indeed a true principle.

The Savior said: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:1–2). What form the purging might take, what sacrifices it might entail for any of us, we probably will not know in advance. But if, with the rich young ruler, we ask, “What lack I yet?” (Matthew 19:20), the Savior’s answer would probably be the same, “Follow me” (Matthew 19:21)—or, in the language of King Benjamin, “[Become] as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19). Here is another way of stating it: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me [and this addition from the Joseph Smith Translation]. And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments” (Matthew 16:24; Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 16:26).

We must be able to say, with Job, that our submission to Jesus, to His will, is so complete that “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). I think this is perfectly described in poetic form in the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” by Isaac Watts.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God.
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.

Were the whole world of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.²

Indeed, the Atonement does deserve our all. Although we may not immediately attain to the Savior’s perfect example of always doing
those things that please the Father and always living our lives in a way
to glorify Him, we can progress as the Savior Himself did, from grace
to grace, until we obtain a fulness. “I, John, bear record that I beheld
his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace
and truth, . . . which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among
us. And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at first, but
received grace for grace; and he received not of the fulness at first, but
continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; and thus he
was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the
first” (D&C 93:11–14).

A few years back in general conference, I quoted this reassuring
statement from President Brigham Young, who seemed to understand
the challenge we face:

After all that has been said and done, after he has led this people so
long, do you not perceive that there is a lack of confidence in our God?
Can you perceive it in yourselves? You may ask, “[Brother] Brigham, do
you perceive it in yourselves?” I do, I can see that I yet lack confidence, to
some extent, in him whom I trust.—Why? Because I have not the power,
in consequence of that which the fall has brought upon me. . . .

Something rises up within me, at times[, ] that . . . draws a dividing
line between my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven; some-
ting that makes my interest and the interest of my Father in heaven not
precisely one. . . .

We should feel and understand, as far as possible, as far as fallen
nature will let us, as far as we can get faith and knowledge to understand
ourselves, that the interest of that God whom we serve is our interest,
and that we have no other, neither in time nor in eternity.3

Testifying of the Atonement’s Fruits

With you, I bear witness of the fruits of that great Atonement.
To me, they come under three headings.

Forgiveness. The first is forgiveness or, as we sometimes say, justification.
“It shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my
name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I
hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge
the world” (3 Nephi 27:16).

“Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of
the prophets, yea, all the holy prophets who have prophesied concern-
ing the coming of the Lord—I say unto you, that all those who have
hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem
his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their
sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, . . . the heirs of the kingdom of God” (Mosiah 15:11).

And this witness from section 20: “We know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true” (D&C 20:30).

_Sanctification._ A second fruit is the cleansing or, as we sometimes say, sanctification that comes through His grace. “No unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end. Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:19–20).

In Moroni, we read: “Again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33).

And again, from section 20, a testimony: “We know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:31).

_Resurrection._ The third glorious fruit of the Atonement is the Resurrection itself, which comes because He atoned for Adam’s transgression. “The Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden. Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world” (Moses 6:53).

In section 88, we learn: “Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead. And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul” (D&C 88:14–16).

Regarding the Resurrection, we read: “They who are of a celestial spirit shall receive the same body which was a natural body; even ye shall receive your bodies, and your glory shall be that glory by which your bodies are quickened. Ye who are quickened by a portion of the celestial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness” (D&C 88:28–29).

The power of the Atonement to pardon, to sanctify, to give new life, even eternal and immortal life, came to me in a simple but powerful
experience some years ago. Again, it is one of many witnesses. On this occasion, I had been assigned by the First Presidency to interview a woman for the possible restoration of her temple blessings. She had committed some grievous transgressions, had been excommunicated and then baptized again, and now had applied for the privilege of returning to the temple. That required this interview and the ordinance of laying on of hands to restore those blessings and rights to her. As I prepared for that interview and read the summary of what had happened in her life, I was astonished. I could not believe that there could be so much of the sordid and evil in one life. As I read, I asked myself, How could the First Presidency ever suppose that this person would again qualify to enter the house of the Lord? When she came into the room to be interviewed, she seemed to have a glow about her, a light within. As we spoke, there came upon me a sense that she was pure—perhaps one of the purest souls I had ever met. I looked at her and I looked at the paper describing the past, and I could not believe it was the same woman. And in a real sense, she was a different person. The Atonement had transformed her. It gave me to understand, powerfully, the depth and breadth and scope of the atoning grace of Jesus Christ. He is real, and His grace is very real.

Conclusion

It is appropriate to consider the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith as we conclude this reflection on the Atonement and Resurrection. Martyrdom endows a prophet’s testimony with a special validity. The Greek root martireo, from which the English word martyr is derived, means “witness,” or “to bear witness.” The prophet Abinadi is described as having sealed the words, or the truth of his words, by his death (see Mosiah 17:20). Jesus’s own death was a testament of His divinity and His mission. He is declared in Hebrews to be “the mediator of the new testament” (Hebrews 9:15), validated by His death, “for where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead” (Hebrews 9:16).

Like most of the Lord’s anointed in ancient time, Joseph Smith sealed his mission and his works with his own blood. In a hail of bullets on the afternoon of June 27, 1844, in Carthage, Joseph and his brother Hyrum were cut down for the religion and the testimony they professed. And as the latter-day Apostles then announced: “The testators are now dead, and their testament is in force. . . . Their innocent blood on the banner of liberty, and on the magna charta of the United States, is an ambassador for the religion of Jesus Christ, that will touch
the hearts of honest men among all nations” (D&C 135:5, 7; emphasis in original).

The Savior has not had among mortals a more faithful witness, a more obedient disciple, a more loyal advocate than Joseph Smith.

I close with his great witness of the Savior, making it my own, joining it with yours:

We beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness;

And we saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever.

And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. (D&C 76:20–24)

This is the most significant aspect of our entire existence. It is real. He is real. “He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24:6). He lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. }

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Notes

1. “God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son,” Hymns (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 187.
Christ and the Rich Young Ruler
Painting by Heinrich Hofmann

Courtesy of C. Harrison Conroy Company
A bishop recently related a truly disturbing incident. He said that while making his way through the hallway toward the chapel to begin sacrament meeting, a young woman from his ward stopped him and said, “Bishop, I really need to talk to you. It will just take a minute.” Thinking it would be some minor item, he stopped and listened. “Last night,” she blurted out, “I was involved in a violation of the law of chastity.” She said just enough more that he knew it was a major violation of the law. Before he could stop her and set up an appointment for a proper interview, she continued, “But it’s okay because I stayed up all night going through the steps of repentance. Confessing to you is the only one I had left on the list. So now I think I am ready to partake of the sacrament.”

This experience, while hopefully an extreme aberration, does highlight a dangerous misunderstanding that many young people, and even some adults, seem to have concerning the nature of true repentance and forgiveness: the notion that this vital process can be reduced to a simple recipe or checklist formula. Because repentance and forgiveness are the very essence of our eternal salvation, it should not be surprising that Satan tries very hard to foster all manner of false doctrine, misinformation, and incorrect attitudes regarding this essential process.

It seems the devil loves to push the repentant sinner toward either end of a broad spectrum of ideas concerning repentance and forgiveness. On one extreme, he seeks to convince some that true repentance is just too hard and that forgiveness is almost unattainable and that...
even if we do receive it, all will be lost if we do not live nearly perfectly thereafter. In other words, he tries mightily to discourage us from even trying to gain forgiveness. This strategy often succeeds, and many give up because they believe it is just too difficult. Equally false is his argument on the other end of the spectrum. As illustrated by the misguided young woman in the incident above, Satan tries to convince us that repentance is easy and that forgiveness is available just by asking or by going through a few simple steps. Before we can fully understand how hard or how easy repentance and forgiveness actually are, we need to answer a basic question: What is it that brings about a remission of our sins? Although many members of the Church believe they know the answer to that question, they often know only part of the answer, and that part is usually the least important. That least-important portion of the answer is often couched in a popular teaching device called the Rs of repentance.

This method seeks to define the repentance process by using a list of words that begin with the letter R. Nearly every member of the Church, even the very young, has heard a number of talks and lessons employing this pedagogical device, and most can readily list at least two or three of these R words. Though some teachers and speakers enumerate as many as eight or ten Rs, the basic six on most lists are as follows:

1. **Recognize** the sin.
2. Feel **remorse** for the transgression.
3. **Resolve** to change the behavior.
4. **Relate** the sin to the proper priesthood leader when it is of a serious nature.
5. Make **restitution**, as far as possible, to those who have been injured by the sin.
6. **Refrain** from the sin thereafter.

Other creative R words are sometimes added to the list. For instance, when I asked a class to come up with additional R words, one young man volunteered, “Well, if your sin is really bad, you might need to **relocate**.”

**The Forgotten Rs**

That this simple device for teaching repentance has been around so long and is so well known attests to its usefulness in our understanding of certain truths about repentance. But it does not teach the whole truth or even the most important part of the truth about either repentance or forgiveness. This method of teaching repentance may actually be an obstacle, doing more harm than good by leading some people to feel that the R checklist is a complete recipe for repentance and a full formula
for forgiveness. The truth, however, is that two extremely important R words are seldom included in lessons and talks on repentance. These two overlooked words represent essential truths that are absolutely vital in understanding the complete repentance and forgiveness process. These two R words are far more important than the other words on the list.

*Redeemer* is the most important of the overlooked R words. Jesus Christ is the “author of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9). To fail to recognize our complete dependence on the Savior in seeking and receiving forgiveness is to make a truly serious oversight. What a huge mistake to speak of the process of repentance and forgiveness as if it is somehow a “do-it-yourself project.” And it is not even enough that we know, understand, and appreciate the centrality of Christ in our salvation; we must express it clearly, powerfully, and often. As Nephi observed, “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, and we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, [and why do we do these things?] *that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins*” (2 Nephi 25:26; emphasis added). Only when we realize that the purpose of repentance is to make amends to God for our sins through “the sufferings and death of him who did no sin” (D&C 45:4) do we truly begin to understand repentance and appreciate the blessing of forgiveness. We then see that the R words on the list—used individually or even collectively—do not bring about a remission of sins but at best lead us to our Redeemer, who alone can grant a forgiveness of sins (see Luke 5:21).

One of the clearest expressions in scripture of the Savior’s pre-eminence in the repentance process and of our total dependence upon Him for forgiveness is found in the Doctrine and Covenants: “Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life” (D&C 45:3–5). Thus, the Redeemer must be at the top of any list of R words.

The second overlooked R word is particularly intriguing, for though it is less crucial than *Redeemer*, it is the most important thing we ourselves can do to obtain forgiveness of our sins. It is true that only through the Atonement of our Redeemer is a remission of sins possible; for “after all we can do,” it is ultimately “by grace that we are saved” (2 Nephi 25:23; see also D&C 20:30–31; 138:4). But even after we have applied the principles taught in all of the listed R words and even after we fully appreciate that the Redeemer ultimately brings about our
forgiveness, we still must engage in the vital process described by the second forgotten R word to draw on the power of the Atonement.

Four passages of scripture will help us identify this often-overlooked yet absolutely essential action to lead us to Christ, who extends forgiveness to us. In writing to his son Moroni, Mormon reveals this important element. He declares, “And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins” (Moroni 8:25; emphasis added). So, in answer to the all-important question, “What action on our part brings a remission of sins?” Moroni clearly states that we must “[fulfill] the commandments.” This same truth is powerfully enunciated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in his report of the vision of the degrees of glory, in which he proclaimed that those who inherit the celestial kingdom are washed and cleansed from all their sins “by keeping the commandments” (D&C 76:52; emphasis added). And, in Doctrine and Covenants 1:32, the Lord proclaims, “Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven” (emphasis added). Ezekiel illuminates this same concept, saying, “But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live” (Ezekiel 18:21–22; emphasis added).

So, again, what is the most important thing we personally can do to obtain forgiveness of our sins? First and foremost, we must rely on the Redeemer, and second, the scriptures declare we must fulfill, keep, and do the commandments of the Lord.

The second R word often left off the list, then, is righteousness—not just the righteousness of not repeating our sins (refraining) but the type of righteousness in which we actively seek “the Lord to establish his righteousness” (D&C 1:16; emphasis added; see also Matthew 6:38) and in which we become “anxiously engaged in a good cause . . . and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27; emphasis added). It is the difference between having a testimony of Christ and being “valiant” in that testimony. It is through this process of being actively engaged that we receive forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness is made possible by the Atonement but is actualized by our righteousness, which flows from true faith in the Redeemer.

We exercise righteousness and thereby, through the grace of our Redeemer, receive His forgiveness. In other words, our righteousness does not of itself bring forgiveness, but it accesses His grace, which is
sufficient for our salvation. We undergo an inner change that manifests itself outwardly in righteous living. President David O. McKay, in a succinct description of repentance, said, “To repent is to change one’s mind or one’s heart with regard to past or intended action, conduct, etc.”

We gain a new devotion to live righteously. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained this process: “Paul said, ‘Crucify the old man of sin and come forth in a newness of life’ (see Romans 6:6). We are born again when we die as pertaining to unrighteousness and when we live as pertaining to the things of the Spirit.” Repentance is complete only as we live “pertaining to the things of the Spirit.” We must first gain an attitude of righteousness—a desire to live righteously—to gain forgiveness. The repentance Christ requires is a lifelong endeavor rather than an instantaneous “checklist” approach.

In the scriptures, this lifelong process is called sanctification. Elder McConkie explains what happens to a righteous person who has become sanctified: “Those who go to the celestial kingdom of heaven have to be sanctified, meaning that they become clean and pure and spotless. They’ve had evil and sin and iniquity burned out of their souls as though by fire, and the figurative expression there is ‘the baptism of fire.’”

Sanctification is the process by which we become continually and progressively cleansed from every form of sin. Elder McConkie writes: “It is a process. Nobody is sanctified in an instant, suddenly. But if we keep the commandments and press forward with steadfastness after baptism, then degree by degree and step by step we sanctify our souls until that glorious day when we’re qualified to go where God and angels are.”

The scriptures have many examples of how people, by living righteously, experienced the blessings of gradual sanctification. For instance, the members of the Church in Helaman’s era found divine forgiveness and sanctification as they acted with ever-increasing faith and humility. The Book of Mormon describes their experience as a repetitious, cumulative process: “Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35; emphasis added).

The Doctrine and Covenants illuminates this connection between righteous living and sanctification: “And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:31). It is through our faith in Him that we develop...
the desire and the ability to be righteous. Righteousness, then, is the very process by which we obtain a remission of sins through our Redeemer.

Acts of Righteousness That Lead to a Remission of Sins

Though all acts of righteousness are part of the process by which sins are remitted, the scriptures emphasize this significant connection with some specific righteous acts. The upright people in Helaman’s day fasted and prayed. Those specific acts of righteousness, along with humility and firmness in the “faith of Christ” and “yielding their hearts unto God,” led to the “sanctification of their hearts” (Helaman 3:35).

King Benjamin gives us another example of righteous actions that led to forgiveness of sins: “And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26; emphasis added).

Another righteous action that is necessary for the remission of our sins is forgiving others. The scriptures make clear that without this kind of righteousness, we cannot be forgiven. Only when we support others’ efforts to repair their lives can we expect the Lord to forgive us: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14–15; see also 3 Nephi 13:14–15).

This principle was stated even more strongly in our own dispensation: “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds” (D&C 64:10–11).

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord points out to the Saints of this dispensation another specific act that brings about forgiveness. He offers us forgiveness as a reward for bearing testimony of Him: “For I will forgive you of your sins,” He promises, “with this commandment—that you remain steadfast . . . in bearing testimony to all the world of those things which are communicated unto you” (D&C 84:61). The Savior states this promise even more powerfully when He says, “Nevertheless, ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you” (D&C 62:3; emphasis added). As we bear continual testimony of the gospel—not only
through our words but more importantly through our actions— we indeed fulfill an act of righteousness for which the Lord will reward us with divine forgiveness.

Those who serve in their Church callings with all their “heart, might, mind and strength” (D&C 4:2) can also have the sweet assurance of laying “up in store . . . salvation to [their] soul[s]” (D&C 4:4). An experience I had while serving as a mission president illustrates how forgiveness comes through this kind of righteousness—specifically, through valiant service to the kingdom. I routinely interviewed each new missionary on the day of his or her arrival in the field. This was always a sweet occasion as they shared their excitement, trepidation, and testimony at the commencement of their great spiritual adventure. One day a new elder surprised me during his interview by saying that he felt he should not be in the mission field. He was very downhearted and depressed. When I asked him the reason for his feelings, I learned that he had gone through a long and very difficult repentance process before his priesthood leaders could recommend him for a mission. He assured me that he had been totally honest with them and had carefully met all the requirements of repentance. Why then did he still feel burdened with unworthiness and feel uncommitted to his call as a missionary?

Clearly, he had not felt the pervading sweet peace that should follow sincere repentance. As I prayerfully sought guidance to know how to help him, I felt prompted to review with him a passage of scripture I believed he could probably quote from memory—the powerful words of the Lord to all those, including this young missionary, who “embark in the service of God.” To them the scripture says, “See that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength” (D&C 4:2).

After we spoke that line together, I asked the troubled young elder, “What will be the result of your serving him with all of your heart, might, mind, and strength?” With hope already showing in his eyes and sounding in his voice as he saw where I was leading him, he responded emphatically, “That [I] may stand blameless before God at the last day” (see D&C 4:2; emphasis added). I then promised him that if he would do as the Lord directed and serve his mission in the Lord’s way, he would indeed “stand blameless before God”—not just at the last day of his life but at the last day of his mission.

He met that challenge admirably. He was a wonderful, valiant missionary. As he kept the commandments and served with all his heart, might, mind, and strength, he was indeed “washed and cleansed from all [his] sins” (D&C 76:52). Because of what the Redeemer has done, this missionary, by “fulfilling the commandments,” was able to gain
“a remission of sins” (Moroni 8:25). On the last day of his mission, he could hardly contain his joy. He observed, “I feel like I have just stepped out of the waters of baptism.” He had received a remarkable appreciation of the Atonement and its application to his life and his salvation. I believe he truly stood blameless before God.

Perhaps the remarkable relationship between understanding repentance and the two missing R words, Redeemer and righteousness, is best capsulized in the third article of faith: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ [Redeemer], all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel [righteousness]” (emphasis added). It is through our Redeemer that we may be saved, but it is by our righteousness that He brings about that salvation and fulfills the glorious promise: “If you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).  

Notes

3. Elder McConkie teaches that even being born again does not happen suddenly: “Being born again is a gradual thing, except in a few isolated instances that are so miraculous they get written up in the scriptures. As far as the generality of the members of the Church are concerned, we are born again by degrees, and we are born again to added light and added knowledge and added desires for righteousness as we keep the commandments” (McConkie, “Jesus Christ and Him Crucified,” 399; emphasis added).
5. McConkie, “Jesus Christ and Him Crucified,” 399; emphasis in original.
Teaching in the Book of Mormon

R. Mark Matheson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some teachers in the Book of Mormon were called by the Holy Spirit and were assisted by the gifts of the Spirit in their teaching. For example, in Alma 18:34 Ammon described his role and its divine origin: “I am called by his Holy Spirit to teach these things unto this people, that they may be brought to a knowledge of that which is just and true.”
4. **Represent God.** In many cases teachers are not only following God’s will in teaching but are also representing God to the students. Striking evidence of this is found in Mosiah, where teachers and God are associated three times in one verse: “They were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit, having the knowledge of God, that they might teach with power and authority from God” (Mosiah 18:26). Students will be accountable for the truths about God that we teach them. The Book of Mormon says of the rebellious people in the time of Lachoneus: “They did not sin ignorantly, for they knew the will of God concerning them, for it had been taught unto them; therefore they did wilfully rebel against God” (3 Nephi 6:18).

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

**The Teacher-Student Relationship**

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

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

Our students have various difficulties to overcome. Each has individual concerns and questions. Teachers have to be responsive to the students’ unique needs, and those needs can be discovered through perceptive interaction. For example, I recently had a change in institute
teaching assignments where I went from instructing all male classes to all female classes. I quickly cut down on my prepared lesson material as this new group of students asked more questions. I also invited several strong students to help teach principles to the weaker students.

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

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

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

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

5. Evaluate our motives. As teachers we should examine our motivation for teaching as Nephi did in a three-fold appraisal in 2 Nephi 6:3: “Nevertheless, I speak unto you again; for I am [1] desirous for the welfare of your souls. Yea, [2] mine anxiety is great for you; and [3] ye yourselfs know that it ever has been. For I have exhorted you with all diligence; and I have taught you.” The pattern displayed here is that
first, teachers place concern for their students’ souls foremost. Next, they explain their emotional investment to their students. Finally, they remind the students to recognize the motivation of their teacher. This assessment can bind students and teachers in a lasting and uplifting learning association.

Teaching Perspectives and Approaches

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

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

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

3. **Avoid excessive personal embellishment.** Teachers in the Book of Mormon taught the words of God’s prophets, not their “pet ideas” or their own interpretations. Alma “commanded them that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets” (Mosiah 18:19).

Gospel teachers should trust the power of the word of God without personal adornment. Students need to hear the words of the prophets, and they will be especially accountable for heeding the counsel of the current prophets; therefore, hearing, knowing, and understanding recent counsel is as imperative for our students today as it was for the
people in Book of Mormon times. In Mosiah 8:3, Ammon shared the words of their prophet for his new and uninformed students. “He also rehearsed unto them the last words which king Benjamin had taught them, and explained them to the people of king Limhi, so that they might understand all the words which he spake.”

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

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

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

A foundation has thick walls with extra reinforcing material to withstand future shocks. Sometimes in the process of building sufficient groundwork, students complain about the repetitiveness of their lesson material. Alma astutely described it as teaching *bountifully*. He explained to his students that “I know that these things were taught unto you bountifully before your dissension from among us” (Alma 34:2). Laying a foundation is not always as enjoyable as teaching advanced material, but let us remember Paul’s counsel, “Brethren, be not weary in well doing” (2 Thessalonians 3:13).
5. *Avoid teaching harmful material.* Abinadi was very concerned with proper teaching. He incisively asked a question to the wayward teachers he was investigating that we should also ask ourselves, “Therefore, what teach ye this people?” (Mosiah 12:27). Nephi exhibited wisdom in his choice of what to teach: “I, Nephi, have *not taught* my children after the manner of the Jews. . . . I have made mention unto my children concerning the judgments of God” (2 Nephi 25:6; emphasis added). Instead of bringing up works of darkness, he focused on the light (see 2 Nephi 25:2). Gospel teachers should likewise be selective in their instructional information and should not dwell on insignificant or detrimental material.

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

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

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

Capturing those moments of questioning and pointing out the difference between false and correct doctrine can lead students to be able to make better choices themselves. In Alma 33:2, Alma clears up a misunderstanding and allows the people the freedom to choose the right. “And Alma said unto them: Behold, ye have said that ye could not worship your God because ye are cast out of your synagogues.
But behold, I say unto you, if ye suppose that ye cannot worship God, ye do greatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this, ye do not understand them” (emphasis added). Helping them understand the principle of worship opened the people’s hearts to further teaching and true conversion.

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

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

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

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

Specific Constructive Teaching Techniques

The Book of Mormon can be considered a manual for teachers. Not only does it exhibit doctrine, qualifications, and teaching perspectives,
it also demonstrates specific instructional techniques that were used by exemplary teachers to help reach students. Here are teaching practices from the Book of Mormon “for our profit and learning” as teachers (1 Nephi 19:23).

