A Teacher of God’s Children

PRESIDENT DIETER F. UCHTDORF
On the cover:
Peyto Lake in Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada.

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Sharpening Our Edge as Teachers

While the ability to teach the gospel is in fact a spiritual gift (see Moroni 10:9–10), an endowment of the Holy Ghost, surely each one of us can become more effective as gospel teachers. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a layman’s church administered by farmers and plumbers and medical doctors, and the gospel is taught regularly by clergymen and college presidents and homemakers; there is no formal training for the ministry. This, however, is no excuse for spiritual laziness or thoughtlessness in our presentations at the pulpit or in the classroom. The tenets of the restored gospel are powerful and soul-transforming, and so how we present them to others matters very much to our Lord and Savior, who is the Master Teacher. God expects his messengers to do their very best to match the Message. A profound truth can be presented poorly and have little impact on listeners. And so it is that the Church encourages its instructors to avail themselves of inservice opportunities, to visit and observe classes and ponder on what constitutes inspired and inspiring teaching.

A serious study of the scriptures, fasting, and prayer will always be prerequisites to teaching “with power and authority of God” (Alma 17:3). On the other hand, attending to methodology, to the means of delivery, is important as well. Theses and dissertations and whole books have sought to identify some of the Savior’s techniques for teaching, and so wise teachers of the gospel (and that includes all of us), though focused principally on content and personal spirituality, will always devote serious reflection to how and in what manner a message is to be delivered. I testify that as we attend to both sides of this equation—both content and technique—our classrooms will become a learning environment filled with moments that matter. Truly, in such a sacred setting, “he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).

Robert L. Millet
Editor
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President Dieter F. Uchtdorf
What a pleasure it is to be with you today. I love and honor you. I am most grateful to President Monson for this assignment. I express the love and gratitude of the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles for your righteous influence on the youth of the Church throughout the world. I pray that the Holy Ghost will bless and edify us as we share this special time together.

In addition to those who are here in this beautiful, historic Tabernacle, we are joined by more than 42,000 seminary and institute teachers in more than 150 countries, with translation in twenty-three languages. Many of you are seeing this broadcast live; some will watch it on DVD at a later time. All this is a modern miracle. But above all, it is our faith in the Lord our God and the miracle of His restored gospel that draw us together across all kinds of boundaries to be edified, uplifted, and united by the power of the Spirit.

My heart reaches out in gratitude to you who have chosen teaching as your profession and to all who teach in response to a call from your priesthood
leaders. President David O. McKay once said, “No greater responsibility can rest upon any man [or woman], than to be a teacher of God’s children.”

Some years ago I was privileged to accompany President Boyd K. Packer on a trip through Europe. As we checked in at our hotel and filled out the usual forms, I was curious to see what President Packer would choose to list as his occupation. At the time he was the Acting President of the Twelve, he had a doctorate degree, he had served as a board member in multiple corporations, and he had been a pilot. There were so many occupations he could have listed. I was deeply touched, but not surprised, when President Packer signed in as “Teacher”!

Each of us, at some time during our membership in the Church, will be a teacher. That is one of the beauties of this Church. The call to teach is an opportunity to follow Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher.

Brothers and sisters, as teachers in seminary or institute, you are privileged to help the rising generation walk toward eternity in the footsteps of the Savior. I wish to congratulate you on the tremendously effective work you are doing. Perhaps you do not always realize how far your influence reaches into the lives of those you teach. The positive impact of seminary and institute might not be readily apparent to those involved in the day-to-day work. Nevertheless, don’t ever underestimate what the Lord is doing through you. When one stands back and looks across a longer period of time, it is obvious that much has been accomplished, and that alone is very gratifying.

I had to grow up in the Church without seminary or institute, and I remember very well the gradual process of implementing these programs in my native country. There is no doubt in my mind that young members today who have the privilege to participate in seminary and institute are far better educated in the history, doctrine, and practices of the Church than any other generation in Church history.

I am confident that the seminary and institute programs have been among the most significant contributors to the stability and strength of the growing worldwide Church. I commend and thank you warmly for what you are doing to establish the Church among every nation, tongue, and people.

I know that it has taken great faith and prayers and tremendous effort, but I know also that you receive sweet satisfaction as those who have been under your guidance flourish. Many become effective missionaries and then go on to become faithful and active members of the Church and strong and able citizens who carry responsibilities of leadership in many parts of the earth.
Your continued guidance will help many young people to get the best education and vocational training possible and excel in their chosen fields in life.