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

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

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

3. **Avoid unnecessary absences.** Students need to know their teachers will consistently be there to teach them. “And there was one day in every week that was set apart that they should gather themselves together to teach the people” (Mosiah 18:25). The continual, diligent effort of teachers acts as an anchor to students. “We did magnify our office unto the Lord, taking upon us the responsibility, answering the sins of the people upon our own heads if we did not teach them the word of God with all diligence” (Jacob 1:19; emphasis added). Book of Mormon teachers took personal responsibility and interest in the righteousness of their students, giving consistent and thorough effort.
“The teachers, did labor diligently, exhorting with all long-suffering the people to diligence . . . . And after this manner did they teach them” (Jarom 1:11; emphasis added).

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

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

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

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

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

Incorrect Teaching Behavior

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

1. Avoid pride. One of the great stumbling blocks to learning is pride. Whether it resides in the teacher or in the student, pride breeds contention and misunderstanding. In an extreme case, Korihor “did rise up in great swelling words before Alma, and did revile against the priests and teachers” (Alma 30:31). Nephi links pride and improper teaching: “Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up” (2 Nephi 28:9; emphasis added).

When pride enters a classroom, the question becomes who is right, not what is right. An example of this is found in Alma 1:3, where Nehor “had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God . . . declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular.” Pride stresses the importance of the teacher more than the material, encouraging personal flourishes on gospel principles in order to promote the messenger. Nephi strongly warned about this. “Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts” (2 Nephi 28:9; emphasis added).
Pride invites competition, comparisons, and envy, thus killing the spirit of learning. “And they shall contend one with another . . . and they shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” (2 Nephi 28:4). Moroni saw that this would happen in our day when “teachers shall rise in the pride of their hearts” (Mormon 8:28). By focusing on the gospel message instead of on the appearance or popularity of us as teachers, we can better serve our students and avoid pride.

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

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

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

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

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

4. **Beware of hypocrisy.** When there are discrepancies between teaching and living, students will recognize the hypocrisy. “If ye teach the law of Moses why do ye not keep it?” (Mosiah 12:29). Teachers who are
not true followers of the Savior are without the Spirit and allow men’s ideas to infiltrate their teachings of God, as warned by Nephi in 2 Nephi 27:25: “Forasmuch as this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men.”

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

Fruits of Superior Gospel Teaching

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

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

Like these Book of Mormon teachers, God will assist those teachers who put forth conscientious effort. Ammon illustrates diligence as he preaches to King Lamoni’s people. “He did teach them . . . and he did exhort them daily, with all diligence; and they gave heed unto his word, and they were zealous for keeping the commandments of God” (Alma 21:23).
The Book of Mormon contains the central doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As shown in this article, it also is full of key doctrines about teaching. As teachers concentrate on improving their teaching, the Book of Mormon can be one of their best resources. We, as teachers, can find ample answers to perplexing pedagogical problems in our classrooms throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon. As we struggle to build a sure foundation in the next generation of Saints, let us remember the counsel and blessing of Alma to his noble son Shiblon: “May the Lord bless your soul, and receive you at the last day into his kingdom, to sit down in peace. Now go, my son, and teach the word unto this people” (Alma 38:15).

Notes

2. The Savior used several methods in His teaching recorded in 3 Nephi that are worthy of further study. Some of these follow:
   - He challenged followers (students) to know the truthfulness of the doctrine for themselves: “Feel the prints . . . that ye may know” (3 Nephi 11:14).
   - Jesus set the example in bearing testimony in His teaching: “I bear record of the Father . . . and the Holy Ghost beareth record” (3 Nephi 11:32).
   - He encouraged His students to do their own gospel study and not to rely on the teacher to provide all the elements for successful spiritual learning: “Prepare your minds for the morrow, and I come unto you again” (3 Nephi 17:3; emphasis added).
3. Lehi also exemplified fine teaching, using objects and analogies to connect his sons with the gospel of Christ (see 1 Nephi 8; 2:9–10).
4. Occasionally, an opposite result can occur: “Whosoever believed or had been taught to believe in the word of God they caused that they should be cast into the fire” (Alma 14:8; emphasis added).
In chapter 5 of the book of Jacob, we find a unique text commonly referred to as the allegory of the olive tree. President Joseph Fielding Smith once said that “the parable of Zenos . . . is one of the greatest parables ever recorded.” Composed of seventy-seven verses, this allegory is thought to follow the progression of a particular olive tree and its offspring in the Lord’s vineyard. Many readers have commented on the special nature of the allegory, with studies ranging from theological meaning, to linguistic comparisons, to actual viticultural practices. Though these studies differ in content, they are similar in one respect: each explores and explains the relationship between the tree and the Lord of the vineyard. This approach is the result of verse 3 concerning the tree itself: “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 olive tree, its offshoots, and their interaction with the Lord of the vineyard are the central features of these studies.

Equally important, yet often forgotten, is the relationship between the Lord and the servant of the vineyard. Though we are never given the name of this servant, the interaction between the Lord and His servant as the vineyard grows is worthy of its own study. More importantly, this relationship parallels the future state of the vineyard itself—eventual oneness, or the establishment of Zion on the earth.
When the tree is the central focus, the allegory is often divided into seven periods. Each period is concerned with an epoch of Israel’s temporal history, beginning with the covenant given to Abraham and ending with the Millennium. This approach is productive in understanding the future of the tree and its offspring, but it is not the only approach available, as the term “Israel” has more than one meaning. Too often, we discuss Israel solely in its biological or social context. According to this view, Israel refers to those who are literal descendants of Jacob, or Israel, and is, therefore, a title given to specific bloodlines. Although the title does fit this definition, Israel is also the title given to those who have entered into a covenant relationship with God. As Paul points out, “They are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Romans 9:6).

Elsewhere, Paul explains how both Gentile and Jew are bound by the covenant through the Atonement of Christ, thus becoming family, or “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19) and are, therefore, called Israel. The Book of Mormon also teaches that the truest nature of Israel is the covenant relationship. In 1 Nephi 14:1–2, the angel tells Nephi, “If the Gentiles shall hearken unto the Lamb of God . . . and harden not their hearts . . . they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father; yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel.” In 3 Nephi 16:12–13, the relationship between the covenant and Israel is quite clear: “And then will I remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel. . . . If the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, saith the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people.” In D&C 103:17, the Lord refers to His covenant members of the Church as “the children of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham.” When Israel is approached from this definition, the allegory does not have to represent a literal history of the tribes of Jacob’s descendants; instead, it can trace the progression of that covenant made between God and Israel.

With this in mind, we can study the allegory from a point of view in which the covenant relationships between the characters are highlighted. In this approach, the allegory is made up of three sections, each coinciding with a particular series of actions that furthers the Lord’s design. The first section starts in verse 3 and runs through verse 28 and is concerned with the first series of actions by which the Lord will seek to save His vineyard. The second section, verses 29–50, is a lamentation scene that plays a pivotal role in the relationship between the servant and the Lord. The third section begins in verse 51, continues through the second series of actions, and ends with the fulfillment of the Lord’s plan for the vineyard. This
approach takes into account the trees, but it also provides a more complete understanding of what exactly the Lord plans for the whole vineyard and follows the progression of Israel’s covenant obligations. More importantly, it allows for the actions of the servant, as a growing, maturing individual, to be just as important in the plan as the trees are.

The Servant, the Lord, and the Tree

For some readers, the Lord of the vineyard has been associated with Jesus Christ and the servant with a mortal agent, usually the prophet. But Paul Hoskisson suggests that the Lord of the vineyard was God the Father, the servant being Jesus Christ. Noting that the interaction between the Lord and the servant is vital to the allegory, he connects the servant in the allegory to the “righteous servant” mentioned in Isaiah 53:11. As Hoskisson notes, Abinadi later identifies the servant in Isaiah 53 as Christ. This reference is found in one of the four “servant” passages comprising Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 52–53. Although in 52–53 it appears that the servant is, in fact, Christ, this is not quite so clear in the three other passages.

In Isaiah 49, the servant is explicitly identified with Israel: “Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (v. 3), which is followed by the duties the servant is to perform for the Lord: “And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, . . . Thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel” (vv. 5–6). Although this language may refer to Christ, it is equally valid for other individuals, such as Joseph Smith, who appears to have used verse 2 to refer to himself. Doctrine and Covenants 86:9–10 further expands the servant Israel to include latter-day covenant members: “For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God. . . . Therefore, blessed are ye if ye continue in my goodness, a light unto the Gentiles, and through this priesthood, a savior unto my people Israel.” Note that in Isaiah 49, the term “Israel” is used to denote two identities—the individual servant and the collective social group. The same is implied in Doctrine and Covenants 86 where the “lawful heirs” are also to be a “savior” (singular) to God’s people, Israel.

Thus, as the Isaiah reference given above suggests, it may not have been foreign to the ancient Israelites to think of two interpretations of Israel—in which one representation would serve the other. Each interpretation implies an aspect of God’s relationship to Israel overall. References to communal Israel should remind the reader of the great promises made
to Abraham and the other fathers. References to individual Israel would bring to mind the intimate, personal relationship between God and the members of the covenant. Thus, the allegory of Zenos, if approached from this perspective, presents the servant as a covenant member of Israel who has responsibilities for the eventual salvation of communal Israel and the greater world.

Beginnings of the Design (Jacob 5:3–28)

The allegory begins in verse 3, where we learn that the olive tree represents a spiritually declining Israel. Verse 3 also introduces the Lord of the vineyard. Immediately, we learn of the Lord’s intent to prune, dig about, and nourish the tree in hopes of reversing the process of decay. We learn an important principle to understanding the allegory: it is the Lord, and later His servants, who is actively engaged in caring for the well-being of the trees. In verse 5, we are told that the Lord intends to nourish the tree with the hope that it will produce young shoots or saplings, which He will transfer to other parts of the vineyard. As we will see later, this is only part of His plan, but this first grafting itself will serve a twofold purpose.

Not only does the Lord intend to plant the saplings elsewhere to save the fruit of the tree but He also intends to separate the saplings to save the mother tree, for “it grieveth me that I should lose the tree” (v. 7). His plan is to replace the offensive branches with grafted branches from other parts of the vineyard. So far the agent of action has been the Lord. Now the servant is involved, though, significantly, we do not hear from him at all. In verses 7–9, the Lord explains the work concerning the mother tree and His servant. More importantly, the servant is given a duty to perform—to graft in the new wild branches into the mother tree. As far as the text states, his only concern is with this single task because he is not told where the saplings are to go. Finally, it doesn’t appear that he does any of the actual cutting on the mother tree; he only grafts in the alternate branches. The servant is a worthy one, as is seen in verse 10, where his fulfilled stewardship is duly noted.

The Lord then prepares His servant to fulfill more duties by explaining in greater detail why the grafting needs to be done. Before, the servant was merely following instructions; now, the servant learns how this grafting will benefit the tree: “Wherefore, that perhaps I might preserve the roots thereof that they perish not . . . I have done this thing” (v. 11). It is necessary for the servant to receive this understanding if he is to fulfill correctly the second set of duties to which he will be assigned. In verse 12, the Lord tells the servant to “watch the tree, and nourish it, according to my words.” The tree is now completely in the servant’s
care. Whereas earlier it was the Lord who nourished and pruned, now it will be the servant’s responsibility to keep the tree alive. Moreover, the servant is given some freedom in determining how to do these things, though he is to follow the Lord’s instructions, for we find that the servant will be left alone in this endeavor. Verses 13–14 state that the Lord was going to plant and graft in the saplings to the other parts of the vineyard, leaving the servant behind to tend the mother tree.

As recorded in verses 19–28, after an undisclosed amount of time, the Lord calls His servant to work again in the vineyard. But before the new work can commence, the servant must give a report concerning his stewardship; and, in verse 16, the servant does that: “Behold, look here; behold the tree.” The servant allows the tree’s progress to speak for his worthiness. Just by looking at the tree, the Lord is able to see that the grafts have taken and that the servant has nourished the tree properly. Having now reported on his successful labor, the servant has been found worthy of even more responsibility. As before, the performances of the duties are preceded by instruction, as the servant must be taught more in the ways of the vineyard and the Lord’s plan for the vineyard.

Earlier, the Lord had mentioned that it was His purpose to save the roots by virtue of the grafts. Now, in verse 18, He explains in much greater detail the exact relationship between the roots and the branches. Moreover, upon inspecting the tree, He acknowledges the servant’s report by pointing out that the branches have indeed strengthened the roots. This, in turn, brought out the virtue inherent in the roots, allowing the grafts to produce good fruit: “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.” Thus, the servant gains knowledge and power, as well as a greater appreciation for the efforts of his Lord.

Having learned these lessons, the servant is ready to be introduced to the rest of the vineyard. This, too, is a learning period, as reflected in verses 21 and 22. As he observes the saplings, the servant notes the poor quality of the soil and questions planting the saplings in such an environment. This observation does not necessarily indicate imprudence on the part of the servant but should instead be seen as a great teaching opportunity, allowing the Lord to explain that proper care of the saplings is not always obvious (note the similarity between this point and Jacob’s reason for giving the allegory in the first place). The Lord’s explanation does not contradict the servant’s observation. Instead, it reveals that the poor ground was part of the overall design of the vineyard: “Counsel me
not; I knew that it was a poor spot of ground.” This acknowledgement is followed by the Lord’s statement that He had nourished the tree the entire time and that the choice of the ground along with the nourishing had produced good fruit. This lesson is repeated three times as the servant and the Lord visit each of the saplings. In each case, the Lord emphasizes the nourishing He had done with the poor ground and the subsequent good fruit. Finally, at the last sapling, the Lord points out that the ground was good and that He had nourished the tree but that the fruit was only partially good.

At this point, new duties are given: “Pluck off the branches that have not brought forth good fruit, and cast them into the fire” (v. 26). Unlike the first time the servant received his duties, this assignment appears to test the servant’s understanding of his role concerning the tree. Before, his only concern was the mother tree; now he is to work with the saplings. Moreover, he has been called to cut off the useless branches just as the Lord of the vineyard did with the mother tree. But the servant realizes that there are steps in the process that have not been fulfilled yet. He says, “Let us prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it a little longer, that perhaps it may bring forth good fruit unto thee” (v. 27). This is the same process that the Lord did with the mother tree prior to its grafting. Thus, the servant has realized that before cutting the branches, a servant must dig and prune. Further, the servant has realized that the cutting itself is necessary for the future growth of the tree. The servant’s answer, therefore, signifies not only that he has absorbed the instruction given him but also that he has watched the Lord work. He has learned the correct way to strengthen the saplings and has proven himself worthy of greater responsibility in the vineyard.

Although it appears that the servant changed the mind of the Lord of the vineyard, he was actually being tested in his stewardship. This feature in the relationship between the servant and the Lord is not unprecedented. Other scriptures record similar real-life exchanges between God and His chosen. Genesis 18:16–33 records the Lord’s discussion with Abraham concerning the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here we read of the Lord’s plan for the cities and of Abraham’s repeated requests for their preservation. Each request is based on the number of righteous inhabitants of the cities. Abraham begins by asking for a reprieve if there are fifty righteous citizens. When he is granted this, he asks for a reprieve if there are forty—and so on until he gets the final reprieve if there are only ten such inhabitants. Like the servant in the allegory, it appears that Abraham changed the mind of the Lord; in fact, it appears that he did so again and again.
But when the story of Abraham is examined more closely, we see that, like the servant, this event concerns Abraham’s stewardship, not the Lord’s decision making. First to be noted is that the cities were destroyed, as there were not even ten righteous inhabitants. No doubt the Lord was well aware of this during His exchange with Abraham. Knowing this, we are left to wonder what was the point of the exchange at all. Part of the answer may be in verse 17, where the Lord soliloquizes, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” Note that the question is not whether He should destroy Sodom and Gomorrah but whether He should explain all His actions to Abraham. The soliloquy continues as the Lord explains why Abraham should know the plans, “seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation” (v. 18). It is because of Abraham’s great mission that he should understand the plan. Finally, the soliloquy ends as the Lord further explains His purpose based on the future actions of Abraham’s covenant, saying, “And all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him” (v. 18). This aspect of Abraham’s mission is important. Although Abraham is to have a nation arise from him, it is through Abraham that all mankind will be blessed. Abraham is responsible for much more than his direct descendants. This, in turn, puts the entire exchange in another light. Already knowing the outcome, the exchange tells the Lord something about Abraham, whose concern for the two cities demonstrates his active awareness of his stewardship beyond his family upon which the covenant hinges.

Moses, too, appears to have been tested concerning his stewardship. In Exodus 32, Israel has seemingly pushed God to the point of no return: “I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation” (vv. 9–10). Numbers 14 also records the Lord stating to Moses, “I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they” (v. 13). In keeping with his stewardship, Moses intervenes on behalf of Israel. Having said this, the Old Testament as a whole makes it abundantly clear that it was never the Lord’s true intention to completely destroy Israel. This does not mean they would not experience discipline for their sins (see Joseph Smith Translation—Exodus 32:12), but, as in the case of Abraham, it does tell us that the Lord knew that Israel was not going to be destroyed at that time. Thus, the exchange between Moses and the Lord was also a test for Moses.\(^\text{15}\)
In Exodus 32:13, Moses “reminds” the Lord of the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (significantly referred to as the Lord’s servants) and the promises concerning land and posterity. But as was mentioned above, the covenant of Abraham also included the provision that he would be a blessing to the nations. Moses, like Abraham, appears to understand that his stewardship extends to those beyond Israel. In both Exodus 32 and Numbers 14, Moses points out that the total destruction of Israel would cause Egypt to not understand the true nature of God: “Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?” (Exodus 32:12). This question suggests two things. First, Moses is concerned with the future status of Egypt and its relationship with God just as much as he is concerned with Israel’s future relationship with God. Moreover, the statement implies that aspect of the Abrahamic covenant in which all nations are blessed since it is Israel’s continued existence that will bless Egypt with a true knowledge of God. Either way, it is the greater stewardship of Moses concerning more than just his immediate duties that is tested. Like Abraham, Moses passed the test.

Lament of the Lord of the Vineyard (vv. 29–50)

After another undisclosed period of time, the Lord and the servant go down again to review the progress of the vineyard. Their first stop, as before, is the mother tree. There they discover that the fruit has gone wild, whereupon the Lord of the vineyard turns to His servant and asks, “What shall we do unto the tree, that I may preserve again good fruit?” (v. 33). This question represents a new stage in the developing relationship between the servant and the Lord of the vineyard. Clearly, the servant has advanced in both his knowledge and in his care for those parts of the vineyard he has been given stewardship over—specifically, those trees associated with Israel. From the beginning, his primary responsibility has been the mother tree. As we saw earlier, the tree’s welfare was turned over completely to the servant (supervised by the Lord of the vineyard). That duty has not been lifted, so the servant is still responsible for the tree. Even though the Lord knows exactly what to do, He gives the servant the chance to find out for himself.

The servant demonstrates his maturation and growth in his responses. He says, “Behold, because thou didst graft in the branches of the wild olive-tree they have nourished the roots, that they are alive and they have not perished; wherefore thou beholdest that they are yet good” (v. 34). Not only does the servant demonstrate his mastery of the
knowledge concerning the health of the tree but also he has learned that
the Lord has a master design, even if he, the servant, doesn’t understand
or see all of it. Compare this response to when he questioned the Lord’s
choice of soil for planting the saplings (see v. 21), and we can see the
development of the servant’s understanding. The Lord, in turn, recog-
nizes the insights provided by His servant, and in verse 37, He explains
the direness of the new situation. Even though the roots are alive, the
branches have brought forth so much evil fruit that the roots themselves
have been infected and are beginning to die.

The second stop is the saplings and branches planted elsewhere.
Upon inspection, the fruit there is also found to be corrupt. At this
point, the Lord cries out, “What could I have done more for my
vineyard” (v. 41). Thus begins the lament presented in verses 41–47.
Verse 47 highlights the poignant nature of the Lord’s sorrow over the
vineyard: “What could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slack-
ened mine hand, that I have not nourished it? Nay, I have nourished it,
and I have digged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it;
and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the
end draweth nigh. And it grieveth me that I should hew down all the
trees of my vineyard.” We notice immediately that the lament is not just
for Israel and its saplings but for the entire vineyard.16 This observation
is significant because up to this point, the focus in the allegory and in
the vineyard has been on Israel and the saplings. There have only been
hints to a larger design in the dealings with the trees. Now, though, the
Lord’s concern for the entire vineyard is made explicit. As we will see,
the servant must understand and share this concern if he is to progress in
his stewardship. Thus, though the lament appears to be spontaneous, it
is, in fact, another learning experience for the servant. The servant is not
the first to learn this lesson by witnessing the Lord’s grief. Nor is this the
only scriptural form of this lesson.

Moses 7 records an exchange between God and Enoch after
Enoch had successfully brought his people back to the presence of God
(see v. 21). In verse 20, Enoch confidently declares that “surely Zion shall
dwell in safety forever.” He is satisfied in the eternal security of his people.
The Lord agrees with Enoch, saying, “Zion have I blessed,” and He then
adds, “but the residue of the people have I cursed” (v. 20). This second
clause suggests that something is missing in Enoch’s initial declaration. As
we will see, Enoch needs to learn something concerning the “residue of
the people” and himself before he can declare victory. Enoch begins to
learn this lesson in verse 23 as he is taken into heaven. There, he imme-
diately witnesses the entire earth covered in darkness because of the chain
of the adversary, as Satan looks up into the faces of Enoch and God and
laughs. Following this, Enoch witnesses the exaltation of Zion (see v. 27)
and sees God’s sorrowful reaction to the “residue of the people.”

God’s reaction is different than what Enoch was expecting, which is
expressed in verses 28–30. Here Enoch asks with surprise, “How is it that
the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the moun-
tains?” (v. 28). Enoch inquires of God, “How is it that thou canst weep,
seeing thou art holy . . . [and that] thou art just; thou art merciful and kind
forever; and thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom . . . and naught
but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy
shall go before thy face and have no end; how is it thou canst weep?”
(vv. 29–31). Though we are told that the weeping came as a direct result
of God’s observation of the residue—those who were left behind after the
exaltation of Zion (see v. 28)—this has not impressed itself on Enoch, who
is shocked that God would weep, even though Zion was safe.

That it was a lesson for Enoch becomes apparent when God
states that the residue Enoch has ignored is, in fact, family: “The
Lord said unto Enoch: Behold these thy brethren” (v. 32). Up to
this point, Enoch’s only concern has been Zion. Now, the Lord has
begun the process by which Enoch may open his eyes to a larger
responsibility. The same designation, “thy brethren,” is repeated
two more times over the next four verses, emphasizing the familial
relationship between the residue and Enoch, the presiding authority
of Zion.17 With the relationship now properly understood, Enoch
is prepared to comprehend the sorrow of God. In verse 37, he is
told that God weeps because of the suffering that Enoch’s brethren,
the residue, will have to endure because of their sins: “Wherefore
should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?” Later, in
verses 39–40, the Lord states, “They shall be in torment; wherefore,
for this shall the heavens weep,” and He adds, “yea, and all the
workmanship of mine hands” (v. 40). This added content includes
Enoch among those who will weep because, as he has learned, the
“residue of the people,” which he had previously ignored, are, in
fact, his responsibility as much as Zion is. His joy is now tempered
by the same sorrow he had witnessed in his Lord. “Wherefore
Enoch knew, and looked upon their wickedness, and their mis-
cery, and wept and stretched forth his arms, and his heart swelled
wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned; and all eternity shook”
(v. 41). By witnessing God’s lament, Enoch came to understand the
true nature of his stewardship, which in turn allowed him to become
even more like God and progress into something greater.18
In the allegory, the servant, like Enoch, experiences the Lord’s lamentation. Similarly, the lament appears to teach the servant that his stewardship, just like his Master’s, includes the entire vineyard. Moreover, he is able to use the knowledge and experience he has with the mother tree and its saplings to explain what has happened to the entire vineyard. “Is it not the loftiness of thy vineyard—have not the branches overcome the roots which are good?” (Jacob 5:48). Before, the servant did not recognize the overburdening of the roots (see above). Now, he can discern the true nature of the problem for all the trees. His increased discernment, as well as the new understanding of his stewardship, explains his response to the Lord’s injunction to burn the vineyard down: “Spare it [the entire vineyard] a little longer” (v. 50).

Like Enoch and Moses, the servant has become a type of Christ as he mediates between the Lord of the vineyard and the trees. Because of the corrupt nature of the entire vineyard, the servant could have simply followed the Lord’s instructions and burned down the vineyard. The lament demonstrates that such an action would have been justified. Moses, too, would have been justified in doing nothing, as he was not responsible for the individual sins committed by Israel. Ultimately, Christ in the garden had no need to suffer for His own actions. He, too, was justified. In these cases, the servants would have been justified without mediating on behalf of others. Thus, each was tested to see if he would accept a greater stewardship and follow his Master. As we have seen, Moses passed this test, and so did the servant in Zenos’s allegory. It goes without saying that Christ did so as well.

Establishment of Zion (vv. 51–77)

As was pointed out earlier, the lament was necessary for the servant to understand his relationship with the rest of the vineyard. That this was the purpose for the servant to witness the lament can be seen in verse 51. Here, the Lord responds to the servant’s request for more time with a strong affirmative, saying, “Yea, I will spare it a little longer, for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard.” It does not appear that the Lord ever truly planned to burn the vineyard. In fact, the verse reads just the opposite; it was always His plan to preserve the vineyard as much as possible. Moreover, as we saw, the lament revealed the true nature of the Lord’s design. It is the success of the whole vineyard and not just a few trees that is His true concern. This understanding is made explicit as the second set of actions in His overall design are begun in verse 52. Verses 3–28 described the first set of actions in which the saplings were separated from the mother
tree and were transplanted to the various parts of the vineyard, and the mother tree was rejuvenated by receiving grafts from other trees in the vineyard. Now, the branches of the mother tree and the branches of the saplings are to be grafted back into each other.

Verses 67–68 record the reasoning behind this series of actions: “And the branches [saplings] of the natural [mother] tree will I graft in again into the natural [mother] tree, and the branches of the natural [mother] tree will I graft into the natural branches [saplings] of the [mother] tree; and thus will I bring them together again, that they shall bring forth natural fruit, and they shall be one.” The purpose of the Lord of the vineyard has always been to bring together again the saplings and the mother tree. But this unity between the trees representing Israel was not the only purpose to the Lord’s work. In verse 74, we read, “And the Lord had preserved unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; and they became like unto one body; and the fruits were equal.”

Yet the Lord’s true concern is for the entire vineyard—not just for the growth of the mother tree and her saplings: “That I may have joy again in the fruit of my vineyard,” and, perhaps, that I may rejoice exceedingly that I have preserved the roots and the branches of the first fruit” (v. 60; emphasis added). Note that His end design was to rejoice both in the fruit of the entire vineyard and in the harvest of the first fruit—that is, the mother tree and her saplings. Moreover, just as He sought for oneness among the mother tree and her saplings, He also planned for the eventual oneness of the entire vineyard. He says, “And blessed art thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in the vineyard . . . and have brought unto me again the natural fruit, that my vineyard is no more corrupted, and the bad is cast away, behold ye shall have joy with me because of the fruit of my vineyard” (v. 75). It is at this point that we truly see the grand design the Lord of the vineyard had concerning the tree representing Israel. By separating, disseminating, and grafting the saplings and the mother tree with the other trees of the vineyard, the Lord has not only strengthened and preserved the mother tree but also has succeeded in transforming the entire vineyard by spreading Israel to all the trees. Now, as He grafts the branches in again, disseminating them across the vineyard once again, the oneness is achieved. As one cannot distinguish the fruit of any given tree, it all is good. At this point, we see how the paradox Jacob sought to explain is answered by the allegory. The Lord is the stumbling block of Israel because He scatters and cuts off what appears to be healthy Israel. But He is also the foundation stone because He
strengthens the roots and saplings of the mother tree. Finally, He is also the means by which Israel fulfills its covenantal obligations to all the family of mankind because His actions graft Israel to the other trees of the vineyard, bringing about the health of His entire vineyard.

The growth of the servant also reaches its climax at this point. Having proved himself as one who is like the Lord of the vineyard in his care for the entire vineyard, now the Lord gives him the greatest responsibility of all: “Wherefore, go to, and call servants, that we may labor diligently with our might in the vineyard” (v. 61). The servant now performs the same duties the Lord of the vineyard did at the beginning of the allegory—that of calling servants to their own individual stewardships. Having proved his care, love, and stewardship for the vineyard, the servant receives responsibility to raise others to the same standard by going through the same process he experienced. At this point, the servant has become like the Lord of the vineyard in every way. This is reflected in verse 71, where he and all the others who have become like the Lord will “have joy in the fruit which I [the Lord] shall lay up unto myself” if they prove faithful and labor with their might in the vineyard.21

Finally, the Lord commends His servants by taking the conditional promise recorded in verse 71 and making it unconditional: “Blessed art thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard, and have kept my commandments, and have brought unto me again the natural fruit, that my vineyard is no more corrupted, and the bad is cast away, behold ye shall have joy with me because of the fruit of my vineyard” (v. 75). The promise is that they will be with the Lord forever. Thus, unity is the end result of the Lord-servant relationship. The trees are also unified at the end of this process. The servant becomes one with the Lord and, in fact, becomes a lord himself, enjoying the fruit of the vineyard as the Lord does and enjoying the companionship of the Lord as an equal. This outcome fulfills the covenantal obligations of Israel individually. In Doctrine and Covenants 86:11, the Lord states, “Therefore, blessed are ye if ye continue in my goodness, a light unto the Gentiles, and . . . a savior unto my people Israel.” These are exactly the same duties outlined for the servant in Isaiah 49. The servant has become a lord of the vineyard, becoming a savior to the vineyard as well.

Conclusion

In Zenos’s allegory, Israel may be seen as both the tree, representing the communal nature of Israel, and as the servant, representing the individual nature of Israel. When read in this manner, we gain a greater
appreciation of the Lord’s design for all of His children through His chosen people, Israel. Because Israel is grafted and transplanted across the vineyard, all have the opportunity to become a part of Israel, thus fulfilling the covenantal promise given to Abraham. It is in this manner that Israel blesses all mankind. Yet Israel is not just the passive tree; as the servant, Israel is an active participant in accomplishing the plan. By fulfilling the duties assigned to it, Israel, as the servant, learns not only about the vineyard but also about what it means to be a lord. Moreover, the process the servant experiences leads to that lordship.

Thus, the allegory follows the covenantal progress of Israel both on the individual level and on the communal level. Although this might not have been the stated purpose of Jacob, it appears to have been understood by Lehi, who experienced a twofold vision of the tree of life. Not only did he see himself as the individual relating to the tree but also he witnessed “numberless concourses” seeking the tree. This duality of the individual and the communal, reflected in both Nephi’s dream and Zenos’s allegory, may have resonated with Lehi, which would explain his immediate discourse on the allegory following his presentation of the dream (see 1 Nephi 9–10).

We should not be surprised that the allegory still resonates today. The allegory reveals truths concerning who we are, what we are expected to do, and what we can become. More importantly, the allegory reveals to us that the Lord truly has a plan, that He is aware at all times what is going on in His vineyard, and that He strives only for the best of all involved. The true power of the allegory comes from understanding that He is seeking not only for oneness and good fruit but also for servants who become companions, associates, and equals—or “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, . . . that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17).”

Notes


2. This division is discussed in great detail in Paul Y. Hoskisson, “The Allegory of the Olive Tree in Jacob,” in The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: FARMS, 1996), 70–104. He is not alone in this approach. See also Dennis L. Largey, ed., Book of Mormon Reference Companion (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), and especially Book of Mormon 121 Student Manual (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

3. This point has led to modest differences in the seven-epoch chronologies.
Hoskisson points out that his division of temporal periods differs from Monte S. Nyman’s chronology (see Hoskisson, “The Allegory,” 100ff.; see also Monte S. Nyman, An Ensign to All People [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987], 24).


5. Hoskisson, “The Allegory,” 73. See also Largey, Book of Mormon Reference Companion, where the servant is identified with the Savior. The Reference Companion notes, though, that others equate the servant with the prophets.

6. This is made explicit only in the Book of Mormon. Jewish exegesis states that the reference referred to Moses (see b. Sota 14a in I. Epstein, The Babylonian Talmud, vol. 20 (1932), 55–56, 73–74).


8. Some have suggested that the Hebrew structure behind the verse allows for alternate interpretations, which would take away the identification of the servant as Israel. Interestingly, Nephi translates the Hebrew text in the same manner as recorded in the King James Version of the Bible in 1 Nephi 21. After recording changes in the first verse, he then records, “And said unto me: Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (v. 3).

9. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 304: “I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priestcraft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty.” See Isaiah 49:2–3: “In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; and said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel.”

10. See also Psalms 105:23; 136:22; and Jeremiah 30:10 for other references to Israel as the singular servant of the Lord.

11. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, Revelations of the Restoration (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 622, speaking of Doctrine and Covenants 86:11: “This phrase combines the prophetic language of Isaiah and Obadiah. It identifies the destiny of Israel, meaning those who hold the priesthood restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith, which is to gather the scattered remnant of Abraham’s seed... It foreshadows the role that those gathering Israel will play in the house of the Lord as they perform ordinances for their kindred dead” (emphasis added).

12. Following are references to individuals who also acted as God’s servants. For Moses, see Exodus 14:31; 33:11; Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 1:1, 2, 7; 8:31; 13:8; and Malachi 4:4. For Joshua, see Numbers 14:24 and Joshua 24:29. In the Psalms and the prose texts of Kings, it is David who is the servant of God.

can be seen both in the communal and individual sense when we read the allegory, even though her central focus is still the trees and the Lord: “In scripture the meaning often lies in the aggregate of allusions and associations. The olive tree is one of these layered symbols. It is Israel at the macrocosmic level; it is also an individual Israelite being nourished by an attentive God” (Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory,” 13).

14. This does not necessarily mean that the servant did not do this—just that these actions, if performed by the servant, are not mentioned explicitly in the text. That the servant may have been involved in the cutting process can be seen in verse 7, where the servant is told that he needs to go “pluck” the wild branches. Later, the pronoun “we” allows for the servant to have been involved in the actual pruning process for the mother tree.

15. This apparent change of mind by God has been discussed elsewhere in Latter-day Saint literature. See Blake T. Ostler’s review of Francis J. Beckwith and Stephen E. Parrish, “The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis,” in FARMS Review of Books 8, no. 2 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1996): “The most faithful way to understand this passage, it seems to me, is to view Yahweh as having formed an intention to do one thing—and thus at one time believing that he would do it—and at a later time changing his mind and coming to believe something different. Yet if God did not know at the time of his conversation with Moses whether Israel would be destroyed, then certainly there were a good many things about the future that he did not know.” Ellis T. Rasmussen, like this author, suggests that Moses was being tested: “Moses declined the Lord’s offer to substitute him and his seed for the apostate Israelites. If this offer was a test, Moses passed it humbly, pleasing with God for mercy for his erring people” (A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994], 119). Sidney B. Sperry suggests the same thing: “Through long experience he [Moses] knew the faults and failings of his people. They were none too easy to handle. And now the Lord was offering to make of him a great nation in their stead. What should he do? His answer is a wonderful tribute to another quality he possessed, namely, loyalty to his God and to his people despite the frailties of the latter” (The Spirit of the Old Testament [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980], 41).

16. Over the seven verses of the lament, the totality of the vineyard is referred to seven times.

17. The use of kinship language here and through the next few verses reveals the covenant obligations of all the parties. Frank Moore Cross discusses the relationship between kinship terminology and covenant language (see Cross, From Epic to Canon [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998], 3–21). He states, “The language of covenant . . . is the language of kinship” (11). It is this kinship-covenantal relationship that Enoch does not possess with the “residue” that God makes him aware of. The idea of the Divine Kinsman is also evidenced. According to Cross, “the God of the Fathers” was the Divine Kinsman, who, like the mortal kinsman, “fulfills the mutual obligations and receives the privileges of kinship.” In Moses 7:33, the Lord states that He had given Enoch’s brethren the commandment to love one another and choose Him as their Father, “but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood.” The father they did choose is mentioned in verse 37: “But behold, their sins shall be upon the heads of their fathers; Satan shall be their father.”

18. In later Jewish literature, Enoch is taken into the company of the gods, becoming one of the divine beings around God, and is actually given the name
YHWH Qaton, or the lesser Yahweh.

19. Arthur Henry King, “Language Themes in Jacob 5: ‘The Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts Is the House of Israel’ (Isaiah 5:7),” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 146, says, “Immediately after agreeing to the servant’s suggestion that the trees should further be spared, the Lord imposes action—the immediacy is such that we would presume that the Lord had been prepared to continue. That would mean that the Lord’s decision to hew down the trees at this point functioned more to find out how the servant would react than as a decision.”

20. The theme of oneness and Zion is the central focus of M. Catherine Thomas’s study of the allegory: “One of the key insights that emerges from the allegory is that the power of the atonement seeks to affect men at every level of their existence. It urges people together geographically into Zions” (Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory,” 19).

21. Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 2:57: “Thus through this scattering the Lord has caused Israel to mix with the nations and bring the Gentiles within the blessings of the seed of Abraham. . . . It is by this scattering that the Gentile nations have been blessed, and if they will truly repent they are entitled to all the blessings promised to Israel, ‘which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.’”

22. See James E. Faulconer, “The Olive Tree and the Work of God: Jacob 5 and Romans 11,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 347–66. See also Thomas, “Jacob’s Allegory,” 19: “Finally, an individual must discover Jacob’s mystery for himself. The greatest value of the allegory may be that it serves to make one conscious of the efforts of the Lord to draw him by ‘the enticings of the Holy Spirit’ (Mosiah 3:19) into a working relationship with a powerful Benefactor.”
The Brother of Jared Sees the Finger of the Lord
Painting by Arnold Friberg

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A land lover at heart, I have always been awestruck by the faith of the Jaredites during their journey to the promised land. In describing the drama on the sea, the account uses phrases like “furious wind,” “tossed upon the waves,” “buried in the depths,” “mountain waves,” and “terrible tempests” (see Ether 6:5–6). No doubt the trip was filled with peril and high adventure. Yet there was little fear in the small vessels. Surrounded by nothing but water and sailing in boats devoid of rudders, sails, or outboard motors, the Jaredite travelers were miraculously filled with assurance that “there was no water that could hurt them. . . . No monster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them” (Ether 6:7, 10).

Bathed in light whether they were above the water or under the water, the voyagers did not spend their time in fear. Instead, “they did sing praises unto the Lord; yea, the brother of Jared did sing praises unto the Lord, and he did thank and praise the Lord all the day long; and when the night came, they did not cease to praise the Lord” (Ether 6:9). The Jaredites traveled not by fear but by faith in Christ, and He lighted their way.

The spiritual context of the last days—the days in which we live and teach—parallels the perilous voyage of the Jaredites. Elder Robert D. Hales said, “We are living through turbulent times. A great storm of evil has come upon the earth. The winds of wickedness howl about us; the waves of war beat against our ship.” Recently, President Boyd K. Packer commented on the flood of evil sweeping the earth:
The world is spiraling downward at an ever-quickening pace. I am sorry to tell you that it will not get better. It is my purpose to charge each of you as teachers with the responsibility—to put you on alert. These are days of great spiritual danger for our youth.

I know of nothing in the history of the Church or in the history of the world to compare with our present circumstances. Nothing happened in Sodom and Gomorrah which exceeds in wickedness and depravity that which surrounds us now.

Words of profanity, vulgarity, and blasphemy are heard everywhere. Unspeakable wickedness and perversion were once hidden in dark places; now they are in the open, even accorded legal protection.

At Sodom and Gomorrah these things were localized. Now they are spread across the world, and they are among us. I need not—I will not—identify each evil that threatens our youth. It is difficult for man to get away from it.2

Whereas the Jaredites conquered the elements of nature with their faith, we are now called upon to conquer the appetites of the natural man in a world that caters to every carnal instinct.

As we seek to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ in these difficult times, we can pattern our efforts after the successful and courageous Jaredites. Specifically, by likening the principles the brother of Jared and his people applied in building ships to our efforts in building lessons, we will be able to plan lessons filled with light. This light will lead our students on, giving them hope and strength as they seek to cross the “angry deep . . . and rest on the blissful shore.”3

“Go to work and build, after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built. . . . According to the instructions of the Lord” (Ether 2:16).

Just as the Jaredites were to build barges according to the instructions of the Lord, we have a great opportunity to be led by inspiration. But it is not enough merely to seek for inspiration without studying things out in our minds. “Teaching does not remove responsibility from the teacher for prayerful and pondering preparation,” said Elder Neal A. Maxwell. “Teaching by the Spirit is not the equivalent of going on ‘automatic pilot.’ We still need a carefully worked out flight plan. Studying out something in our own minds involves the Spirit in our preparations as well as in our presentations. We must not err, like Oliver Cowdery, by taking no thought except to ask God for his Spirit (see D&C 9:7).” Elder Maxwell then added, “Seeking the Spirit is best done when we ask the Lord to take the lead of an already informed mind, in which things have been ‘studied out.’”4
Teaching by the Spirit is a partnership and a sacred trust. The *Teaching the Gospel Handbook* states that teaching by the Spirit takes place “when the Holy Ghost is performing his role or functions with the teacher, with the student, or with both. This can happen during lesson preparation and lesson presentation. It can happen as teachers interact with students outside of class, or even while teachers are just thinking how best to help their students. In some cases, the Spirit may touch a student’s mind or heart long after class is over.” Simply put, without the influence of the Spirit, we will fail in our work.

“And they were small, and they were light upon the water, even like unto the lightness of a fowl upon the water. And they were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight” *(Ether 2:16–17).*

The oceangoing vessels built by the Jaredites exhibited some interesting characteristics. First, they were small and light. This quality made them extremely buoyant. Second, Moroni points out they were “tight.” He mentions this element of design five times within one verse: “And they were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight, even that they would hold water like unto a dish; and the bottom thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the sides thereof were tight like unto a dish; and the ends thereof were peaked; and the top thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the length thereof was the length of a tree; and the door thereof, when it was shut, was tight like unto a dish” *(Ether 2:17; emphasis added).*

With such a big, vibrant, and powerful ocean, it would seem logical for the Jaredites to build big ships to match. Yet it was the small, simple design that kept the people afloat. As religious educators, we should build lessons that have similar qualities of the Jaredite vessels. Our lessons should be small, light, and tight. As teachers, we will not find the power we need in complex, high-maintenance, emotion-manipulating lessons. On the contrary, by small and simple lessons will great things be brought to pass. Below are four ways we can follow the Jaredite ship design in building powerful, unsinkable lessons.

First, we should make sure that our lessons are doctrinally “tight.” Elder Paul V. Johnson shared Elder Jeffrey R. Holland’s counsel on this subject at a CES conference:

Brethren and sisters, please be cautious and restrained and totally orthodox in all matters of Church doctrine. This is, as you might suppose, of great concern to the Brethren, our employers in this great work. And while they love us and help and trust us individually and collectively—and they do—they cannot fail to respond to some anxiety
expressed by a member of the Church who feels that some inappropriate doctrinal or historical position has been taken in the classroom. It is in light of this rather constant danger always before us . . . that I give you these cautions and reminders. . . .

With this appropriate restraint, what we then teach must be in harmony with the prophets and the holy scriptures. We are not called upon to teach exotic, titillating, or self-serving doctrines. Surely we have our educational hands full effectively communicating the most basic and fundamental principles of salvation. . . . Continue to study for the rest of your life, but use caution and limit your classroom instruction to what the Brethren prescribe. Listen carefully and see what they choose to teach at general conference—and they are ordained.6

President Harold B. Lee also stated, “You’re to teach the old doctrines, not so plain that they can just understand, but you must teach the doctrines of the Church so plainly that no one can misunderstand.”7

Second, we should use simple but memorable methods in our teaching. In a recent address to mission presidents, President Packer suggested:

The way the Savior taught, and the way you can teach, is both simple and very profound. If you choose a tangible object as a symbol for a doctrine, you can teach just as He did. A teacher can associate the doctrine with an object already known, which can be seen with physical eyes. . . .

Now faith is not really exactly like a seed, nor is the kingdom of heaven exactly like a net or a treasure or leaven (see Luke 13:21) or “a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls” (Matthew 13:45). But with these illustrations, Jesus was able to open the eyes of His disciples—not their natural eyes but the eyes of their understanding (see Matthew 13:15; John 12:40; Acts 28:27; Ephesians 1:18; 2 Nephi 16:10; D&C 76:12, 19; 88:11; 110:1).

With the eyes of our understanding, we see things that are spiritual. With our spirits reaching out, we can touch things that are spiritual and feel them. Then we can see and we can feel things that are invisible to the physical senses. Remember, Nephi told his rebellious brothers, who had rejected a message from an angel, “Ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words” (1 Nephi 17:45; emphasis added). . . .

Ordinary teachers responsible to teach the doctrines and to testify of spiritual things have within their own personal experience everyday things which can be likened unto things which are spiritual.8

Third, we should have faith in the word of God. The Teaching the Gospel handbook reminds us:

Satan would have teachers believe that students will not like studying the scriptures, or that one cannot teach the scriptures day after day and
be successful. But the power of the Lord’s word is sure. The scriptures contain “the words of life” (D&C 84:85). The prophet Alma said that the word has a more powerful effect upon the mind “than the sword, or anything else” (Alma 31:5). The word of God “healeth the wounded soul” (Jacob 2:8) and “will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3). The scriptures can give the youth the power to resist the “fiery darts of the adversary” (1 Nephi 15:24) and help them become “throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:17).

Elder Henry B. Eyring taught that having faith in the word of God is essential if we are to succeed in helping students become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ:

> Whether the miracle comes in a moment or over years, as is far more common, it is the doctrine of Jesus Christ that drives the change. We sometimes underestimate the power that pure doctrine has to penetrate the hearts of people. Why did so many respond to the words of the missionaries when the Church was so young, so small, and seemingly so strange? What did Brigham Young and John Taylor and Heber C. Kimball preach in the streets and on the hills of England? They taught that the Lord had opened a new dispensation, that He had given us a Prophet of God, that the priesthood was restored, that the Book of Mormon was the word of God, and that we had a glorious new day. They taught that the pure gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored.

> That pure doctrine went down into the hearts then, as it will now, because the people were starved and the doctrine was taught simply. . . .