**Unto the Ends of the Earth**

Isn’t it interesting that from the very beginning of this dispensation—even when the Church was still small and obscure—the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors have spoken of this work in universal terms? For example, the modern revelations contain this grand, global declaration: “Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together. For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. . . . Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all [who want to] hear may hear” (D&C 1:1–2, 11; emphasis added).

Let me quote another prophecy that seems remarkable considering the humble circumstances of the Church at that time: “The arm of the Lord shall be revealed in power in convincing the nations . . . of the gospel of their salvation. For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed forth upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ” (D&C 90:10–11; emphasis added).

When this revelation was given, the Church was just over three years old. Missionary work outside the United States had not even begun yet, and the fastest way to travel back then was by horse and buggy. I can only imagine how the members must have felt when they heard prophecies about the islands of the sea and the ends of the earth and every man hearing the gospel in his own tongue. They definitely had faith, and they added plenty of courage and hard work. Today we see that their faith was not in vain. Now we can easily communicate across continents and oceans by phone, satellite, or videoconference; we travel by plane, high-speed train, or by car. Recently I learned that some seminary classes are even held by means of Skype or iChat.

All these developments could easily seem like a dream. But they are not a dream; they are part of the fulfillment of prophecy! I give thanks for the miracles of modern communication and transportation that have helped make it possible for the voice of the Lord to reach the ends of the earth.
Penetrating Hearts

As miraculous as these new technologies may seem, they are only a small part of the fulfillment of the Lord’s prophecies. Modern modes of transportation can bring Church leaders and missionaries to distant lands. Modern modes of communication can bring the scriptures and the words of the prophets before the eyes and ears of God’s children everywhere. But they cannot accomplish what I consider an even greater miracle: bringing the gospel into their hearts. To accomplish this, we need something even more miraculous than modern technology. We need effective, loving teachers.

Brothers and sisters, this is your role in the Lord’s work. Because of your dedicated service, this miracle occurs in thousands of seminary and institute classes every day. You are helping bring to pass the Lord’s promise that “there is no . . . heart that shall not be penetrated” (D&C 1:2).

Today I would like to share with you a few plain and simple guidelines that will help you work such a wonderful miracle. I sincerely pray for the direction of the Holy Spirit that the following five selected topics of counsel may be of some help to you in your most significant responsibilities.

1. Follow the Master Teacher

Our purpose and our efforts as teachers, leaders, and administrators must be centered on the Master Teacher—His gospel, His teachings, His example, and His love. For this reason, “we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children . . . to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. . . . And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:23, 26).

Let us help the youth of the Church learn to love the Lord, for what we love determines what we seek. What we seek determines what we think and do. What we think and do determines who we are—and who we will become.

As we teach our young people to love the Savior Jesus Christ, they will become true disciples of the Master. This process will prepare them to become loyal, loving husbands and fathers, wives and mothers—leaders of eternal families. The temples will become a natural and important part of their lives. They will become missionaries, serving the Lord on missions as young adults and later as mature couples. These will be joyful and highly
anticipated waypoints on their charted course. As we strengthen our youth by pointing them to Christ, we also strengthen families and the Church.

Your students will love, admire, and be most grateful to you. Brothers and sisters, be thankful for this. But don’t you ever inhale it. When you begin to inhale it—when you become obsessed with your own greatness and importance as teachers, when you begin to dwell on your influence or reputation—that’s when pride will begin to corrupt your motives and behavior. Remember that it is the Savior, not you, who must be the focus of your service.

For the word of the Lord to penetrate the hearts of our young people, we need teachers who are bold enough to teach the doctrine of the restored gospel and at the same time humble enough to teach only the doctrine of the restored gospel. Teachers who do not have their own agenda or hobbyhorses are the teachers we’re looking for. Seminary and institute teachers should never seek to create their own followers. Rather, they should seek to follow the Master Teacher and His anointed servants and to inspire their students to do the same.

I like the message in the finale of Stephen Sondheim’s musical *Into the Woods*. The company sings:

Careful the things you say  
Children will listen  
Careful the things you do  
Children will see and learn. . . .  
Children will look to you for which way to turn  
To learn what to be  
Careful before you say “Listen to me”  
Children will listen

We all know that this work will go forward with or without us. Let us live up to our privileges and opportunities and commit to be effective tools in the hand of the Lord. As you lose yourselves in His service, you will discover your own happiness and purpose in life.