> Most of those early converts in England had known they were hungry for the true word of God. Our students may not know that they are fainting from famine, but the words of God will slake a thirst they did not know they had, and the Holy Ghost will take it down into their hearts. If we make the doctrine simple and clear, and if we teach out of our own changed hearts, the change for them will come as surely as it did for Enos. ¹⁰

> Sometimes in the earnest desire to catch students’ attention, I have neglected the scriptures and used a time-consuming object lesson, video clip, or other method that captured the attention I was seeking but lost the Spirit. Instead of trusting the small, tight, pure power of the word of God, I was trying for the “safety” of a big ship. Elder Eyring’s counsel has been helpful to me:

> Now, there may be times when we feel that we must add some enrichment to our curriculum. . . . Our first thoughts for something to add usually turn to something we know has held [the students’] interest in some other setting. Our students increasingly have been exposed to and attracted to various forms of worldly entertainment. President Clark’s message [“The Charted Course”] suggests how to make that choice of
what to add, what enrichment to bring, how to make that choice wisely. He seemed to anticipate the media-soaked world in which we and future generations would live. He promised that we would know, if we will inquire, what experiences will invite the Spirit and what will repel the very influence of the Spirit we seek. Here is his prayer for us in that talk, and I now make it to you my promise:

“May God bless you always in all your righteous endeavors. May He quicken your understanding, increase your wisdom, enlighten you by experience, bestow upon you patience, charity, and, as among your most precious gifts, endow you with the discernment of spirits that you may certainly know the spirit of righteousness and its opposite as they come to you. May He give you entrance to the hearts of those you teach and then make you know that as you enter there you stand in holy places that must be neither polluted nor defiled, either by false or corrupting doctrine or by sinful misdeed. May He enrich your knowledge with skill and power to teach righteousness. May your faith and your testimonies increase, and your ability to encourage and foster them in others grow greater every day—all that the youth of Zion may be taught, built up, encouraged, heartened, that they may not fall by the wayside, but go on to eternal life, that these blessings coming to them, you through them may be blessed also” (Charted Course, 12).

With that blessing of President Clark, we will never choose to enliven our seminaries and institutes with music, or performances, or speakers, or humor which might offend the Spirit. 11

Fourth, we should avoid trying to cover too much ground. Our lessons should be focused like a laser instead of a vast collection of doctrines given with the hope of hitting something. This shotgun approach to preparing and giving lessons is burdensome and ineffective and was among a list of dos and don’ts given in a talk by Elder Maxwell: “Don’t . . . present a ‘smorgasbord,’ hoping someone will find something of value. The lack of focus leaves the receivers uncertain. . . . Know the substance of what is being presented. Ponder and pray over its simple focus.” 12

Similarly, we should be conscious that students will have more than this lesson to hear the truths presented. Therefore, we should follow the Lord’s pattern for instruction and teach a little at a time, line upon line and precept upon precept. Again, Elder Maxwell commented, “We worship a Lord who teaches us precept by precept, brethren, so even when we are teaching our children the gospel, let’s not dump the whole load of hay.” 13

As we apply the pattern of Jaredite boatbuilding to lesson preparation, we will seek to keep lessons simple, doctrinally pure, focused, and connected to the word of God. Following these principles will prevent us from “looking beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14). Although the excitement of “fire, wind, and earthquake” methods may seem to be what
our students are used to, our students will find the Lord in the still, small voice associated with teaching the pure gospel, and that is what they truly need (see 1 Kings 19:11–12).

“And I know, O Lord, that thou hast all power, and can do whatsoever thou wilt for the benefit of man; therefore touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea” (Ether 3:4).

After all the effort and work of the brother of Jared and his company, their vessels were dark inside. The brother of Jared was required to come up with a solution. He had to melt the stones, climb the mountain, and importune the Lord for light. Light did not come until his efforts were touched by the finger of the Lord.

In teaching the gospel, we should also follow this pattern. It takes hard work to prepare interesting, variety-filled lessons that will appeal to students. It takes knowledge of the scriptures and the words of the prophets. It requires an understanding of our students—who they are now and their potential for the future. It takes humor, creativity, and insight. But after all the work we bring to the lesson, if the Lord does not touch our efforts, there will be no light.

We need to prepare solid lessons, and then it is encumbent upon us to live and teach in such a way that the Lord may touch our efforts and make them come alive in the hearts of our students. President Brigham Young taught, “When an individual, filled with the Spirit of God, declares the truth of heaven, the sheep hear that [see D&C 29:7], the Spirit of the Lord pierces their inmost souls and sinks deep into their hearts; by the testimony of the Holy Ghost light springs up within them, and they see and understand for themselves.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

“I thought of what a great challenge this is for you to teach in such a way as to not only instruct but, more importantly, to inspire. . . . Yours is the tremendous challenge to give courage, and inspiration, and faith to those willing to accept, and to try with all the capacity that you can possibly have to hold on to those who are pulled with such pressure into those activities which will separate them from you and your better students. . . . I hope that you will plead with the Lord to give you strength, to give you capacity, to give you inspiration in teaching those who come before you for instruction. Your example will count for more than all of your words concerning Church history and doctrine. . . .
May heaven smile upon you, my dear friends in this great work. Just do the best you can, but be sure it is your very best. Then leave it in the hands of the Lord.¹⁵

Just as the Lord touched the rock that was molten by the brother of Jared and made it shine forth in the darkness, if we are humble, if we live the gospel, and if we “do the best we can and then leave it in the hands of the Lord,” He will touch our lessons and make them shine forth in the hearts of students.

As a coordinator, I had the opportunity to visit several early-morning classes. One morning while visiting a class with a volunteer teacher, I felt the Spirit very strongly. The teacher led the class in a discussion about some verses in the Old Testament. Before too long, the students began asking questions and making comments, and quickly the lesson had a life of its own. What I witnessed was humbling to me. A teacher with limited time and resources, doing the best job she knew how to do, was embraced by the classroom response of her students, and they literally helped her teach the lesson with their unsolicited comments and questions. I humbly realized that on my best days I seldom accomplish in my classroom what she had accomplished in hers. That day I witnessed a lesson touched by the finger of the Lord.

Conclusion

Building gospel lessons based on Jaredite boatbuilding principles will enable us to successfully bring light into the classroom. We should build according to the instructions of the Lord—small, light, and tight—and we should live in a way that the Lord can touch our efforts and fill them with the light of His Spirit. When this happens, we will feel as the Jaredites did upon arriving at the promised land: “And they did land upon the shore of the promised land. And when they had set their feet upon the shores of the promised land they bowed themselves down upon the face of the land, and did humble themselves before the Lord, and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them” (Ether 6:12).  

Notes


Mike and Terry Parson after Mike carried the torch in Los Angeles for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City

Photos courtesy of Michael K. Parson
I don’t know exactly when I developed the dream of being a teacher. I would like to think I was born with it, but I just don’t remember. I do remember when I developed the dream to be an Olympic runner; that started in high school. As I look back after over forty years, I can see how those two dreams have molded my life.

My earliest recollection of a desire to teach was also in high school. I remember talking to my sophomore math teacher, Mrs. Shearer, about wanting to be a teacher. And I recently discovered in my senior-year high-school annual, a note from my English teacher that said the following: “Best wishes for a successful career in teaching, and a happy future. Sincerely, Margaret Nicholson.”

I must have developed an early desire to teach religion, too, because I also have clear recollections of sitting in the high-school stadium bleachers with a group of other runners during lunch. Apparently, we must have discussed religion on more than one occasion because I can remember one of my friends asking me, “Mike, explain to me again which kingdom I am going to.”

During my sophomore year, I tried out for football. We had four football teams—varsity, junior varsity, B, and C. I was fourth-string wingback on the B team. Following the regular season of games, as we still had to suit up for P.E. and do something physical, I began running with a friend who had just finished the cross-country season. The track coach saw me running and thought I had a good running stride and invited me to join the track team. Seeing that I had no realistic future in football, I decided to take up running.
My track season was less than remarkable, but I did well enough that a fire began to burn within—a love for running and a desire to run. It seemed to become the most important thing in my life at that time, and it began to consume me. I became totally dedicated in my workouts and eating habits. In fact, nearly everything I thought about all day long had something to do with running. If I wasn’t running or at least thinking about running, I was probably studying the *Track and Field News*. One of my running heroes was Herb Elliot of Australia. He was the world’s greatest middle-distance runner of the era. I wanted to be like Herb Elliot and run the 1500-meter race in the Olympic games.

I must confess that if it were not for this tremendous interest, I am not sure I would have made it through high school. To be eligible to compete, I had to maintain at least a C grade average. This requirement was very important because I had always had difficulty with academics in both grade school and high school. I was a very slow reader and read only what I had to read.

In high school, we were required to take yearly aptitude tests. They were referred to as the Iowa tests. Because I was a slow reader, I always took a longer time to answer the questions than most of the other students required. To avoid the embarrassment of being one of the last to finish, I began answering a few of the questions, then randomly marking several, then answering a few more, and then again marking several without even reading them. This approach solved the embarrassment problem because I was able to finish at the same time that about half of the other students did.

After the testing was completed, I forgot about the whole thing until my counselor called me in and advised me that because of my low Iowa test scores, I should not plan to attend college but should try to learn a trade or some marketable skill. This disclosure was devastating. I already had a self-image that I could not succeed academically, and even though I knew the reason for the low scores, the counselor’s advice merely confirmed what I had believed for years—I just couldn’t make the grade. I have often wondered if this incident may have given me greater determination to be a teacher, thinking that because many other students like me were out there, maybe I could somehow apply my experience to others and help them.

Mission

My bishop called me into his office one Sunday and discussed with me the possibility of serving a mission. I knew I should go, so I told him I would. Leaving his office, I had two major concerns. I was in
excellent physical condition and felt I was well on my way to realizing an Olympic dream. I was concerned with what would happen to my dream if I went on a mission. Would I lose all that conditioning? Secondly, I had always believed that the Church was true, but I had never read the Book of Mormon. I decided that if I was going out to teach, I needed to know for myself.

For the spring semester of 1965, I decided not to attend school but to prepare for my mission by attending the institute full time. Whatever class was being offered, I was there. When a class was not being taught, I was in the library, reading principally the Book of Mormon and *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder.*

As I read the Book of Mormon for the first time, I was overwhelmed by what was happening to me. The Holy Ghost bore witness to me continually that what I was reading was true, that the people in the Book of Mormon were real and had lived here, and that Jesus Christ really had visited them. I now had a burning desire to serve a mission and share what I knew and felt.

I remember what my experience at the institute of religion did for me in giving me a great love for the scriptures, the gospel, and the institute program. I wanted to do for others what my institute instructors were doing for me. Great men such as Marv Higbee, Joe Muren, and Chess Gottfredsen, for example, were my heroes in a more significant way than Olympic runner Herb Elliott was, and I wanted to be like them.

My experience as a missionary enhanced my desire to teach religion. On more than one occasion, after teaching a discussion and explaining a principle of the gospel, my companion seemed impressed and asked me where I learned those things. I told him, “At the institute!”

When I returned from my mission, I was again concerned that I had lost all my conditioning and worried how much of a setback this would be to my Olympic goal. To say that I was pleasantly surprised with what happened next would be an understatement. Within a few weeks after returning home, I was outrunning everyone on the college cross-country team! I was amazed. I had not lost it. I was still on track. All that tracting and bicycling paid unimagined dividends. I was happy, and I looked forward to my future, never imagining what twists and turns it would take.

**Vietnam**

When I returned from my mission to Canada in July of 1967, the Vietnam War was in full swing. While on my mission, we had been counseled by our mission president not to concern ourselves with world affairs, so I tried not to worry too much about it. However,
after returning home, the Vietnam situation began to weigh heavily upon my mind. One thought that continually came to me was that thousands of young men were being sent over there and were going through severe hardships and trials and were making great sacrifices while I was relatively comfortable at home. I often thought, “Why shouldn’t I make a similar sacrifice?” This impression continued with me rather constantly through the fall semester at El Camino Junior College, and even after meeting my future wife, Terry Bickmore, I still had these impressions. I felt prompted (more than prompted—compelled) to enter the armed forces and go to Vietnam. The thought of going frightened me, and I did not desire to go—but I honestly felt I was supposed to go.

While attending the fall 1967 semester, I received a letter from the Selective Service (draft board) inquiring as to whether I wanted a student deferment. The letter explained that if I chose to take one, according to a new law signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, when I turned twenty-four, I would be placed on the top of the list to be drafted.

I thought about this a great deal. At that time, I was turning twenty-three and had no real commitments. I was not married or engaged; I was not in any certain program at school; and I had no idea what my situation would be when I turned twenty-four. These thoughts, coupled with the promptings and impressions previously referred to, led me to make my decision. I concluded to go to the Selective Service office and “volunteer.” This decision essentially meant they would put me on the top of the list to be drafted.
Not long afterwards, I received my letter from the president of the United States. I was ordered to report to the induction center in Los Angeles on January 24, 1968. Following my basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington, I was sent to Fort Polk, Louisiana, for advanced infantry training. I had been there only a short while when the battalion commander spoke to all of the trainees in a large auditorium. His blunt message was that we were there to prepare to go to Vietnam and that we were all going. He said that many of us would not come back and that we needed to be prepared for that possibility. He told us that we should all write a will. His message was sobering, to say the least. We all knew that we were there to prepare for combat in Vietnam, but we assumed that some might go to Germany or elsewhere. It was very quiet as we exited the building and returned to our barracks.

This experience happened a few days before general conference of April 1968. I remember thinking, If I’m going to Vietnam and might not come back, then I want to go to conference before I go. Both Terry’s family and my family were already planning to attend conference, and I was determined to be there also. Based on what was said to us in that auditorium, I felt sure I would not be denied the opportunity to attend a “religious retreat” before going to war.

I asked my company commander for permission to go, but my request was denied. He said the training was too important for me to leave—even for a weekend. I expected that response, but I had a plan. I asked to see the battalion commander, knowing my company commander could not deny that request. As he handed me the pass, he said, “All right, go ahead and see him.” Then he added, “But it won’t do any good.”

As I left his office, I was quite confident that I would get permission. I believed there was not a chance of being denied at the next level because the officer I was about to see was the man who had given the sobering speech.

I walked into his office, saluted him, and introduced myself. I had barely made the request when he said, “Oh, sure; that would be a good experience for you,” and he signed the papers. I was in and out of his office, with a smile on my face, in less than five minutes.

Terry and I had a great time visiting both of our families, attending my missionary reunion, visiting places in Salt Lake City, and attending conference. During that weekend, one of the most significant events of my life took place. On Saturday, April 6, 1968, I asked Terry to marry me. She did not give me her answer then, but the next day as she and her father took me to the airport, she told me she had prayed and had received confirmation from the Lord and would marry me. I finished
my training, and after a very short two-week leave, during which we announced our engagement, I was off to war.

When I arrived in Vietnam, I was assigned to the First Air Cavalry Division, stationed outside of Quang Tri, near the demilitarized zone. Word came to us that my company had made contact with the enemy and that a firefight was going on. I remember thinking, *How did I ever get into this?* Because of the enemy contact, we were not able to go out that evening but waited until morning. I was relieved!

When I arrived the next morning, I was greeted by my new company and surroundings. Many of the guys were lying around, some sleeping, others eating C-rations. They had surrounded a small village where some of the Viet Cong had been hiding. The inhabitants had been evacuated the day before, and rounds had been fired into the village all night. Later that day, we marched through the village to inspect. Everything was destroyed, with bodies scattered here and there. This was my eye-opening introduction to the war, which caused me to conclude that war really is hell. The next eight months simply reinforced that fact.

**Meeting with the Saints**

One of the very positive experiences I had in Vietnam was associating with Captain Craig Cowley. Between the two of us, we organized Latter-day Saint Church services. He was set apart by the district president as the leader of our servicemen’s group, and I was his assistant. Because I had already gone on a mission, I gave one of the missionary discussions each week for a sacrament meeting talk. It was comforting to meet together as Saints and partake of the sacrament.

I suppose the best experience I had during my tour of duty occurred sometime later. I was riding in a large Chinook helicopter, which carried a lot of personnel, and sitting across from me was a fellow who had *BYU* written on his helmet. I was excited to find another Latter-day Saint, so when we got on the ground, I asked him if he had gone to BYU, but he said he hadn’t. I asked if he was LDS; he said he wasn’t. I asked him why he had *BYU* on his helmet, and he explained that his girlfriend was LDS and was a student there. I asked how much he knew about the Church and if he had read the Book of Mormon. He said that he did not know much and that his girlfriend was going to send him a copy. I had my small servicemen’s copy with me and gave it to him. We became friends, and at night, after camp was set up, I taught him the missionary discussions. It was not long before he gained a testimony and wanted to be baptized.

By this time, the entire First Air Cavalry Division had moved south to a location near the city of Tay Ninh. On the base at Tay Ninh
was a rather large portable swimming pool. After David Moss had an interview, I baptized him into the Church. We then went to a chapel nearby, where he was confirmed and ordained to the priesthood. It was such a contrast to be participating in the ordinances of the kingdom of God amidst war and wickedness all around. I am grateful to my Heavenly Father for giving me this experience.

Mortar Attack

Sometime in February 1969, I was assigned to be a radio operator on the helicopter pad of a forward landing zone. My job was to communicate with the helicopter pilots when they approached the landing zone, find out what they were carrying, and tell them where to land. I actually showed them where to land by throwing a colored smoke grenade to the landing spot.

In mid-March 1969, after working on the helicopter pad on the Tracy for a while, the entire battalion moved back to Landing Zone White, where we had been a month before. When we first arrived back on Landing Zone White, there was no bunker for the radio operators. The first few nights we slept in the supply tent while we slowly built a bunker in our spare time.

On the night of March 20, 1969, I retired as usual to a cot in the supply tent. I was awakened about four o’clock in the morning by the sound of explosions and flying debris. The first thing I did was to get down on the ground. We were in the middle of a mortar attack!

After a few minutes, a mortar landed near my feet. I was sure my legs had been blown off because the pain was so excruciating. I screamed and screamed. After a moment or two, I gained control of myself and looked down at my feet. I realized they had not been blown off but that the mortar had sprayed my lower legs with fragments.

I called for a medic, not thinking that a medic wouldn’t be foolish enough to run around in the middle of a mortar attack. While I was lying there on the ground, I could hear the screams of others who were wounded also. I clearly remember one young man scream, “My eyes, my eyes! I can’t see.”

I distinctly remember offering a prayer at that moment. I asked the Lord to please not let me die in that land but to please let me go home. Even if I had to lose my legs, I did not want to die in Vietnam. I asked Him to please spare my life, and if He did, I promised to always put the Church first in my life.

Within moments, perhaps only seconds, I heard a sound that brought me great relief. It was the sound of helicopters, Cobra gunships.
We called them the ARA, for Ariel Rocket Artillery. They were equipped with rockets and miniguns, which could spray a football field and not miss much. I knew that the attack was over because at night when the mortars fired, there would be a flash that could be seen from the air. So as soon as the enemy heard the helicopters, they quit firing.

Once the attack had stopped, a medic got to me, gave me a shot of morphine, and started bandaging my legs. I was carried to the aid station, where the doctor was checking others who had been wounded. I remember him reprimanding those who were bringing in the casualties, telling them to leave the dead ones and bring in only those who were still alive. When I was carried in, I noticed that all around the inside of this hospital tent were wounded men.

About 4:20 a.m.—all this happened in less than thirty minutes, although it seemed at the time to be hours—I heard another helicopter. This time it was a medivac. When it had landed, I heard the doctor say to them to get the most seriously injured out first, and then he pointed to me and said, “Take him first.”

I woke up the following morning in a hospital ward with a full leg cast on my right leg and bandages to the hip on my left. I asked a nurse what damage was done. She wouldn’t tell me. Soon, a doctor came and told me I had a broken leg. I remember thinking, That’s not too bad! Lots of people get broken legs. I felt greatly relieved and encouraged by this report. It seemed to assure me that I would be able to run again. That same morning, some officers came to see me. There at my bedside they thanked me for my sacrifice and gave me my purple heart without much ceremony.

I was at that hospital for only a short time. I was told that because of the danger of infection, they did not want to close up serious wounds in Vietnam, so they sent me to a hospital in Japan. I remember thinking as we flew out over the ocean that for me, the war was over!

Soon after I arrived in Japan, I was taken into surgery. Up to this time, I was under the impression that the extent of my injuries was a broken leg. When I was taken into the operating room, they gave me a spinal so I would not feel anything from the waist down. They had also, however, hooked up an IV with a syringe of sodium pentothal attached, ready to inject if needed. A towel was draped over my waist so I could not see what they were doing. I was to be awake for the operation. They could see that I had some concern about being awake for the surgery, so they poked my legs with a pin to show me that I could not feel any pain.

I remember that while they were scrubbing down my legs to make them as sterile as possible, they made the mistake of raising my right
leg up high enough for me to see my right foot. They could tell from the heart monitor that I had gone into shock. As soon as I saw it, all I had time to say was, “I saw my foot,” before they immediately gave me the sodium pentothal. Within seconds I was out.

I now had a clearer indication as to the seriousness of my wounds. What I saw looked like a scene from a horror movie. All I saw was bone, tendons, and raw flesh. The entire top of my foot had been blown off. In that second, I knew that I had something far more serious than a broken leg.

From the moment I awoke and for several days following, I was greatly depressed. Prior to the surgery, I had written home that because I had only a broken leg, there was nothing to be overly concerned about. Now I feared that I would never be able to run again. I was sent back to the states for more surgeries at Madigan General Army Hospital at Fort Lewis, Washington. The doctors there suggested the possibility of amputation before my medical discharge and transfer to the Long Beach Veterans Affairs Hospital.

Early in 1970, following my discharge, I had just about concluded that amputation was probably my most reasonable option. My right ankle was fused in a “drop-foot” position. I felt very handicapped, and medical science had not given me much hope of being otherwise.
However, before giving up my foot, I needed additional medical advice. In checking around, I was informed that the foremost amputee clinic was at University of California Los Angeles. I made an appointment for a consultation. I wanted to know if I would be better off medically with or without my foot. The doctor studied my X-rays and other medical records and made the following conclusions: I had severe bone damage, with the ankle fused in a drop-foot position; I had severe nerve damage, with no feeling on the top of my foot; and I had severe circulatory damage, which would lead to serious problems in the future. He strongly advised amputation.

Sometime in May of 1970, I was again wheeled into surgery, this time for the amputation of my right foot. It was taken off about seven inches below the knee, and with it was cut away my dream of ever running again.

I suppose if my foot had been taken off in March of 1969, I would have experienced greater shock and a more difficult adjustment. Because I felt I had the ability to compete in the Olympic Games, to awake and find my foot gone would have overwhelmed me. However, by May of 1970, I was resigned to the fact that if my foot were not amputated, I would be even more handicapped for the rest of my life. The choice was mine, and I have never regretted my decision.

A Slow Recovery

I have always felt very grateful to have been blessed with Terry as a companion. She was an anchor, a great stabilizing influence, and a source of strength during those first couple of years—and ever since. I have observed that many other wounded veterans did not have a loving wife, a family, and a church, and they did not adjust nearly as well. I am aware of a young man who lost both legs and did not have the support of his family. He tried to commit suicide twice and succeeded the second time.

After May of 1970, I had many adjustments, with many months of therapy; but after a few setbacks, I was fitted for an artificial leg. It was awkward at first but also exciting to be able to walk again. Gradually, I could do it easier and longer and with less pain.

I used crutches at first; then, after a while, I used a cane. Gradually, I used it less and finally got around without it. I was very fortunate to be able to walk as well as I did. From that time until now, unless I’m having some discomfort, most people cannot tell that I am wearing a prosthesis.

My hardships and trials since March 21, 1969, have often caused me to reflect upon Joseph Smith’s experience in Liberty Jail, where he pleaded to know why he and the Saints were suffering so much. Part of the Lord’s answer, as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 122, has
always intrigued me. After recounting many of the terrible things that had already happened to Joseph and referring to some worse things that could happen, the Lord made this profound statement—“Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (v. 7).

As I have read over this statement and wondered how this could be, I have thought back over my own life. When I went to Vietnam, I considered myself to be a good person. I was a returned missionary and was active in the Church. I believe I would have continued to be active without this trial in my life. Yet I know I am a better man today because of my experience. I am not sure of all the reasons why this is true; I just know it. And so, as I look back on this entire experience, two facts that I am sure of stand out in my mind: I was supposed to go to Vietnam, and I am a better man and a better teacher because of that experience.

Each day as I feel discomfort because of my prosthesis, I am constantly reminded of the commitment I made to the Lord while lying on the battlefield of Vietnam—that I would always put the Church first in my life. I fully realize that in a sense, I was bargaining with the Lord. I also fully realize that I had already made that promise when I was baptized and that I have renewed that promise thousands of times as I have partaken of the sacrament. And I also realize that I may have lived anyway, without making the promise. Nevertheless, my life was spared, and I did make the promise, and I intend to keep it.

Back to School

I was a bit apprehensive starting back to school. My academic history was nothing to be proud of. I had been on extended probation—academic disqualification—and now after two and a half years, I was coming back on probation.

But this time, I had some advantages that I did not have before. I was now much older and, I hoped, wiser. I had gained the experience of a mission; in addition, my military and war experience had a very maturing effect upon me. One additional factor that made a great deal of difference was the fact that I was married. I have often thought that it is one thing to come home and tell your mother you are failing in school and quite another to have to tell it to your wife, who is working so you can go to school.

At the end of my first semester, I received a letter from the college. I thought, Oh great, here we go again. But then the thought came, My grades couldn’t have been that bad. When I opened the letter, I was shocked to read that I had made the dean’s list. I first checked to be
sure it was addressed to the right person. The dean’s list! Nothing like that had ever happened to me, but it completely changed my academic future. I never again had a poor grade in school, and I eventually earned three college degrees—a bachelor’s, a master’s, and a Juris Doctorate. I would love to have the opportunity to see my old high-school counselor now. I would like him to see my grades and degrees so he might learn the principle, never write anyone off.

While I was in college, I taught three years of early-morning seminary, which again fanned the flames of my teaching desire. While doing so, I went through the Church Educational System (CES) preservice program with A. Paul King, my mentor. After I completed the preservice program, Paul recommended me for hire. However, he explained that the Church was going to fill all the overseas assignments with indigenous personnel and that the American personnel would be brought back to fill any vacancies in the states. That meant my chances of being hired were almost zero. Paul advised me to look for something else but told me that if I still wanted to try again the following year, he would recommend me. I was extremely disappointed. I had been looking forward to this for years, but now my dream was beginning to fade right before my eyes.

The vice president of personnel at Western Airlines lived in our stake. He invited me to come in for an interview. When I was getting ready to go, I had an impression like, Why are you doing this? You’re supposed to teach in CES. I went to the interview and was offered a job to start right away. I told them I could not start until June (this was April), when I would graduate with my bachelor’s degree. They told me to come back then and they would hire me.

Determined as ever to get into CES, rather than take the job, I began a one-year master’s degree program. I still felt quite discouraged, not being sure I would get hired the next year either. I remember writing a letter to Frank Bradshaw, in the central office, explaining my situation and hoping he could be of help. He wrote me an encouraging letter but could not make any promises.

The following year, I was hired to teach released-time seminary in Mesa, Arizona. During that first year, I saw how my fellow teachers were struggling to work on their master’s degrees and how relieved I was not to have to worry about mine. I quickly realized how fortunate it was that everything had worked out the way it had. My great disappointment in not being hired the year before turned out to be one of the greatest blessings of my professional career.

Through many years of teaching, I have greatly missed running. Whenever the Olympics were on television, I had a difficult time
watching the track events because that is what I wanted to do, and I knew I could not. But after seventeen years, I began to hear of new developments in prosthetics. I made some inquiries and eventually was fitted with a new leg designed for running.

On a quiet Saturday morning, on the playground of the elementary school my children attended, I had another life-altering experience that placed me on a thrilling new path. For the first time in seventeen years, I actually ran. It was not a skip or a hop but an actual running stride. I was eager to pursue this newfound freedom and thought I would gradually start running on a regular basis.

About that time, I received a letter from the U.S. Amputee Athletic Association. I did not even know there was such an organization. They invited me to attend the upcoming National Championships in Nashville, Tennessee. I thought how much fun it would be to run and compete again. The problem was that the event was in six weeks, and I had not even run in seventeen years. There was no way that I could get into shape in that amount of time. Plus, being a law student, I couldn’t afford to make the trip to Nashville. So I decided to forget about it.

But I couldn’t forget about it. I was aware of the winning time in the two-hundred-meter run in the previous year’s competition: thirty-five seconds. I decided to have a time trial to see if I was anywhere close to that. I ran it in forty-two seconds. Not good enough, I thought, and I again decided to forget about it.

Now, with only three weeks to train, I did as much as I could. I competed in the two-hundred-meter race and got third place, running it in thirty-four seconds. I also took second place in the four-hundred-meter race. I thought, If I can do that in only three weeks, what could I do if I trained all year?

The following year, I did well enough to qualify as a member of the U.S. team to compete in the Paralympic Games in Seoul, South Korea, following the Olympic Games. These were to be held in the same facilities used by the Olympic athletes.

The Paralympics are, essentially, the Olympic Games for disabled athletes. It is an elite competition to see who is the best in the world among different levels of disabilities, amputees being only one of the disability groups. I was thrilled to represent the United States in an international competition. Whenever the team arrived at Olympic Stadium, schoolchildren flocked around us and asked for our autographs or asked to have their pictures taken with us. I felt like Carl Lewis!

Through these experiences, I have learned that even though our dreams may have been blown apart by catastrophic circumstances, the
Lord has a way of helping us to realize those dreams in ways we may not have imagined. If someone had said to me a year before I began to run again, “Mike, in a couple of years you’ll be in Olympic Stadium, competing in an international track competition,” I would not have believed them. But there I was, in the Olympic Stadium in Seoul, Korea, in 1988. It is truly amazing how the Lord works.

We all have some type of disability. Some disabilities are physical, but many are not. We all have spiritual disabilities. I do not think that the Lord is nearly as concerned with what our disabilities are as He is with what we do about them. With the Lord’s help, we can make more out of our lives than we ever thought possible. He can help us to overcome our disabilities and realize our goals and dreams.

After the Paralympic Games in October 1988, I essentially retired from my “running career” because of some pain I was having in my leg. I could not run one hundred yards without severe pain. I eventually had surgery, but that did not solve the problem; and rather than undergo additional surgery to try to improve the situation, I just resigned myself to not running again.

**Olympic Torch Relay in 2002**

Approximately ten years later, as the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympics approached, something happened that is an epilogue to this story. Chevrolet and Coca Cola, as the sponsors for the Olympic torch relay, invited the public to nominate individuals who might have inspiring stories and who could be considered good candidates to carry the Olympic torch. Unbeknownst to me, my wife and children submitted my name. When I finally found out what they had done, I asked them why and said, “I can’t do that!” The idea was exciting on the one hand, but I felt fearful on the other. I knew I could not run with the torch, and I thought, *What if they pick me? What will I do?* My wife thought that the names would be selected randomly and that I was only one of many thousands. She tried to comfort me by saying, “Oh, don’t worry; you’ll never get picked!”

While we were in Nauvoo, Illinois, on a Church history tour in July 2001, my daughter called with the news that I had received a letter from the Salt Lake Olympic Committee. I told her to open it and read it to me. It was from Mitt Romney, inviting me to be a member of the Olympic torch relay team. I felt overwhelmed by the honor but still wondered what I would do.

When we returned home, I went to see my orthopedic doctor, Paul Gilbert. When he walked into the room, I said to him, “Dr. Gilbert, of all the orthopedic doctors in southern California, you have
been chosen to perform a miracle!” He just smiled and asked what I was talking about. When I told him, his smile broadened. He was very excited at the prospect. He said it was quite common to give a shot of Marcaine to athletes who were in pain, which would give temporary relief and allow them to continue competing. He thought we should try it and see if I was able to run. It was successful enough that I was able to carry the torch through the streets of Los Angeles, just a few blocks from my institute at USC. Being able to carry the Olympic torch was truly a thrilling experience.

The Torchbearer

Some great principles are associated with carrying the torch. I was privileged to be one of the many to carry the Olympic flame as it traveled throughout the United States. What a thrill to know I was representing not only our country but also the entire world as I carried the flame. Even though there were thousands of torchbearers, for that one moment in time, I was the Olympic torchbearer.

The purpose of the torchbearer is to run through the community, lighting the way and announcing to all that the Olympics will soon begin. Since then, I have thought how in a very real way all of us are torchbearers. In our own special way, we have the responsibility of carrying the light of the gospel to a darkened world and announcing, “The Restoration has taken place; Christ will soon come, and the Millennium will begin!” Think of what the scriptures tell us about being torchbearers: “Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up—that which ye have seen me do” (3 Nephi 18:24). “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Teachers as Torchbearers

All teachers are in a position to light the way for their students. For this moment in time, if you are a teacher, in your own sphere of influence, you are the torchbearer. May you hold up that light, that Jesus Christ may shine unto the world.

And now, after more than thirty years of teaching, I realize I am approaching the end of my formal career. As a torchbearer of a different sort, I want to feel that I will be passing the torch, the flame and passion for teaching, on to the rising generation of teachers who will carry it for a short distance until it will be time for them to pass it on. May they let their light so shine before their students that their students will
see the goodness of the message they bear and the truthfulness of their teachings, causing their students to glorify our Father in Heaven.
Discerning and Meeting Needs: The Essence of Our Ministry

Peter B. Rawlins

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“Meet the needs.” This phrase (in its varied forms) is not found in the scriptures, but it has become commonplace in the Church. For example, President Spencer W. Kimball counseled priesthood leaders to “take into account, prayerfully and carefully, the needs of their members and to focus on meeting those basic needs.” He stressed that “our task is to be simple enough to serve our people at the level of their need.”¹ The Ensign typically reminds visiting teachers to “prayerfully select and read from this message the scriptures and teachings that meet the needs of the sisters you visit.”² Home teachers are asked to “prayerfully determine the individual and family needs of the members [you] serve. Then . . . plan and work to help meet those needs, providing support and encouragement.”³

Unfortunately, the phrase “meet the needs” may be used so much that we pass over it lightly, without attending to its profound implications. The phrase could become—perhaps has become—a mere cliché. In contrast, President James E. Faust taught, “One of the great transcending principles that we teach in the Church is that we’re trying to meet the needs of others. We talk frequently about service.”⁴ Indeed, many of the essential teachings of the Church seem to converge at one point: identifying and meeting needs through dedicated service. We have the formidable duty to diagnose and prescribe.

An emphasis on meeting needs is not merely procedural. Clearly, learning to identify and meet needs is an essential dimension of our ministry as disciples of Christ. Serving and meeting the needs of others
may be classified in two broad categories—*temporal* and *spiritual*, both requiring comparable attention. For example, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said that the Savior left as a heritage for His Church “the relief of the ills and sufferings of humanity [temporal, physical needs], and the teaching of the spiritual truths which should bring us back into the presence of our Heavenly Father [spiritual needs].”

During the Savior’s ministry, He “went about all the cities and villages” (Matthew 9:35). He was anxiously engaged—He was found out among the people, “teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23). His teaching was directed at meeting spiritual needs, which He understood so perfectly and discerned so precisely. He also perceived temporal needs and used His power to relieve them. He was found “healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matthew 9:35; see also Matthew 4:23–24; Mosiah 3:5–7; 1 Nephi 11:28, 31; Acts 10:38 for descriptions of the Lord’s ministry).

Christ’s ministry is a model for our own. He told the Nephites, “Ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do” (3 Nephi 27:21).

**A Wide Variety of Needs**

God knows our real needs—better than we can possibly know them ourselves. “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matthew 6:8), and He desires to satisfy our needs according to His wisdom. Through His Holy Spirit, He intervenes in our lives to strengthen us in our unique situations. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26), or “with striving which cannot be expressed.”

Elder Henry B. Eyring said, “Our Heavenly Father knows us and our circumstances and even what faces us in the future. . . . He has perfect understanding of the feelings, the suffering, the trials, and the needs of every individual.”

Although humans have common needs, desires, and wants, the manifestations of these needs are infinite in number and variety. We all need food to nourish and sustain us, but some may satisfy their hunger with rice, others with pizza. Thus, although our humanity endows us with universal needs, we also encounter astounding diversity in individuals and cultures. Needs are very individual and unique. In addition, people have differing capacities to handle needs by themselves.

Some needs are obvious, especially temporal needs. Some are hidden, such as sin or loneliness and emotional or spiritual needs. Needs
may go unrecognized because of ignorance; a person may not realize that a genuine need is unfulfilled. Needs may be merely a vague, ill-defined feeling that defies verbal descriptions. Needs may also be denied or sublimated—hidden because of pride, shame, or embarrassment.

Needs are time-sensitive. Hunger may dominate our thoughts at one moment, but when that physical need is fulfilled, achievement or entertainment easily redirects our motives, only to be overtaken by fatigue.

We often impose artificial needs on ourselves through indulgence. The needs of the body can mutate into the lusts of the flesh. President Brigham Young said, “I call evil inverted good, or a correct principle made an evil use of.” Pampered desires become habits, and conquering the habit becomes a new need. Webster’s 1828 dictionary included this couplet under the definition of want: “From having wishes in consequence of our wants, we often feel wants in consequence of our wishes.” Elder Richard L. Evans noted, “It is getting to where our necessities are too luxurious and our luxuries are too necessary.”

Similarly, Elder Joe J. Christensen said: “If we are not careful, it is easy for our wants to become needs. Remember the line “There, there, little luxury, don’t you cry. You’ll be a necessity by and by.”

Psychological and physical needs, however, are often more obvious than our spiritual needs. Just as hunger is merely the symptom of an unsatisfied physical need, so unhappiness, lack of purpose, and gnawing emptiness can be merely the symptoms of unsatisfied spiritual needs. Too many people are like a “hungry man which dreameth, and behold he eateth but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or like unto a thirsty man which dreameth, and behold he drinketh but he awaketh and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite” (2 Nephi 27:3).

Our spiritual longings are satisfied through communion with God—spiritual rebirth, which effects a remission of our sins; and spiritual gifts, which enable us to minister with real effect. Yet many people pass through life only vaguely aware that they are spiritually deprived. Certainly we need the proximate peace (see John 14:27) and the fullness of joy (see 3 Nephi 27:10) the Savior has promised. “That divinity within us needs food from the Fountain from which it emanated. . . . Principles of eternal life, of God and godliness, will alone feed the immortal capacity of man and give true satisfaction.”

**Gifts of the Spirit**

God makes ample provision to meet every unique need and to supply each individual want. Through the Light of Christ, He prompts people to do good. Caring individuals render marvelous service, using
their finely honed talents to meet needs they discern through heightened awareness and sensitive inquiry. Ultimately, however, the profuse variety of personal needs—especially spiritual needs—can be fulfilled only with God’s help and through His power. Only God knows the secret needs of our hearts, and only He has power to satisfy needs, fully and completely. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “We live and teach amid a wide variety of individual personalities, experiences, cultures, languages, interests, and needs. Only the Spirit can compensate fully for such differences.”

Thus, God gives spiritual gifts to be used in the service of others. Gifts are given “severally,” or individually, according to God’s will (see Moroni 10:17–18; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11), and they are given for the profit of all and for the common good (see D&C 46:26). Gifts of the Spirit are manifestations of the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is received by the laying on of hands of those with priesthood authority. They are the signs promised to those who believe (see Mark 16:17–18; 63:9–12; D&C 84:64–73).

We have observed that needs are as individual, as unique, and as varied as the people who have them. They are changing, dynamic, and elusive. They may be fleeting or perpetual. They may be routine, requiring plodding maintenance, or episodic, occurring at irregular intervals. Needs may be intense or mild; they may be predictable or unexpected. The gifts of the Spirit are measured precisely according to the need. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “The Lord gave us power in proportion to the work to be done, and strength according to the race set before us, and grace and help as our needs required.” Modest needs call forth seemingly small but discernable allotments of spiritual power, as when Jesus blessed the children (see Matthew 19:13–15). Great needs call forth awesome power, as when the Lord raised Lazarus from the tomb (see John 11). We must not gauge miracles based on our narrow perceptions. “Behold, O Lord, . . . we know that thou art able to show forth great power, which looks small unto the understanding of men” (Ether 3:5). Nor should we become jaded so that we are “less and less astonished at a sign or a wonder from heaven” (3 Nephi 2:1). Grace and power are extended in proportion to the need, and we must learn to recognize God’s influence in our everyday experiences.

This special and particular allocation of spiritual gifts is evidence that God intervenes in our lives and controls conditions according to His wisdom. His gifts are not doled out randomly or capriciously. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “All of the gifts of the Spirit must be dispensed in an orderly way, according to the needs and conditions of the moment.
All the affairs of the earthly kingdom must be administered as changing needs and circumstances require.” God indeed adapts “his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men” (D&C 46:15). God gives precisely what should be meted (measured) to each person at the very moment that it is needed (see D&C 84:85). Elder McConkie also said: “All of those called to the ministry . . . are given the gifts needed to perform the work whereunto they are called. These gifts are always the ones needed for the particular work at hand.” We are commanded to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31). The “best gifts” may be those best suited to a particular need. Accordingly, one gift may be best in one circumstance, and another gift may be best in a different situation—and God governs the interaction. Our role is to trust Him to do His work, at His own time, and in His own way.

The abundance of spiritual gifts is also evidence of their divinity. They are, according to Elder McConkie, “infinite in number and endless in their manifestations because God himself is infinite and endless, and because the needs of those who receive them are as numerous, varied, and different as there are people in the kingdom.” God makes lavish provision for our needs when we exercise faith and trust His will. He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Ministering to Needs

President Spencer W. Kimball plainly taught a principle that he also exemplified: “God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom.” Obviously, needs are met when people respond to the private impulse or formal call to serve. Unfortunately, many people are left in want because those who should have served failed in their duty. Service is the catalyst that combines needs and gifts in an effective—even powerful—interaction.

We must first prepare ourselves to serve by becoming self-reliant, or independent, in solving our own problems. Ideally, the Church should become “independent above all other creatures beneath the celestial world” (D&C 78:14). Through provident living, we are to meet our needs, reduce them, or prevent them from developing. While we strive to become independent, we also recognize that we, as mortals, will always have personal needs of varying intensity. To the extent possible, we forget ourselves—our needs—in the service of others. “Charity means subordinating our interests and needs to those of others, as the Savior has done for all of us.” We see examples such as President Spencer W.
Kimball or President Howard W. Hunter, who served valiantly despite physical hindrances. One missionary serving in a far-off land was asked by her parents what she would like for a small Christmas remembrance. She honestly could not think of a thing; her needs had been utterly eclipsed by her service. “Service changes people. . . . It prompts us to consider others’ needs ahead of our own.”

Satisfying our own needs, then, is secondary. The world lauds self-fulfillment, self-gratification, self-esteem, and self-respect. All these aims focus on serving ourselves. But the Savior taught that if we are to save our lives, we must lose them (see Matthew 10:39). Thus, we are to prepare ourselves to help meet others’ needs: “Let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Ephesians 4:28). Our covenants require us to voluntarily and deliberately take upon ourselves the needs of others (see Mosiah 18:8–10). Their needs become our needs.

Alma taught that the Savior knows how to “succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). This is tantamount to saying that He knows how to succor His people in proportion to their needs and wants. In emulation of the Savior, we go about among the people, “administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26); we “succor those that stand in need of [our] succor” and “administer of [our] substance unto him that standeth in need” (Mosiah 4:16). We are to impart “to one another both temporally and spiritually according to [or in proportion to] their needs and their wants” (Mosiah 18:28). We adapt our compassion to their suffering.

The Prophet Joseph Smith observed that spiritual gifts, like needs, are usually invisible and that “it would require time and circumstances to call these gifts into operation.” To fulfill our covenants, however, we do not passively wait for time to grant a fortuitous opportunity. Rather, we deliberately and voluntarily invest our time to identify and meet needs. In harmony with doctrinal principles, and in fulfillment of our covenants, we sacrifice our own interests to do things we would not otherwise do. We actually create circumstances when we are anxiously engaged (see D&C 58:27), taking inspired initiative and consecrating our time through service. The resulting circumstances then call into operation those gifts best suited to the occasion. Giving at the right time becomes crucial.

In this way, faith and experience mesh, and our lives are altered by God’s hand. By our faithful actions, we elicit divine intervention. Our daily experiences—how we discern and meet needs—are thus molded by the potter’s hands (see Isaiah 64:8). “The miracles . . . show how the law of
love is to deal with the actual facts of life. Miracles were and are a response to faith, and its best encouragement. They were never wrought without prayer, felt need, and faith.”

Just as in the early days of the Restoration, today, revelations of divine power, perfectly suited to the conditions we face, are “received in answer to prayer, in times of need, and [come] out of real-life situations involving real people.” Thus, spiritual gifts are no longer abstractions; they take shape as faith-promoting stories that show how gospel power is at work today as it was anciently. The signs that follow faith confirm (establish, corroborate) our faith (see Mark 16:17–20).

We go through life, of course, with purpose and direction. We are to work out our own salvation. But in the process—indeed, as an integral part of the process—we maintain a heightened awareness of those around us. We are alert to others’ needs and are sensitive to their feelings. We develop a kind of peripheral vision, the ability to see what is outside the central area of focus. We prayerfully cultivate the special spiritual gift of discernment, increasing our capacity to recognize by the power of the Spirit the longings and desires in another person’s heart. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, “May God bless you always, . . . and, as among your most precious gifts, . . . may He give you entrance to the hearts of those you teach [or serve] and then make you know that as you enter there you stand in holy places.”

**Sow Diligently**

The laborer is worthy of his hire, and spiritual gifts are some of the “wages” we receive from the Eternal Paymaster. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained the passage, “He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal” (John 4:36).

What is the result of preaching the gospel? Who gets the blessings? . . . Of course, the convert gets the blessing; but above that, always it’s the laborer in the vineyard who is blessed. . . .

It isn’t just a matter of laboring here and after a long and diligent period of service receiving a wage, a reward. The people who labor get paid at intervals as time goes on. And where the Lord is the paymaster, they get what they merit and deserve. So you, in the process of doing the things that win you eternal life eventually in our Father’s kingdom, begin here and now to reap the blessings of missionary service. I think that the greatest blessings that you begin to gain day by day and continually are the gifts of the Spirit. . . .

We ought to be seeking the gifts of the Spirit. Every time we get one of the gifts of the Spirit we’re receiving wages. We don’t get them until we abide the law upon which their receipt is predicated.
We would soon weary of well-doing if we were not rewarded along the way. Spiritual gifts not only help us meet the needs of others but also assure us that God is with us always.