### 2. Teach the Truth with Courage and Clarity

The Apostle Paul very accurately described our time when he wrote of people who are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7), “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” And he warned: “From such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:5). “For the time will
come when they will not endure sound doctrine. . . . And they shall turn away
their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

It is no secret that we are living in a morally confused world. The same
technologies that facilitate access to the words of the prophets also make it
easier for Satan to spread his lies. Today many people believe that there is no
divine, absolute truth. They believe that God is not real, that He is a creation
of a less-enlightened generation, and that moral truth is always relative to
culture, circumstances, or the time in which we live. Some use clever names
like new morality or situational ethics or moral relativism or being politically
correct to camouflage the fact that the world is lacking moral direction and
commitment to God’s laws.

Where do we stand as teachers of seminary and institute on this crucial
issue of values and doctrine? Where do we stand as The Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saints?

We stand committed to a living and loving Heavenly Father, whose laws
are absolute truths. Gospel doctrine and principles are eternal; they never
change. They are the same yesterday, today, and forever, in all cultures, in all
nations, and in all times. Traditions, languages, cultural expectations, and
even programs of the Church may differ and change over time. However, the
commandments of God and the doctrines of the restored gospel will stand
firm and cannot be changed by man.

As a Church, as seminary and institute teachers, our course is charted. In
1938 President J. Reuben Clark Jr. gave a landmark address on education in
the Church. Though he gave this message before I was born, it is still fresh,
powerful, and profound today. We should regularly recheck our position on
that charted course and make sure that we are not slowly drifting off course.
The more we treasure the scriptures and the words of the prophets and apply
them, the better we will be able to recognize when we are drifting—even if by
only a few degrees.

I quote from President Clark’s timeless message:

We have passed the place where we . . . talk in ambiguous words and veiled phrases.
We must say plainly what we mean, because the future of our youth, both here on
earth and in the hereafter, as also the welfare of the whole Church, are at stake. . . .
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 . . . ; they want to gain testimonies of their truth. They are not . . .
doubters but inquirers, [they are] seekers after truth. . . .
They want it in its simplicity and purity. . . .
You do not have to sneak up behind [our] youth and whisper religion in [their] ears; you can come right out, face to face, and talk with [them]. You do not need to disguise religious truths with a cloak of worldly things; you can bring these truths to [them] openly.2

What a quote! This eagerness to learn that President Clark described is also expressed beautifully in one of our favorite hymns:

I am a child of God,
And he has sent me here. . . .
Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday.

The second verse of this wonderful hymn adds a sense of urgency to this plea:

I am a child of God,
And so my needs are great;
Help me to understand his words
Before it grows too late.3

Our young people want to believe; they yearn to know more about the Savior. Our responsibility is to teach them the truth with such clarity that they will not be confused by the philosophies of the world.

This is how faith is developed, as the Apostle Paul taught: “Faith [comes] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). For “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a [teacher]?3” (Romans 10:14). Brothers and sisters, the eternal truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ have the power to cut through the moral confusion of our day and penetrate the hearts of our youth.

Paul also said, “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare . . . to the battle? . . . Except ye utter . . . words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?” (1 Corinthians 14:8–9). We must teach gospel truths with courage and clarity.

We cannot afford to “give an uncertain sound.” There is an old saying: “A man with one watch knows what time it is; a man with two watches is never quite sure.”4 We need to help our youth to know and to recognize the right “signs of the times” (see D&C 68:11). It is then the responsibility and the privilege of our young people to listen, to hearken, and to decide for themselves how to live their lives.
Clarity and plainness in teaching have always been a hallmark of our prophets. Our beloved President Gordon B. Hinckley was masterful at teaching with understandable words and in logical lines of thought. He said: “Effective teaching is the very essence of leadership in the Church. Eternal life will come only as men and women are taught with such effectiveness that they change and discipline their lives. They cannot be coerced into righteousness or into heaven. They must be led, and that means [effective] teaching.”5

3. Teach by the Spirit

When I was a stake president in Frankfurt, Germany, one of the bishops in our stake was a Church Educational System employee overseeing the development of seminary in Germany. He was a great teacher and motivator. In his ward he had a group of young men who were extremely difficult. There were times when I, as their stake president, had little faith or hope that they would stay active or ever become temple worthy or serve missions. This bishop, however, had a way of teaching and motivating these young men that I can only call pure inspiration. He even motivated me, as his stake president, to continue to believe in these young men. They continued to look quite rough around the edges, and their behavior was not always exemplary, but they caught the fire of his testimony. And I knew that this good bishop was continuously seeking for the gifts of the Spirit to touch their hearts.

Let me tell you the rest of the story by quoting a letter I received from one of these young men in November 2010.

Dear President Uchtdorf,

Let’s see if your memory serves you as well as your conference talk on pride served me. My name is [so-and-so], and you ordained me an elder in 1986, when you were our stake president.