President Brigham Young lamented: “I am satisfied . . . that in this respect, we live far beneath our privileges. If this is true, it is necessary that we become more fervent in the service of God, . . . that we be not slack in the performance of any duty, but labor with a right good will for God and truth.” Twenty-six Too often, we fail to receive “wages,” or the gifts of the Spirit, because we do not invest time to create spiritually ripe circumstances. We do not “go about doing good” often enough or long enough. Hence, opportunity passes by unnoticed. Elder Maxwell said: “Opportunities and options abound all about us to ‘bring to pass much righteousness.’ We would be staggered and ashamed if we saw fully the unused and unexplored possibilities for service that surround each of us all of the time. Twenty-seven

If we neglect our home teaching or visiting teaching, we pass up an opportunity to receive a reward, a spiritual gift. If we turn down a calling or don’t magnify it, we miss an opportunity, and we may never realize it except through nagging feelings of guilt. If we let our fear of public speaking prevail, we do not experience what it is like for the Holy Ghost to give us utterance. If we rely wholly on our skills and talents rather than seek spiritual gifts, we miss the divine aid that compensates for our inadequacies.

And if we miss spiritual gifts because we bypass an opportunity, we miss a central gospel experience. Elder McConkie said: “If spiritual gifts are interwoven with and form part of the very gospel of salvation itself, can we enjoy the fulness of that gospel without possessing the gifts that are part of it? If gifts and miracles shall—inevitably, always, and everlastingly—follow those who believe, how can we be true believers without them? . . . We are commanded to seek the gifts of the Spirit; if we do not do so, we are not walking in that course which is pleasing to Him whose gifts they are.” Twenty-eight

We are admonished to seek spiritual gifts. “Desire spiritual gifts,” and be “zealous of spiritual gifts, seeking that ye may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:1, 12). We are to “lay hold upon every good gift” (Moroni 10:30). How do we do so? By fulfilling the conditions that call them forth. As gifts are granted in proportion to the need, so also are they received in proportion to our investment, our service. “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of
necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:6–8).

The Savior taught, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).

It would be tragic to miss or reject the proffered gifts: “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33).

On the other hand, when we reap spiritual gifts as the natural consequence of our devoted service, we enjoy some of the most satisfying experiences of mortality. We give life to our faith and substance to our covenants. We receive the Spirit as the “earnest of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14), meaning that “the Lord gives us his Holy Spirit in this life as a foretaste of the joy of eternal life.” We thus have the assurance that the course of our lives is in harmony with God’s will and that we will ultimately receive eternal life, “which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God” (D&C 14:7).

**Divine Grace**

With all that has been said about meeting needs, we err if we think we can solve certain needs by our own power alone. The most critical needs are unsolvable by mere human intervention. We can marshal community, Church, or individual resources. We can sacrifice our time, contribute our means, and share our talents. We can empathize and console. But to genuinely and permanently meet another person’s needs, we must lead that person to Christ, our ultimate source of succor.

Because of His atoning sacrifice, the Savior can rightfully “claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men” (Moroni 7:27). As the “advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1), He is “pleading [our] cause before him—saying, Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified” (D&C 45:3–4).

This merciful intervention by our Advocate with the Father is not reserved only for a distant afterlife. Christ intercedes on our behalf even now—from day to day and moment to moment—if we will receive Him. When He ascended into heaven, He said, “Lo, I am with you alway” (Matthew 28:20). He is “in [our] midst” (D&C 29:5); His eyes are upon
us, even though we cannot see Him. He will go with us and be our advocate, and nothing will prevail against us (see D&C 32:3). His advocacy can result in present forgiveness, and we can know we are clean before Him (see D&C 110:4–5). He will “console” the pure in heart, and “he will plead [their] cause” (Jacob 3:1). Jesus Christ, our advocate, can do this because He “knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted” (D&C 62:1).

He was not one who could not “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He was “made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” who is able to “succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17–18). He “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6; see also Ephesians 4:9–10) and experienced the most abhorrent human suffering. “The Son of Man hath descended below them all” (D&C 122:8). In mortality, He suffered “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:7). He endured “pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind.” He took upon Himself the infirmities of all mankind “that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12).

Thus, we are commanded, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord” (Psalm 55:22). We are to cast “all our care upon him, for he careth” for us (1 Peter 5:7). We are to rely on the Lord’s grace, which is “an enabling power,” a “divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.”

Grace is given abundantly—but not randomly, capriciously, or arbitrarily. To be appreciated, it must be sought, and the act of seeking is faith. “We have access by faith into this grace” (Romans 5:2; see also Ephesians 3:12). Our Lord allows us to approach or communicate with Him on the condition that we exercise faith. Without faith, the grace of Christ would not be appreciated or accepted. “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift?” (D&C 88:33). Indeed, God is angry with His people “because they will not understand [His] mercies which [He] hast bestowed upon them because of [His] Son” (Alma 33:16).

Conclusion

All people have needs of one kind or another. Through the enabling power of grace, our Savior can grant us spiritual gifts to bless our lives and the lives of others and to guide us back to His presence. The Lord’s
consecrated, covenant servants are the catalysts who bring unmet needs and spiritual gifts together with power and real effect. The interaction can produce some of our most profound and satisfying experiences.

Notes


This is a standard introduction to many visiting teaching messages.

3. Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood, Part B, “Home Teaching” (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 55.
14. Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 1:175.
15. Bruce R. McConkie, A New Witness for the Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 278.
26. Young, Discourses of Brigham Young, 32.
About one of every ten Church members has a disability that requires special attention.

Courtesy of Visual Resources Library © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.
Welcoming All of God’s Children in His House: Supporting Members with Disabilities

*Tina Taylor Dyches*

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Ability and disability are inherent parts of our mortal existence. Although some people are born with disabilities, many acquire them through accidents, illnesses, or conditions incident to aging. Disabilities are conditions that hinder adequate or normal functioning of the mind and body, and they are often chronic in nature.

One great way to help our ward family grow closer together is to consider the needs of others, especially families who have children with disabilities.

Members with Disabilities in Our Wards

Many Church members may be able to identify only a few in their ward with disabilities. Often, the most visible disabilities come to mind (for example, those who are blind or deaf, who have significant intellectual disabilities, or who are in wheelchairs). However, if general population statistics are reflected in the average North American ward of 432 members, 50 (or approximately 12 percent) would have disabilities that warrant special attention. Of these 50, 13 would have a chronic mental illness, 10 would have learning disabilities, 8 would have intellectual disabilities, 6 would have communication disorders, and 4 would have hearing impairments. Two would have behavior disorders, 2 would have chronic health impairments, 2 would have motor and orthopedic impairments, 2 would have visual impairments, and 1 would have multiple disabilities.¹
If you are in a leadership position in your ward, you should be aware of the special needs of all of the members in your organization. Is there an empty pew that should be filled by one of these fifty members? Ask yourself these questions: “Where are the people with disabilities in my ward?” “Are some invisible to me?” and “Are some not attending church?”

A personal example illustrates the need to answer these questions. I am the Sunbeam teacher in my ward. Part of my stewardship is to know the individual nature of each of the eight children in my class. I may not know if these youngsters have a disability because most mild disabilities are not detectable at the age of three or four. However, I could choose to ignore the individual ways my Sunbeams learn the gospel of Jesus Christ, or I could pay particular attention to how Samantha needs to change activities every two to three minutes, how Cabe needs pictures to help me understand his speech, and how Max needs to sit on my lap while I draw pictures of dinosaurs during sharing time to keep him from getting his head stuck in the back of his chair! I also need to know why Tasha has not come to Primary since her name appeared on my roll. Does she have a special circumstance that makes it difficult for her and her family to feel welcome at church?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of disability</th>
<th>Number of members with disability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Mental Illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Disabilities</td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Quote" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disabilities</td>
<td><img src="chart3.png" alt="Quote" /></td>
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<td>Communication Disorders</td>
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<td>Hearing Impairments</td>
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<td>Behavior Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic Health Problems</td>
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<td>Motor or Orthopedic Impairments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual Impairments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
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In an average ward of 432 members, 50 will have disabilities. This chart is a breakdown of the 50 members with disabilities. Each character equals one member. Male and female proportions within disabilities vary.
Welcoming All Members in God’s House

Our Heavenly Father desires that His children no longer be “strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). Those of us who are active in the household of God have an obligation to provide an environment in which all of His children are welcome. We can begin to fulfill this obligation by asking these questions regarding those under our stewardship: “Are they attending sacrament meeting?” “Are they attending priesthood, Relief Society, Young Men or Young Women, Primary, seminary, and institute meetings and activities?” “Are they visited by sensitive home teachers or visiting teachers?” “Are they given callings to serve others in the ward or stake?” “Are they receiving all the blessings of the gospel afforded to those without disabilities?”

The blessings of the gospel are intended for all of God’s children, not just for those who are physically, intellectually, and emotionally astute. A personal example illustrates this concept. When I was a young college student earning my degree in special education, I met Carol at a school for students with intellectual and multiple disabilities. Our interactions were brief because I spent most of my volunteer time with children younger than Carol. I finished my volunteer work at the school and moved on to other learning and teaching experiences in locations far from this special school. Fifteen years later, while I was with my two-year-old son at McDonald’s, I saw Carol again. Nearing our table to clean it, she immediately recognized me, and I her. When I realized she had previously attended the special school, I was amazed! She was doing so well with her life. This was not the expected outcome for many of these students at that time. After doting on my son, she told me, in simple but sincere words, how the gospel had blessed her life. She showed me her wedding ring and informed me that she had married a fine man in the temple, that she had helped support her brother on a mission, and that after her shift at work, she often took the bus to the temple where she served diligently. Although her intellectual capabilities are impaired, her spirit and determination to follow the counsel of the prophet have been magnified.

Carol had intellectual disabilities that limited some of her life experiences; yet, she and her family felt blessed. These feelings are present in many families who report unique spiritual blessings that come from raising a child with disabilities. In some of our research regarding how families adapt to raising a child with special needs, parents offered comments regarding how their spiritual and religious perspective facilitated positive adaptation.
Many indicated that raising a child with special needs is a spiritual experience. Parents described the spiritual experience as part of a journey to a unique perspective. They also adapted positively over time after the initial crisis of learning about the child’s disability. However, they also described fluctuating spirituality, ranging from heightened experiences of personal knowledge to depths of despair regarding whether religion provided any support.

Parents reported a sense of unique knowledge—or insights that were “beyond” others who were either not of their faith or who were not raising a child with disabilities. Almost every couple expressed the sense of uniqueness that “because of our beliefs, our family is different from others.”

Three themes helped parents build and expand their personal faith. These were shared family beliefs in Church tenets, social support from members of the Church community, and family unity in Church participation. Personal faith was developed when families shared theological perspectives regarding the experience of raising a child with disabilities and when they could rely on community members for support. However, when parents differed in their level of religious participation, they experienced a degree of dissonance.

Parents described an ongoing process of transformation based on faith and religious belief. One father stated: “I look at these poor families that sit and say that it’s not fair and that God’s cursing them. It’s so meaningless. We don’t know exactly why we have him, but our base feeling is that we’re fortunate to have him; we’re not cursed or [having] bad luck. We didn’t do anything wrong; [neither are we] being punished. . . . It makes a big difference in our day-to-day outlook; and the frustrations we have with him affect us less because we know we have this basic belief and faith.”

Some parents expressed that they feel blessed to parent their disabled child and that this perspective allows them to view their child’s special worth and helps them deal with any hardships that come. Parents often “referred to their children as a ‘blessing,’ having a special purpose, helping the family to view an ‘eternal perspective,’ and ‘having it made’ or assured blessings in heaven.”

Yet not all families have spiritual confirmations regarding the special challenges God gives to His children. Some families experience challenges that may keep them from enjoying the blessings of the gospel.

**Spiritual Challenges of Families with Children Having Disabilities**

In some of our research, parents offered information regarding how religion can help them cope with the challenges of raising a child with a
disability. Some families are challenged by their desire to find meaning in the experience of raising a child with disabilities by feelings of ambivalence regarding how religion can help, by the fear of not fitting into the Church community, and by family dissonance in Church participation.

Finding meaning in the experience. President Thomas S. Monson has given advice to families who struggle to find meaning in the experience of raising a child with a disability or other chronic illness. He stated:

In our lives, sickness comes to loved ones, accidents leave their cruel marks of remembrance, and tiny legs that once ran are imprisoned in a wheelchair.

Mothers and fathers who anxiously await the arrival of a precious child sometimes learn that all is not well with this tiny infant. A missing limb, sightless eyes, a damaged brain, or the term “Down’s syndrome” greets the parents, leaving them baffled, filled with sorrow, and reaching out for hope.

There follows the inevitable blaming of oneself, the condemnation of a careless action, and the perennial questions: “Why such a tragedy in our family?” “Why didn’t I keep her home?” “If only he hadn’t gone to that party.” “How did this happen?” “Where was God?” “Where was a protecting angel?” If, why, where, how—those recurring words—do not bring back the lost son, the perfect body, the plans of parents, or the dreams of youth. Self-pity, personal withdrawal, or deep despair will not bring the peace, the assurance, or help which are needed. Rather, we must go forward, look upward, move onward, and rise heavenward.

Ambivalence regarding how religion can help. Although some parents perceive their religiosity as a benefit in raising a child with a disability, some feel ambivalent regarding the helpfulness of the Church.

Some parents receive misguided advice from members of the Church community. One father said, “At first it was tough. People would say that we were blessed, and we’d look at each other and say, ‘Do you feel blessed? I don’t.’ One mother expressed, ‘Sometimes you feel really blessed, but you don’t want to hear it from everyone 10 times a day. I’ve talked to a couple of other moms, and they don’t see it as a blessing.’ Parents recognized that Church members were trying to be supportive but noted that such statements are not helpful and that a realization of a blessing emerged from within the family’s own belief system and time period and not from suggestion or advice from other church members.”

Another mother lamented, “My mom said if I prayed enough he would be fine. Then after he was born and he had problems, she said if I had more faith it would have been OK.”
Fear of not fitting into the Church community. Some parents felt isolated because they feared that their child would behave inappropriately at Church meetings or that they might be treated unkindly by Church members. “A father related, ‘A kid [at church] turned around and called her “flat face.”’ In another home, a mother reported that the . . . parents alternated church attendance to allow one parent to stay home to care for the child with the disability, thus avoiding situations where the family did not fit.”

Unfortunately, this experience is all too common for families raising children with significant disabilities.

Family dissonance in Church participation. Some families felt dissonance in their family, particularly when one spouse is actively involved in the Church and the other is not. Another type of dissonance was based on their expectations for the child with disabilities as they participated in specific Church ceremonies. Some parents wondered how, when, or whether their child might participate in priesthood ordinations and saving ordinances such as baptism. Some parents were concerned that their child’s not being involved in these ceremonies would call attention to how their child was different from others.

The Church’s Unique Role

Although many governmental programs exist to help people with disabilities and their families with their temporal needs, the Church exists to help them with their spiritual needs. This leads members to ask whether we in the Church are fulfilling our obligations to “sucor those that stand in need of succor” (Mosiah 4:16).

We asked ninety-seven sets of parents who were raising a child with a disability regarding the services they found helpful. They noted that the following services and organizations were most helpful: schools, government services, private organizations, extended family, friends and neighbors, medical professionals, and support groups. Interestingly, Church members and wards were rarely mentioned, and 90 percent of these parents were Latter-day Saints.

Barriers to full participation in the Church may be substantial for many families raising a child with disabilities. Yet our Heavenly Father wants them to enjoy all the blessings of the gospel.

“None Are Forbidden”

“Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his
salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all
men. . . . But all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and
none are forbidden” (2 Nephi 26:26–28).

Elder W. Craig Zwick has noted what we as members and leaders
in the Lord’s household must do to invite all His children to partici-
pate: “Our task, facilitated by prayer, is to recognize even the slight
limitations of each person who may be suffering pain or discourag-
ement. It may be a minor learning disability, dyslexia, or a slight hearing
impairment. Without our help, they may be unable to partake of the
Savior’s goodness or enjoy the fulness of life.”

How Church Members Can Help

Members of the Church can welcome those with disabilities into
the Church by knowing and loving the families of the child with special
needs, inviting them to participate and contribute in Church activities,
providing respite care, helping each member learn about the Savior and
His gospel, and making the church building accessible.

**Know and love the families.** The best vehicle for knowing and loving
families is home teaching and visiting teaching. These teachers should be
selected with care because they need to be sensitive to the special condi-
tions of the child and the family. The family may also need to rely upon
these teachers more than families who are not in similar circumstances.

In some of our research, we had children with moderate to severe
disabilities take pictures of what was important to them. One boy with
Down syndrome took several pictures of his home teachers, noting they
were loved as dearly as family. It was clear by the joy Dallin expressed
when he showed us his snapshots that he felt valued and cared for by
these home teachers. They were there for him at the many important
junctures of his life, not just for important religious events.

By ascertaining the needs of the family, members can find ways to
help them participate more fully. Home teachers and visiting teachers
and other Church leaders should get a clear sense of the spiritual needs
of the family. Can they participate in their Church meetings, attend
the temple, and fulfill their Church callings? Their social needs also
should be met. The Church is a society of brothers and sisters. Often,
these parents feel so burdened by the daily demands of their child with
disabilities that they haven’t the time to be “fellow citizens with the
saints” (Ephesians 2:19). Once the participation patterns of the family
are known, then the leader can work to reduce barriers to full access.

Members can also work to reduce the barriers that prevent the
families from attending Church meetings and activities. Two types of
barriers may prohibit full access to Church participation: access barriers and opportunity barriers.\textsuperscript{14}

Access barriers are those that hinder access to the environment, such as steps leading into the chapel, narrow bathroom stalls, and poor lighting. The standard design of modern Latter-day Saint Church buildings is generally compliant with laws for accessibility, although older buildings may have access barriers that prevent the full participation of some members.

Opportunity barriers hinder full participation because of policy, practice, attitudes, knowledge, and skills of those in the community. For example, when Primary leaders require the mother of the child with a disability to be the child’s one-on-one teacher, the child is not able to participate fully with her peers in Primary, nor is the mother allowed to participate fully in Relief Society. Further, other Primary children are not given the opportunity to learn alongside those who may appear to be different from them.

Opportunity barriers are not the responsibility of the general contractors of the Church. We, as members, must recognize the barriers we place on those with special needs and work to reduce and even eliminate those barriers.

\textit{Invite them to participate and contribute.} Some families may need transportation to get to ward or stake meetings, seminary, institute, or other Church-related activities. Others may just need an invitation—to feel that somebody cares about them and their spiritual welfare. Leaders can provide callings or responsibilities that fit the needs of the member with disabilities and of the Church alike.

For many years in my ward, Mark’s calling was to place the hymn numbers on the board for our sacrament meeting. He was dedicated and accurate in his calling. When Mark’s parents left for a mission and Mark moved to live in a group home, we felt a deep void in our ward. I was the music leader, and I missed him the most, I think, because I couldn’t quite reach the top of the hymn board!

We shouldn’t assume that just because members have a disability they cannot enjoy the blessings of the gospel. Elder James E. Faust said, speaking of those with disabilities: “Many . . . are superior in many ways. They, too, are in a life of progression, and new things unfold for them each day as with us all. They can be extraordinary in their faith and spirit. Some are able, through their prayers, to communicate with the infinite in a most remarkable way. Many have a pure faith in others and a powerful belief in God. They can give their spiritual strength to others around them.”\textsuperscript{15}
Provide respite care. Members can tend the child with a disability so the parents can attend their Church meetings. They can sit with the family and help if the child is restless or disruptive in meetings. Members should avoid giving harsh looks when a child is disruptive in a meeting; instead, they should show increased love and understanding. It is natural to turn and look when a peaceful environment is disrupted. However, when the look is one of compassion rather than disdain, the family is more likely to continue to participate in Church services. When feelings of compassion elicit acts of service, the reward is even greater.

Help each member learn about the Savior and His gospel. Members, leaders, or parents can invite a disability specialist to provide in-service assistance to Church leaders and teachers. Special educators are employed at almost every public school in the United States. Also, many universities have special-education departments with professors who can provide ward members with effective strategies for teaching those with disabilities. Further, the greatest experts regarding children with disabilities are the children’s parents. They may be willing and eager to provide ward members and leaders with instruction that is relevant to their child.

Members and leaders can consider integrating children with disabilities with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Most people don’t like to be singled out, particularly for their deficits. When we integrate individuals with disabilities with members of the ward who do not have disabilities, all members can benefit. Expectations are raised, normal patterns of behavior are modeled, and love and compassion are shared.

As Elder Marion D. Hanks was reflecting on Joseph Smith’s revelation that “all the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement,” he received a forceful impression that “God expects that His handicapped children will be given an opportunity for that enlargement, and that His disciples will accept the great responsibility to be concerned that they are. ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ’ (Galatians 6:2).”

Those in teaching positions can use ideas from Teaching—No Greater Call and resources from LDS Special Curriculum. They can also adapt curriculum as necessary (for example, using materials adapted for those with specific disabilities or using the Beginning Course Kit, which introduces the scriptures to beginning learners, helping them understand and read the scriptures).

Make the Church building accessible. Members can ask themselves, “Does my ward provide transportation? Marked accessible parking places? A ramp with a reasonable slope and sufficient width? Pews cut
at scattered sites? Accessible bathrooms? Accessible water fountains? An elevator or chair lift? Air filters or fragrance-free sections? Large print materials, sign language interpreters, and sound amplification?” If the answer is “no” for any of these questions, then ward or stake leaders should find ways to eliminate these barriers so every member can fully participate. For “the body hath need of every member, that all may be edified together, that the system may be kept perfect” (D&C 84:110).

Church Resources

Many resources exist for members with disabilities and those who serve them. Some are available through Special Curriculum, and most are available through the distribution centers or the online catalog. Examples include the Including Those with Disabilities packet and the materials listings for those with hearing impairments, intellectual impairments, and visual and physical disabilities.

The Church catalog offers various materials to alleviate the barriers those with disabilities face in accessing the curriculum and standard works of the Church. Many materials are available in Braille, large print, half- or standard-speed cassette tapes, and American Sign Language, including the Dictionary of Church Sign Language Terms, Interpreting for Deaf Members Handbook, CDs, music, hymns, and The Children’s Songbook.

Also, materials are available from the Boy Scouts of America to help scouts learn about those with disabilities through a “disabilities awareness” merit badge. This merit badge requires scouts to visit an agency that serves people with disabilities, interact with someone with a disability, spend fifteen hours helping a scout with disabilities, study the accessibility of public and private community places, display a summary of what was learned, and make a commitment to help people with disabilities. Several booklets are available to help leaders understand and serve scouts with disabilities in their troops. Although outdated, these booklets may be a good starting point for serving scouts who have learning disabilities, physical disabilities, hearing impairments, and visual impairments. The intent of these booklets is to ensure that all boys who want to be scouts will have the opportunity to do so and to have it be a successful experience.\textsuperscript{18}

Come unto Christ

The gospel is preached so that all may come unto Christ. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, explains that we are all “the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Corinthians
12:27). He explains, “For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? . . . If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Corinthians 12:14–15, 17–20).

The Lord has need of all members of His Church to fulfill His purposes. I have indeed been blessed by so many members of the Church who have special needs. When we were teenagers, John taught me about courage and perseverance. He came to meetings week after week, even though others teased him about his dress, hygiene, and intellectual capabilities. My Sunday School teacher, Sister Poor, taught me to seek true meaning from the word of the Lord. Her diligent reading of the standard works in Braille taught me to not just read the word of the Lord but to truly feast on it. James, my Sunday School classmate, taught me to ask thoughtful questions about the gospel and to break through the barriers of deafness to communicate spirit to spirit. Max, one of my Sunbeams, taught me to always keep an eye on my students—to never let them out of my sight—because all are precious in the sight of God and because my stewardship is to include, teach, and love them. My prayer is that we will do our part to welcome all of God’s children into His house.

Notes

1. Members with Disabilities, handout from LDS Special Curriculum, 2.
5. Marshall, “This Is a Spiritual Experience,” 68.


Charting the Course: President Clark’s Charge to Religious Educators

Scott C. Esplin

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Introducing President J. Reuben Clark Jr.’s classic address “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” in Messages of the First Presidency, editor James R. Clark observed, “No document, perhaps, in recent L.D.S. Church history, and in particular in the history of ‘Mormon’ education and educational philosophy, has had wider distribution or wider discussion than this message.”

The original 1938 Improvement Era publication of the talk likewise declared, “ Its significance pertains to the whole Church, and may well serve as an authoritative guide in all our teaching and all our meetings—auxiliary and otherwise, where there is any possibility of Church facilities and Church time being used to expose Church people to contrary influences.”

Commonly accepted today as the landmark charge in religious education, the talk has developed this central role over time. What brought about such a significant address in religious education? How was it received in its day? How has it been used in the intervening six decades of wide distribution and discussion?

Preparation of a Lifetime

What has been written of inspired statements and even scripture like President Joseph F. Smith’s vision of the redemption of the dead could likewise be said of “The Charted Course”: “The stage was set: preparation of a lifetime and preparation of the moment were recompensed with a heavenly endowment.” A lifetime of educational, intellectual, and spiritual preparation met with a moment of need.
J. Reuben Clark Jr. was born in Grantsville, Utah, on September 1, 1871, and was the eldest son of Joshua Reuben and Mary Louisa Woolley Clark. His father, a recent convert to the Church, and his mother, the daughter of Utah pioneer Bishop Edwin D. Woolley, contributed greatly to the education of young Reuben. He grew up studying under his father, a farmer and part-time educator in the local schools. Although he did not start formal schooling until the age of ten, he was tutored at home by his mother. Dedicated to learning, he completed the eighth grade, which was then the highest available education in Grantsville, and repeated it twice more to learn all he could.\(^5\)

Having exhausted his educational opportunities in Tooele County, Clark left home for Salt Lake City at the age of nineteen. Enrolling at the Latter-day Saints’ College (now LDS Business College), he studied under the principal, James E. Talmage, ultimately working as clerk for Talmage’s Deseret Museum. Eventually, Clark followed his mentor to the University of Utah, where he graduated valedictorian in 1898.\(^6\) After marrying Luacine Savage later that fall, Clark took his first job, like his father before him, in education.

Clark’s first teaching appointment was as inaugural principal of Heber High School. In his short teaching career, he was on the faculty at the Latter-day Saint’ College and Salt Lake Business College, and was acting president of the southern branch of the State Normal School (now Southern Utah University) in Cedar City for one year.\(^7\) Anxious to continue his studies, Clark left Utah in 1903 at the age of thirty-two to study law at Columbia University. Upon his departure, former teacher and then University of Utah president James E. Talmage remarked, “[J. Reuben Clark] possessed the brightest mind ever to leave Utah.”\(^8\)

His intellect, coupled with a passion for learning, served him well at law school and in his subsequent professional career. Upon graduation in 1906, Clark received an appointment as assistant solicitor of the State Department. He also resumed teaching, working for nearly two years as an assistant professor of law at George Washington University.\(^9\) By 1910 he was solicitor for the State Department. Subject to the political fallout from national elections, Clark was in and out of public service from 1910 to 1933, maintaining an international legal practice in the Washington DC area. His public career culminated in four years of service as the U.S. ambassador to Mexico.

Clark’s personal and political aspirations changed in the winter of 1931 when President Heber J. Grant called him to become Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Not sustained until the April conference of 1933 due to his ambassadorial duties in Mexico, he brought a
lifetime of educational and intellectual experience to the office as the first member of the First Presidency to have earned a graduate degree. This preparation was vital in his charge to religious educators.

**Preparation of the Moment—August 8, 1938**

The need for a definitive statement on religious education in the Church was evident to President Clark early in his service in the First Presidency. As part of his duties, he “made a thorough review of curriculum materials being used in the Church schools, institutes, and seminaries. Fearing the influence of secularization, he underlined [questionable terms] . . . . In his opinion, the terms were a compromise with secular ideas which asserted that the teachings of Jesus were purely ethical and not divine.”

This exposure to secular interpretations of spiritual truths was not new to President Clark. He had become familiar with the intellectual trends in religious studies while in the East. There, he had studied extensively the works of New Testament scholars, making copious notes that were later used in his 1954 book titled *Our Lord of the Gospels* and his 1956 book titled *Why the King James Version?* The Clark papers also contain charts tracking expenditures on religious education. The themes of intellectualism in religious education and the justification of Church expense for education are evident in “The Charted Course.”

With the issues and their solution fully formulated in his mind, President Clark accepted an invitation from church commissioner of education Franklin L. West, to address the assembled seminary, institute, and Church school religion faculty in Provo Canyon at Aspen Grove on Monday, August 8, 1938. The faculty and their spouses, numbering over ninety teachers, had been assembled for six weeks of special courses during Brigham Young University’s Alpine term. The group represented a majority of the 128 seminary, 18 institute, and 4 Brigham Young University religion faculty members employed by the educational system in 1938. During what one report called a “vigorous” morning rainstorm, President Clark addressed the assembled faculty. Seminary teacher Sterling M. McMurrin described the experience: “During the summer of 1938, when Natalie and I were newly married and I had a contract to teach a second year at Richfield, we attended the BYU Aspen Grove program held for seminary and religion teachers. . . . We camped out, really. The Wests and the Bennions had cabins, but here were the seminary, institute, and BYU religion teachers from all over the West living in tents. . . . Guest speakers came in every week for the Sunday morning service. Among the speakers were John A. Widtsoe, J. Reuben Clark, and myself.”
It is apparent from the Clark correspondence that the issues he discussed weighed heavily on his mind before the summer of 1938. Glimpses of this prior preparation emerge from letters written shortly after the talk’s delivery. In one response letter, President Clark wrote, “I have appreciated more than I can express your observations regarding that speech, and particularly your fine and sane estimate of the situation in our Church School System, and its needs. The talk at Aspen Grove is probably the first notice you had that I was feeling concerned about the situation, but I would like to assure you that the concern is not newly born, but has been with me ever since I came into the Presidency. I hope we are on the way towards curing the situation which has developed.”

Responding to Samuel O. Bennion, vice president of the Deseret News Publishing Company, President Clark also wrote, “I said a good many things then that I had been thinking for a long time, and wishing to say. I think that most of the parents of the Church will agree with all that I said.” Furthermore, fellow Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith wrote to President Clark immediately after the talk, saying, “I have been hoping and praying for a long time for something of this kind to happen. I have talked to many of these teachers, including the Commissioner of Education himself, and realize thoroughly the need of such counsel and wisdom which I hope will bear fruit.” President Clark responded, “I am very grateful to you for your kind expressions about the talk. We have felt for some time—as you say you have felt—that something of this sort should be said, and we are trustful that now it has been said, things will move in accordance with the ideas suggested.”

Reception of President Clark’s Message

As noted in the Clark correspondence, news of the talk spread quickly. McMurrin continued his description of the occasion: “Recently appointed to the First Presidency of the church, Clark gave his notorious address which was printed immediately in the Improvement Era (Summer 1938). It continues to be cited even today.” Excerpts from it were published the next day in area newspapers, including the Deseret News. The introduction to the article states: “Voicing an official pronouncement of the First Presidency of the Church, President Clark gave direct counsel to teachers of the Church Seminary System who are attending special courses during the university’s Alpine term. The policy, he said, was to apply also to other institutions of the system, including Brigham Young University, and Church academies and institutions.” On Saturday, August 13, the Church section of the Deseret News carried the full text on its front page under the title, “First Presidency
Sets Standards for Church Educators.” By August 15, *Deseret News* vice president Samuel O. Bennion asked President Clark to authorize its printing in pamphlet form, noting, “I am hanging on to my Church Section of *The News*, but I should like to see this outstanding address widely read.” Later the next month, the *Improvement Era* also ran the full text for the first time, under the title “The Charted Course of the Church in Education.” The origin of this title is unclear. President Clark’s personal correspondence and diary of the era refer to it as “my talk at Aspen Grove,” “my talk before the seminary and institute teachers,” or simply “Aspen Grove—Seminary People.”

As is also evident by McMurrin calling the talk “notorious,” early opinions of President Clark’s message varied. McMurrin continued, “We divided ourselves up pretty quickly into liberal and conservative camps, and I landed among the liberals. . . . There was considerable discussion about it around our campfires. Natalie and I were included in the campfire discussion presided over by Newell K. Young. . . . That evening by the campfire, Newell got up . . . and said, ‘I don’t know about the rest of you; but before I go to bed, I’m going over to see Lynn Bennion and resign.’ He did too.” Brother Bennion refused to accept the resignation.

Young later expressed his concerns about academic freedom in a letter to Russel B. Swensen, a religion faculty member at BYU: “I think the Brigham Young University is the greatest institution in all the Church. I would to God that whole and welcome freedom was granted all of you. What an intellectual, social, and spiritual power the Y could be if properly financed, well administered, and given complete democratic and Christian freedom of research and expression. Nothing can be spiritually and religiously great without the fullest freedom. No where else is force or coercion so harmful as in the realm of religion.” Another teacher reported a conversation among Church educators who bristled at the criticism, calling the talk “an expression of medieval theology.”

President Clark himself was aware of the controversy generated by his declaration. Responding to mission president William E. Tew’s praise of the printed talk, he wrote, “It is enheartening to receive commendation such as yours, because there has been not a little rather severe fault-finding on the part of certain groups because of the things which I said at Aspen Grove. We expect to follow through on this matter and to try to bring our Church education institutions in line herewith.” To another friend President Clark confided, “I am going to . . . treasure this expression of admiration because it helps to wipe out the memory of the unkind things which always come to me after I say something that seems to me to be worthwhile.”
In spite of the “unkind things” that came to President Clark following his talk, there was also much to treasure. The Clark papers in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at BYU contain numerous letters of praise, gratitude, and agreement he received in connection with the message. Among them are letters from a fellow Apostle, mission presidents, a stake president, business leaders, teachers, and students. Some reported evidence of the intellectualism President Clark sensed was a problem in Church education, to which he responded, “The information which [your letter] contains will be valuable to us in our attempt to handle a difficult situation. Unfortunately, yours is not the only statement of this sort that comes to us.”

Others were simple expressions of encouragement and thanks. Unique among them is a letter from a nonmember friend, who penned, “If there is another man in Utah who could make such a talk, I do not know him. If there is another man in the United States who could make for his church such a clear, forceful, and valuable statement, I have never heard of him. Permit me, as an outsider, to voice my great appreciation of your teaching. Only good can result from your work.”

**Historical Impact of “The Charted Course”**

While his nonmember friend was correct in his prophecy of “good” coming from the work, much of it occurred after President Clark’s lifetime. Some immediate changes did result from the talk, however. Franklin L. West, Church commissioner of education, was committed to act on the message. In a letter written to President Clark the month after delivery of “The Charted Course,” West highlighted several of the talk’s themes, stating, “I desire to say again . . . that I fully agree with the position the Presidency has taken. We exist wholly for the purpose of building testimonies to the Divine Mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith and to the Messiah as the Son of God. Our job is to teach the Gospel. . . . I promise you that you will see marked and rapid improvement along the lines you have in mind. . . . I am anxious to carry forward the work as nearly as I can exactly as you would have it.”

President Clark’s office diary further reports the following meeting with Commissioner West on January 23, 1939:

Brother West told me that he was himself outlining the courses for the Brigham Young University religious training; that he was also looking over the question of selection of the teachers, and insisting that no teacher should be employed in the school who is not spiritually sound; that this qualification seems at some time to have been overlooked or
not sufficiently emphasized; and that the problem presented there was, for various reasons, rather a difficult one. He said, however, he was determined that the schools should take on a proper instruction in religion.

In the course of his observations he spoke of the fact that as a body the institute and seminary teachers had real testimonies of the truthfulness of the Gospel. I told Brother West that I had never had a serious doubt but that the bulk of those teachers did have a testimony. I said that my own view was that their real difficulty was that they could not bring themselves to teach the doctrines of the Church because of what their non-Church member colleagues would say about them. I said in my judgment the real difficulty was lack of courage. I emphasized this several times during the conversation.

At a later point in the conversation Brother West said that the Brigham Young University people were almost apologetic about the Gospel, to which I responded that was evidence to my thesis, namely, that what they lacked was not testimonies, but courage. We agreed that no person should be employed to teach in the college who is not in a position spiritually to teach any subject in religion.37

As noted in the Clark diary, the talk produced organizational changes in Church education, especially at BYU. “The late 1930’s was a time of sensitive relations between Salt Lake City and Provo. Many Brigham Young University faculty members were beginning to feel themselves qualified scholastically and spiritually to reconcile the worlds of science and religion.”38 Furthermore, control of the school did not reside in Salt Lake City. At the time, Executive Committee members of the BYU Board of Trustees were all Utah County men.39 Even before the talk, the Church Board of Education discussed a structural reorganization. The idea was to replace local individuals and Brigham Young family members with General Authorities on the board of trustees. President Grant felt that “Brigham Young University is not a Provo institution, but a Church institution.”40 Following delivery of “The Charted Course,” the Church Board of Education took action, and on February 2, 1939, the BYU Board of Trustees was restructured to match identically the General Church Board of Education, with all three members of the First Presidency and seven members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles comprising both boards.41

A second immediate change from the talk occurred in Church school curriculum. As Commissioner West reported in January 1939, he undertook to personally outline the courses. True to his word, West reviewed the curriculum, delivering a “Preliminary Outline of Courses in Religion for Church Colleges and Institutes” to President Clark on March 3, 1939.42 Later, detailing what he called
a First Presidency Conference, President Clark recorded in his office diary on July 21, 1939: “In connection with the general discussion of Church Education, I repeated my statement that the present courses in the Church Educational program contemplated the study of religion and ethics, with our own religion really as a part of this general study, rather than a study of the Gospel. It was agreed that this should be changed, and the Gospel should be made the essential thing.” 43 This seems to be a repetition of what he said more forcefully to the religious educators at Aspen Grove: “These students fully sense the hollowness of teachings that would make the gospel plan a mere system of ethics. . . . You are not to teach the philosophies of the world, ancient or modern, pagan or Christian, for this is the field of the public schools. Your sole field is the gospel, and that is boundless in its own sphere.” 44

BYU religion professor Russel B. Swensen reported the impact of these changes on the curriculum: “About 1941 they had a new curriculum and Brother West, under severe pressure from the General Authorities had to make the whole revision. . . . They had social dancing, they had psychology of religion, the sociology of religion, which were taught to get religious credit. They found that a man could go the full four years at BYU and not take a genuine religious course, so probably we had gone too far in deviating from religious courses.” 45

In spite of these immediate changes due to President Clark’s talk, larger national and international issues may have quickly overshadowed it. The year he delivered the address, Germany’s military occupied Austria. The front page of the same edition of the Deseret News that reported the talk covered fighting between Japan and Russia. In March of 1939, Germany occupied Czechoslovakia. One year after the talk’s delivery, missionaries were withdrawn from Europe shortly before Hitler’s forces invaded Poland, beginning World War II. 46 The impact of these events on the Church generally, and on educational institutions specifically, could have pushed “The Charted Course” and educational reform to the periphery for the remainder of President Clark’s life.

Ironically, the talk itself, given in the midst of these tumultuous times, seems to transcend them. President Clark, himself a man of vast political experience, made no reference to national or international developments. His words are not time sensitive. Like other inspired teachings, its application is not dependent on the contextual events that initiated it. Sixty years later, Elder Henry B. Eyring observed, “He saw our time and beyond, with prophetic insight.” 47
Gaining a Life of Its Own: “The Charted Course” After President Clark

With the end of global conflict and a flood of students returning to the classrooms, educational growth and change again took center stage in the 1950s. Enrollment at BYU, for example, nearly doubled from 1950 to 1956. However, President Clark’s charge seems to have been lost. Never quoted in general conference during the 1940s and 1950s, few, if any, references exist to it. The next reference about the talk came in an October 1959 letter from BYU president and administrator of the Unified Church School System Ernest L. Wilkinson to President Clark. Apparently ignorant of “The Charted Course,” Wilkinson wrote, “After giving my address to the faculty, one of the members of our faculty, who long preceded me, Brother Wes Belnap, sent me a copy of an address which you had given to the faculty dated August 8, 1938. I note . . . that you had said 20 years prior, in much more eloquent language, the same thing I tried to say in my enclosed address.”

Franklin D. Day, assistant commissioner of Church Education from 1968 to 1986, credits the increased use of the talk during this era to President Boyd K. Packer, former assistant administrator of seminars and institutes of religion. Noting that he only remembered it being mentioned casually before this time, Day reports that Elder Packer began emphasizing it frequently when he served as an administrator and early in his call as a General Authority. Day commented, “I don’t know of anyone else that emphasized it as much as Boyd K. Packer.”

Elder Packer himself later stated, “I think I have never talked to religious educators of the Church except I have quoted some verses of scripture from the document entitled The Charted Course of the Church in Education.” In addition, Elder Packer, in his second year as an Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles, quoted from the talk in his April 1963 general conference address, the first General Authority to do so since it had originally been given. A decade later, noting that “never a year goes by but that I reread it carefully,” he published it as the appendix to his book Teach Ye Diligently.

President Packer’s special emphasis of “The Charted Course” dominates its history since the 1970s. As mentioned, he cites it frequently, often noting, “It is revelation; it is as much revelation as that which you find if you open the standard works.” On numerous occasions he has challenged religious educators, “Surely you read that every year, every one of you, every year.” Speaking to the BYU religion faculty at the presentation of Jeffrey R. Holland as dean of Religious
Instruction, Elder Packer summarized many of these themes, “We have, I am sure, all read ['The Charted Course']. But some of us have not read it enough. President Clark was a prophet, seer, and revealer. There is not the slightest question but that exceptional inspiration attended the preparation of his message. There is a clarity and power in his words, unusual even for him. I know you have read it before, some of you many times, but I assign you to read it again. Read it carefully and ponder it. For by applying the definition the Lord Himself gave, this instruction may comfortably be referred to as scripture.”

During the same time period, Elder Joe J. Christensen, then associate commissioner of education, emphasized a return to “The Charted Course.” He attributed this emphasis to three challenges facing religious education at the time. First, in 1970, the Church Board of Education decided that the seminaries and institutes of religion would follow membership growth in the Church worldwide. Elder Christensen commented, “We felt it would be very important for everyone to be aware of this basic, classic document to get them going in the right direction doctrinally from the start.” He continued, “Secondly, we were in the process of creating a lot of curriculum that would have an influence around the world. We wanted those who had that responsibility to have what they prepared to be consistent with the principles contained in ‘The Charted Course.’ Third, we were aware of a few of our personnel we felt needed to adjust their approach in teaching to conform better with the doctrinal principles President Clark taught.” For these reasons, he issued a reprint of the talk for religious educators, adding the following introduction:

Only a few things are worth a second reading—rarely are things of such enduring quality that they are read many times and live to inspire a second or third generation. President J. Reuben Clark’s address “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” belongs to the latter group and has been republished so that its fundamental principles may continue to inspire and motivate the personnel of the Church Educational System.

President Clark’s summation of the responsibilities teachers have to the Church and its mission and to students’ spiritual needs are relevant, comprehensive, and inspirational.

May this reprint serve to remind us that although it may take extraordinary moral and spiritual courage to apply them, the stakes President Clark drove remain solid and firm. Perhaps it is time for all who teach to recheck their bearings and see where they are and whether the axiomatic principles and objectives outlined in the “Charted Course” are being fully implemented (or utilized).
Of this reprinting, Elder Christensen observed, “We felt that the reprint had a very important influence on many teachers to assure that the students were being taught the doctrines of the Gospel more solidly.” He later commented: “[‘The Charted Course’] is a classic which I believe is just as relevant in principle now as then and applies to all who teach the gospel. You would do well to read and reread it in its entirety.”

Other General Authorities without direct Church Educational System backgrounds also began citing President Clark’s talk in the mid 1970s. It was the underpinning of the First Presidency’s inaugural instructions to Church Commissioner of Education Elder Neal A. Maxwell in 1970 and later in the 1971 charge to Elder Dallin H. Oaks as the new president of Brigham Young University. In his 1976 address to religious educators, Elder Ezra Taft Benson relied heavily on excerpts from “The Charted Course,” declaring, “This counsel has not changed over the years. Its applicability is even greater today.” Elder Bruce R. McConkie mixed numerous quotations from “The Charted Course” with scripture in his 1981 talk “The Foolishness of Teaching” and later challenged teachers to “read again your instructions as given by President J. Reuben Clark, Jr.”

Other General Authorities to cite President Clark in addressing religious educators include Bishop Victor L. Brown, President James E. Faust, and Elder Henry B. Eyring.

Unique among all citations of President Clark’s charge was President Marion G. Romney’s 1980 talk “The Charted Course Reaffirmed.” Beginning his talk, President Romney stated, “Because this assignment to speak to you professional teachers about how to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ in these Church institutions requires an endowment which I do not possess, I shall say what I think should be said in the words President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., used in an address he gave forty-two years ago entitled ‘The Charted Course of the Church in Education.’” President Romney then reread nearly the entire talk, making only one change: substituting the word you for the original phrase “the Church seminaries and institutes.”

Elder Henry B. Eyring, then commissioner of Church Education, later added the following details to the experience:

That was the end of his talk. He had chosen to read The Charted Course of the Church in Education, even though, I knew, he had prepared a talk of his own.

President Romney had no family member with him at the Salt Palace that night. So I volunteered to drive him to his house...
After we had driven along for a few minutes, I asked, “President Romney, don’t you think young people and the world have changed almost completely since President Clark gave that talk in 1938?” And then I paraphrased what seemed a remarkable part of President Clark’s talk, at least to me:

“The youth of the Church are hungry for things of the Spirit; they are eager to learn the gospel, and they want it straight, undiluted. They want to know about the fundamentals I have just set out—about our beliefs; they want to gain testimonies of their truth. They are not now doubters but inquirers, seekers after truth. Doubt must not be planted in their hearts. Great is the burden and the condemnation of any teacher who sows doubt in a trusting soul.

“These students crave the faith their fathers and mothers have; they want it in its simplicity and purity. There are few indeed who have not seen the manifestations of its divine power. They wish to be not only the beneficiaries of this faith, but they want to be themselves able to call it forth to work” (The Charted Course of the Church in Education, 1992 rev. ed. [address to religious educators, August 8, 1938], p. 3.).

I talked with President Romney, as we drove along, about all the changes in youth, in morals, in science, in education, in the sophistication of young people, and the changes in their families—and on and on. And that is when I repeated my question to President Romney, something like this: “Do you think what President Clark taught still describes the way we should approach our students today?”

President Romney chuckled, sat silent for a moment, and then said, “Oh, I think President Clark could see our time—and beyond.”

This episode highlights another aspect of “The Charted Course.” As President Romney indicated, speaking to religious educators required a special endowment that not even he as a fellow member of the First Presidency felt to possess. President Clark himself seems to indicate this. In a letter written after the talk’s delivery, he commented, “We of the Presidency have felt that something should be said about matters that were discussed in my talk at Aspen Grove, and it was decided that I should be the mouthpiece to say them.” Two weeks later he added, “In that talk I said what the First Presidency believe, and expressed the decisions which they have reached.” The Deseret News stressed the importance of the message, introducing it as “voicing an official pronouncement of the First Presidency of the Church.” The Improvement Era emphasized that the message had been given “with the approval of the First Presidency.” More recently, Elder Packer emphasized that President Clark was “speaking for” and was “approved by the First Presidency.”
The talk’s very inclusion in *Messages of the First Presidency* says something about its importance. Editor James R. Clark indicated in the introduction to the first volume of *Messages of the First Presidency*: “The general rule of the compilation was to include only *Messages* of a public nature signed by The First Presidency as a quorum (D&C 107:21–22). Some are signed only by the President of the Church.”75 In his introduction to the fourth volume, James R. Clark further explained, “I have chosen to include in this volume a number of documents issued on the letterhead of the First Presidency and dealing with Church matters but signed by less than a full quorum of the First Presidency.”76 Expanding those general rules to include a talk delivered by the First Counselor in the First Presidency seems unique indeed.

“The Charted Course” Today

After more than six long and interesting decades, President Clark’s “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” seems to characterize the man. President Marion G. Romney, President Clark’s friend and associate, wrote of him, “I have always hoped that those who would write about J. Reuben Clark, Jr., would remember this: to him it mattered little whether he was being praised or criticized; it mattered much, however, whether his course was right and true.”77 While initially offensive to some, the talk stands today as the centerpiece of religious instruction in the Church, outlining a course “right and true.” Cited, sometimes extensively, in over fifteen General Authority addresses to assembled religious educators, it continues to be emphasized in training for prospective teachers, is quoted in *Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders*, and was reprinted as the first in a collection of core addresses to CES entitled *Charge to Religious Educators*.

From a personal perspective, the emphasis on President Clark’s words and the subsequent prophetic commentary his successors made about it changed me as a teacher. Six years ago, in an address that highlights my early concerns as a teacher, Elder Henry B. Eyring stated, “On an evening in February, you may well be feeling a little discouragement about how hard it seems to be to lead young people to choose eternal life. In your class today or yesterday, you searched the faces and watched the body language of your students, looking for some sign that the gospel was going down into their hearts and into their lives.”78 Addressing religious educators like President Clark before him, Elder Eyring continued, “The place I would always begin . . . would be to read President J. Reuben Clark Jr.’s talk ‘The Charted Course of the
Church in Education’. . . . He saw our time and beyond, with prophetic insight. The principles he taught, of how to see our students and thus how to teach them, will always apply. . . . The great change in our classrooms, as the kingdom goes forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, will only verify the prophetic vision of President Clark. . . . The principles described so many years ago will be a sure guide in the years ahead, both in our classrooms and in the homes of our students and their posterity.””

That year, President Clark and his message encouraged me to stay in the classroom. Six years later, it still does.

Notes

1. James R. Clark, ed., in Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 6:44.
3. Clark, in Messages of the First Presidency, 6:44.
17. Sterling M. McMurrin and L. Jackson Newell, Matters of Conscience: Con-


19. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Samuel O. Bennion, August 20, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.


25. Samuel O. Bennion to J. Reuben Clark Jr., August 15, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.


30. Newel K. Young to Russel B. Swensen, November 21, 1938, correspondence, in Russel B. Swensen Papers; mss 1842, box 2, folder 5; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

31. N. L. Nelson to J. Reuben Clark Jr., September 2, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.


33. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Stephen Abbot, August 31, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

34. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Merrill Y. Van Wagoner, September 3, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.
35. Captain Stephen Abbot to J. Reuben Clark Jr., August 21, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

36. Franklin L. West to J. Reuben Clark Jr., September 4, 1938, correspondence, in Joshua Reuben Clark Papers, 1933–61; ms 4265, reel 14; Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.


42. “Preliminary Outline of Courses in Religion for Church Colleges and Institutes,” in Joshua Reuben Clark Papers, 1933–61; ms 4265, reel 14; Church Archives.


47. Henry B. Eyring, “The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest,” address to CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 2.


49. Ernest L. Wilkinson to J. Reuben Clark Jr., October 15, 1959, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.


52. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 1963), 106.


57. Boyd K. Packer, “That All May Be Edified” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 44; see also D&C 68:4.


63. Clark, Messages of the First Presidency, 6:44.
69. Eyring, “And Thus We See,” 107.
70. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to R. K. Bischoff, September 8, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.
71. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Jacob H. Trayner, September 22, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.
73. Clark, “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” 520.
75. Clark, in Messages of the First Presidency, 1:xxiv.
76. Clark, in Messages of the First Presidency, 4:xi.
Gordon B. Hinckley as a boy

Unless otherwise noted all photos courtesy of the Office of the President
Born June 23, 1910, Gordon B. Hinckley, first child of Bryant and Ada Hinckley, was a “spindly, frail boy susceptible to earaches and other illnesses.” He had allergies, hay fever, and whooping cough, which were aggravated by the smoke of Salt Lake City’s coal-burning stoves. Upon their doctor’s recommendation, the Hinckleys purchased several acres of farmland in the East Millcreek area, where they lived during the summer and where Gordon could breathe fresh air free from the smoke of the city. The summer home was a place of work and outdoor adventure. It was a place to tend animals, plant trees, and explore. Some nights were spent lying in the grass sleeping under the stars. The city home had a library with a thousand volumes. It was a place for Gordon to follow the habits of his parents in reading and pondering good books.

These two places of Gordon B. Hinckley’s childhood and young adulthood exemplify twin characteristics that are so much a part of him today. He loves the outdoors and has always spent time planting trees and flowers; he enjoys home repairs and projects and doesn’t mind getting his hands dirty. But he is also a man of letters and language, a person who is well acquainted with good literature.

Today he is still a mix of city and country. He can meet with heads of state, kings and queens from around the globe, but he can also get his work clothes on, fix a toaster, plant a tree, weed a garden, and enjoy the beauty of God’s creations. He said of his childhood, “I learned to live around animals and learned the lessons of nature—the
beauty that is there and the penalties that come when nature in abused. We had large fruit orchards, and we learned how to prune trees. . . . In January, February, and March we pruned the trees, but we didn’t like it, because it was hard work. Yet we did learn something from it: You can determine the kind of fruit crop that you will have in September by the way you prune the trees in February. That was a great lesson, and it applies to people as well. You can pretty much determine the kind of adults you will have by the way you care for them as children.”

Gordon’s first two decades overflowed with the happy, ordinary experiences of a joyful boyhood. This happiness was shaken by family heartache in 1930 when his beloved mother, Ada, died of cancer at age fifty. Even in death, his mother’s influence on her son was profound and lasting. Whenever he faced challenges, he thought of his courageous, faithful mother who was a constant influence for good in his life.

Gordon was an excellent student at Hamilton School, Roosevelt Junior High School, LDS High School, and the University of Utah, where he graduated in 1932 with a major in English and a minor in ancient languages. In 1932, at age twenty-two, Gordon wanted to attend Columbia University in New York City to study journalism, but the Lord had other plans for him—he was called to preach the gospel in the European Mission, with headquarters in London.

His first weeks of missionary work were discouraging and difficult. Suffering with hay fever and homesickness, he wrote home to his father that he felt he was wasting his time and his father’s money and that perhaps he should just return home. His father responded, “Dear Gordon, I have your recent letter. I have only one suggestion: forget yourself and go to work.” Elder Hinckley had a change of heart, and later said of that experience, “That July day in 1933 was my day of decision. A new light came into my life and a new joy into my heart. Everything good that has happened to me since then I can trace back to the decision I made that day in Preston.”

Elder Hinckley conducting a street meeting as a missionary
When Elder Hinckley returned from the mission field, his mission president had arranged for him to report to the First Presidency on the missionary work in the European Mission. A few days later, second counselor in the First Presidency, David O. McKay, who had been impressed with this newly returned missionary, offered him the position of executive secretary of the Church’s Radio, Publicity, and Mission Literature Committee. In this position, he wrote and produced hundreds of radio scripts, filmstrips, missionary pamphlets, public relations materials, and books for use in the mission field. Later he was asked by President McKay to find a way to present the temple ceremonies in various languages. This led to the production of a film version of the temple ceremonies in fourteen languages. This film version was first used in the Swiss Temple following its dedication in September 1955.

After years of dating and close friendship, Gordon married Marjorie Pay on April 29, 1937 in the Salt Lake Temple. They are the parents of five children: three daughters and two sons, and more than three score grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They are a close-knit extended family, unfailingly supportive of one another.

Gordon B. Hinckley’s early Church callings included service on the Sunday School General Board of the Church from 1937 to 1946. As part of this assignment, he wrote a manual for Book of Mormon study that was used in Sunday Schools for two decades. In 1946, he was called as
second counselor in the East Millcreek Stake presidency and after that, he was called to stake president—becoming the third generation of Hinckleys to serve as a stake president. As a stake leader, he was known for his efficiency, diligence, wisdom, and a wonderful sense of humor.

On April 6, 1958, President David O. McKay called him to serve as an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve. Two and a half years later, at the October 1961 general conference, he was sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (just three months after the passing of his beloved father). During his service as a member of the Twelve, Elder Hinckley was respected at Church headquarters and among the Saints for his devoted service and leadership, writing and speaking abilities, and good nature and kindly disposition.
He supervised missions in Asia and in South America, and filled numerous headquarters assignments and committee responsibilities.

The next two decades would bring new callings and additional responsibilities. In July 1981, he was called by an ailing President Spencer W. Kimball to serve as an additional counselor in the First Presidency. In December 1982, upon the passing of Nathan Eldon Tanner, Gordon B. Hinckley was called as second counselor in the First Presidency. With the death of President Kimball in November 1985, President Hinckley was called as a first counselor to new Church President Ezra Taft Benson. Nine years later, upon President Benson’s death in 1994, he was again called to serve as the first counselor to a new president, Howard W. Hunter. Each of these three presidents experienced age-related illnesses, and during that time President Hinckley carried much of the day-to-day responsibility for the administration of the Church.

On March 12, 1995, President Gordon B. Hinckley was ordained and set apart as the fifteenth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During a news conference the next day, a reporter asked him about his focus and the theme of his administration. Without missing a beat, he answered, “Carry on. Our theme will be to carry on the great work which has been furthered by our predecessors.” With his theme of carrying on this great latter-day work, he has expanded and accelerated the growth and mission of the Church in unique and important ways.
Except for a brief two-year interlude during World War II (when he worked for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad), President Gordon B. Hinckley has spent more than seventy years either as an employee or General Authority of the Church. No one in the history of the Church has worked for more years in more assignments at Church headquarters than he has. Both professionally and in his Church service, he is known for his intelligence and diligence, his responsiveness and creativity, his complete commitment to the gospel and the work of the Lord.

**Milestones of a Remarkable Presidency**

Some of the milestones and hallmarks of President Hinckley’s leadership include temple building, the proclamation on the family, construction of the Conference Center, the Perpetual Education Fund, the establishment of additional Quorums of the Seventy, interaction with the media, international Church growth, and interfaith outreach.

At the conclusion of the April 1998 general conference, President Hinckley announced a “tremendous undertaking,” a program to begin immediately to construct smaller temples across the earth that would bring the blessings and ordinances of the Lord’s house to more people. His prophetic leadership has increased the number of temples worldwide from 51 in 1998 to over 120 today, with the total announced or under construction at 131.

President Hinckley read “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” in the general Relief Society meeting of the Church on September 23, 1995. Underscoring its importance, this is only the fifth proclamation issued by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in this dispensation. The proclamation sets forth fundamental gospel doctrine about marriage, family, gender, Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness, the sacred responsibilities of spouses and parents, and principles of successful marriage and family. It also provides a solemn warning that the disintegration of the family undermines society.
Because the Church had outgrown the Tabernacle on Temple Square, President Hinckley announced plans to construct a new Conference Center on April 6, 1996. The 1.4-million-square-foot building was dedicated by President Hinckley during the general conference of the Church, October 8, 2000. The building seats 21,333 in the main Conference Center and 905 in the Little Theater, making it, possibly, the largest theater-type building in the world.

In the April 2001 general conference, President Hinckley announced a new official program of the Church, a “bold initiative” which was inspired of the Lord. The Church would establish a revolving fund, similar to the Perpetual Emigration Fund in the early days of the Church, which would bless generations of people to come. From the continuing contributions of faithful Latter-day Saints, a Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) has been created that extends loans to devout and ambitious young men and women so that they may borrow money to attend school. They then repay that which they have borrowed together with a small amount of interest designed as an incentive to repay the loan.

President Hinckley called Area Authority Seventies in the April 1997 general conference, a move toward a decentralization of the operation of the Church and greater efficiency in working with nations across the globe. Members of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Quorums of the Seventy were called to serve for a period of years in a voluntary capacity in the area in which they reside. “We have established a pattern under which the Church may grow to any size with an organization of Area Presidencies and Area Authority Seventies, chosen and working across the world according to need.” Today, these three quorums, as well as three additional quorums, work under the direction of General Authorities.

No Church leader has been interviewed and profiled by more media outlets around the world than has Gordon B. Hinckley. He has welcomed the media attention because he understands and respects journalists, and he knows that media coverage helps to spread the gospel message and continues to bring the Church out of obscurity. He has been interviewed by large publications including Time magazine and the New York Times to local newspapers and broadcast outlets in countries across the globe. He has appeared before the National Press Club, and was featured on 60 Minutes and Larry King Live.

President Hinckley has written numerous articles and books during his lifetime. Among them are Truth Restored, a concise history of the Church; Standing for Something: Ten Neglected Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes (2000), a nationally published book that has sold over half a million copies and appeared on the USA Today and New

In 1910, when President Hinckley was born, the Church had 62 stakes with 398,478 members. As of December 31, 2004, there were 2,665 stakes with 12,275,822 million members worldwide. In addition, when President Hinckley was born, the vast majority of Church membership was centered in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. As of 1996, the majority of Latter-day Saints now live outside of the United States.

A hallmark of President Hinckley’s presidency is his desire to reach out in love to others not of the Latter-day Saint faith and to extend a hand of friendship. Over the years, he has repeatedly denounced arrogance and self-righteousness among Church members, saying, “We must never forget that we live in a world of great diversity. The people of the earth are all our Father’s children and are of many and varied religious persuasions. We must cultivate tolerance and appreciation and respect one another. We have differences of doctrine. This need not bring about animosity or any kind of holier-than-thou attitude.”

As the Lord’s prophet to all the world, his motivation is love for all humankind and a desire that they may be partakers of peace in this life and eternal life in the world to come.
On April 6, 2004, President Hinckley faced one of the greatest challenges of his life when his beloved wife, Marjorie Pay Hinckley, passed away. During their life together, President and Sister Hinckley shared an optimistic view toward the world, a love of books, a willingness to work, and a commitment to the Church. Though the physical affects of age were visible in her later years, the love they shared was equally apparent. They walked the highway of life side by side for almost sixty-seven years. She traveled the world with him, meeting members of the Church and supporting her husband in his heavy responsibilities. President Hinckley described her legacy as wife and mother in this fitting tribute: “To her I give all the credit for the virtues of our family, including our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. She holds a very bright spot in their hearts. . . . My love for her extends over a very long period of time and I expect it will go on forever.”

True to the theme of his administration, President Hinckley carried on, determined to serve to the best of his ability as long as the Lord required. In July 2005, President Hinckley celebrated his ninety-fifth year with a grand evening in the Conference Center. During this celebration, his friend Mike Wallace, the CBS news commentator, paid a tribute to the President as did other community and entertainment leaders. At an age when most are long retired, President Gordon B. Hinckley continues to serve as the Lord’s servant, determined to carry on in his service as leader of the Church.

Notes

3. Quoted in Dew, Go Forward with Faith, 64.
### Appendix: Life and Times of Gordon B. Hinckley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910, June 23</td>
<td>Born to Bryant Stringham Hinckley and Ada Bitner Hinckley</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Baptized by his father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Graduated from University of Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Became executive secretary of Church Radio, Publicity, and Mission Literature Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Married Marjorie Pay in the Salt Lake Temple</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939-1946</td>
<td>Served on Sunday School General Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Called by President Stephen L. Richards to serve as executive secretary of the General Missionary Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Asked by President David O. McKay to help with preparation of temple instruction to be presented in different languages in Swiss Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Called as president of East Millcreek Stake by Elders Harold B. Lee and George Q. Morris</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>Called as Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>Sustained as member of the Quorum of the Twelve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Called by President Kimball to serve as counselor in the First Presidency</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Set apart as the fifteenth President of the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Reads “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” at general Relief Society meeting</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Published <em>Standing for Something: Ten Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes</em></td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Dedicated the new Conference Center in Salt Lake City</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Announced the creation of the Perpetual Education Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Dedicated the reconstructed Nauvoo Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Published <em>Way To Be! Nine Ways to Be Happy and Make Something of Your Life</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Marjorie Pay Hinckley passes away in Salt Lake City</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>President Hinckley celebrates his 95th birthday</td>
</tr>
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New Publications

Joseph Smith and the Doctrinal Restoration

“Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (D&C 135:3). This year’s Sperry Symposium volume focuses on truths restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. It celebrates his 200th birthday and the 175th anniversary of the Church’s founding.

$24.95, ISBN 1-59038-489-X

Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament
Edited by Paul Y. Hoskisson

Explore the Old Testament as the original testament of the Savior’s dealings with humanity. Topics include the law of Moses, the Abrahamic covenant, and the teachings of Isaiah and Elijah. Elder Russell M. Nelson, Robert L. Millet, and others offer scriptural insights in these classic Sperry Symposium addresses.

$25.95, ISBN 1-59038-533-0
Pioneers in the Pacific: Memory, History, and Cultural Identity among the Latter-day Saints
Edited by Grant Underwood

In this volume, President Gordon B. Hinckley tells inspiring stories of missionaries and members in Australia, Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa, Tahiti, and Tonga. Elder Glen L. Rudd recalls serving with Matthew Cowley, the “Apostle of the Polynesians,” a man loved for his faith and kindness. Chieko N. Okazaki discusses the need for harmony between gospel principles and human culture. Groundbreaking chapters tell the history of Saints in the islands.

$19.95, ISBN 0-8425-2616-1

Fire on Ice: The Story of Icelandic Latter-day Saints at Home and Abroad
Fred E. Woods

How did the message of the restored gospel come to Iceland, the land of fire and ice? What made its converts so adventurous to make this lengthy Utah journey by sail, rail, and trail? What challenges did they encounter trying to assimilate into a western American culture? This book provides the answers. Its publication marks a dual sesquicentennial commemoration: the arrival of the first Icelandic Latter-day Saints in Utah and the earliest settlement of Icelanders in the United States.

$15.95, ISBN 0-8425-2617-X

A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, Vol. 2
Peter Crawley

On July 21, 1847, Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow, with one horse between them, paused at the mouth of Emigration Canyon and then made their way into the Great Salt Lake Valley—the first Latter-day Saints to walk on the land that would become their home. This volume tells the story of Latter-day Saint publishing efforts as the Church settled Utah. It also features detailed descriptions of Orson Pratt’s missionary publications in England and the printed works of missionaries in France, Italy, Denmark, and the Pacific islands. Researchers, librarians, book collectors, and serious students of Mormonism will find this book a valuable reference guide to these early publications.

$65.00, ISBN 0-8425-2603-X
**Window of Faith: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on World History**  
*Edited by Roy A. Prete*

Historians rarely discuss God’s hand in history. This collection offers the vantage of faith in viewing the events of the modern world. The book features Elder Alexander B. Morrison’s keynote address on God’s role in history, along with timely articles that delve into the role of divine providence in world events. Topics include the voyage of Columbus to the Americas, the birth of freedom in the Western world, scientific and technical advances, and the rise of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

$49.95, ISBN 0-8425-2610-2

**Latter-day Saint Nurses at War: A Story of Caring and Compassion**  
*Compiled by Patricia Rushton, Lynn Clark Callister, and Maile K. Wilson*

This remarkable book tells the story of Latter-day Saint nurses who have served in the military, covering the engagements from World War I through Operation Iraqi Freedom. Each conflict is introduced by a brief historical background, followed by individual accounts that capture the struggles and sacrifices of nurses who served so faithfully.

$29.95, ISBN 0-8425-2611-0

**Salvation in Christ: Comparative Christian Views**  
*Edited by Roger R. Keller and Robert L. Millet*

What do Christians believe about spiritual rebirth, justification, sanctification, and the fate of people who did not hear the gospel in their lifetimes? Scholars from many Christian traditions converged on the campus of Brigham Young University to share their perspectives. This volume weaves together the different hues of doctrinal understanding into a tapestry unified by faith in Jesus Christ.

$24.95, ISBN 0-8425-2606-4
Religious Studies Center

Established in 1975 by BYU Religious Education Dean Jeffrey R. Holland, the Religious Studies Center (RSC) is the research arm of Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Since its inception, it has provided funding for numerous projects, including conferences, books, and articles relating to Latter-day Saint culture, history, scripture, and doctrine. The RSC endeavors to use its resources to, first, facilitate excellence in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ; second, encourage research and publication that contribute to the mission of the university and its sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and third, promote study and understanding of other cultures and religions.

Research and Publication

One of the primary aspects of the RSC’s mission is to enhance understanding of revealed truths. The ultimate interpretation of doctrinal matters rests with the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; therefore, we seek to discover historical background, provide cultural and linguistic details, and explore new avenues of understanding into our faith, history, and way of life. Thus, research into scripture, Church history, and religious matters in general is an important part of what the full-time Religious Education faculty do. Because BYU is primarily a teaching institution, we recognize as our major thrust the classroom experience. We seek, however, to expand our classroom through the writing and publication of our research.

The RSC helps fund several meaningful projects each year and publishes books, articles, a newsletter, and the *Religious Educator* in helping to
promote and disseminate Latter-day Saint research and thought. These publications enhance the libraries of Latter-day Saint readers and others who take an interest in the history or culture of the Latter-day Saints. The yearly application deadline for research funding is June 1. Please send inquiries to RSC at 370 JSB, BYU, Provo, UT 84602.

An Invitation to Join with Us

RSC research and publication projects are sustained by university funding and by financial donations from friends who want to encourage the kind of quality work the RSC does. We are thankful for the generosity of those who support our efforts to bring the best scholarship to light. If you would like to become a donor to the RSC to help its mission, please contact the RSC at 370 JSB, BYU, Provo, UT 84602.

The RSC restricts its publications to items that fit within the scholarly range of the curriculum and mission of Religious Education. It produces materials that are well written, rigorous, and original and that reflect the doctrine, the history, the teachings of the living prophets, and the standard works of the Restoration. It seeks works that meet academic needs or fill a niche in the area of faithful scholarship. It welcomes all materials that fit within these parameters.
The Atonement and the Resurrection
Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Beyond “Recipe Repentance” and “Formula Forgiveness”
Lawrence R. Flake

Teaching in the Book of Mormon
R. Mark Matheson

“Ye Shall Have Joy with Me”: The Olive Tree, the Lord, and His Servants
Daniel Belnap

Building Lessons Filled with Light
Robert R. Wallace

Teachers as Torchbearers
Michael K. Parson

Discerning and Meeting Needs: The Essence of Our Ministry
Peter B. Rawlins

Welcoming All of God’s Children in His House:
Supporting Members with Disabilities
Tina Taylor Dyches

Charting the Course: President Clark’s Charge to Religious Educators
Scott C. Esplin

Profiles of the Prophets: Gordon B. Hinckley
Lloyd D. Newell

“The power of the Atonement to pardon, to sanctify, to give new life, even eternal and immortal life, came to me in a simple but powerful experience some years ago.”