What has happened to me since then? Well, I served a mission, got married to a wonderful girl 15 years ago, had four beautiful children born in the covenant, serve in my callings faithfully, work in the temple, and most of all I hold fast to the iron rod.

Why am I writing you all of this? Because, as you know, I did not always hold fast onto the iron rod, and when others looked at me with doubt, you saw me the way I am today. I felt your love and confidence.

I have tried to live a kind of life you exemplify. I have tried to look at others the way you looked at me because we are all children of a Heavenly Father, and sooner or later we will turn to His love and arms of mercy.

Thank you for your confidence in me.
Brothers and sisters, many of your students will be blessed in their process of conversion by the strength of your testimony, your faith, your confidence and love for them. Because of your charity toward our young people and the virtue of your example, their confidence will eventually become “strong in the presence of God.” Your testimonies, your teachings will “distil upon [their] soul as the dews from heaven.” This will be possible only if “the Holy Ghost [is your] constant companion” (D&C 121:45–46).

In your role as teachers in this great work, you need to have the Spirit. No eternal learning can take place without that quickening of the Spirit from heaven. “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). For this reason, you are to teach the gospel “by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.” You must continually ask yourselves, Do I teach the gospel “by the Spirit of truth”? Or do I teach it “some other way”? I hope it will never be “some other way,” because then, the Lord has warned, “it is not of God” (D&C 50:14, 17–18).

4. Teach from the Heart

To bring the word of the Lord to the hearts of our youth, we need excellent teachers. And our teachers have to come from our local membership, no matter how small the pool or how inexperienced our members may be. In this we follow the pattern described in the Book of Mormon: “The Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he [sees] fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8).

Many of you listening to this broadcast are not professional teachers and have no technical training in the field of education. To you the assignment to teach seminary or institute may seem overwhelming or beyond your abilities. In fact, considering the eternal significance of this work, even those of you who are professionally trained probably ought to feel overwhelmed every now and then.

Let me share an experience from my youth about the help we may receive through the power of a right motive and attitude.

After the turmoil of the Second World War, my family ended up in Russian-occupied East Germany. When I attended fourth grade, I had to learn Russian as my first foreign language. I found this quite difficult because of the Cyrillic alphabet, but as time went on, I seemed to do all right.
When I turned eleven, we had to leave East Germany overnight because of the political orientation of my father. I was going to school in West Germany, which was American-occupied at the time. There, schoolchildren were required to learn English and not Russian. To learn Russian had been difficult, but English was impossible for me. I thought my mouth was not made for speaking English. My teachers struggled. My parents suffered. And I knew English was definitely not my language.

But then something changed in my young life. Almost daily I rode my bicycle to the airport and watched airplanes take off and land. I read, studied, and learned everything I could find about aviation. It was my greatest desire to become a pilot. I could already picture myself in the cockpit of an airliner or in a military jet fighter. I felt deep in my heart this was my thing!

Then I learned that to become a pilot, I needed to speak English. Overnight, to the total surprise of everybody, including myself, it appeared as if my mouth had changed. I was able to learn English. It still took a lot of work, persistence, and patience, but I was able to learn English! Why? Because of a righteous and strong motive!

Your motives, attitudes, and thoughts to help and bless the rising generation will ultimately influence your actions. Your testimony of the truthfulness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is the most powerful motivating force in this process. My dear brothers and sisters, you are on the Lord’s errand, and the Lord will qualify you for this work. Jesus repeatedly said to those who desire to serve Him, “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not” (D&C 6:36).

And always remember: “The best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book.” And “Education is not so much the filling of a bucket as the lighting of a fire.”

The greatest teachers I have known were not necessarily the most proficient in techniques of teaching. Rather, they were able to speak spirit to spirit, heart to heart. Their great influence had less to do with mechanically following prescribed lesson plans or educational theories and more to do with sincerity, passion, and conviction.

Teachers who can craft elegant, polished sentences are impressive and pleasant to listen to. But teachers with compelling ideas, who speak heart to heart, inspire us to action. These teachers may not be as polished; they may speak with a soft voice. But when we listen to them, they open up new and fascinating vistas; they open the eyes of our understanding; they plant a
desire in our heart and mind that will reach out for eternity. I like the saying “If you want to build a ship, don’t give people orders to gather wood. Rather, teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

Our daughter and son went through home-study seminary in Germany. The class met with a teacher only once a week. At first they had a very experienced and well-versed Church-employed teacher. They respected him very much. During this time they learned great things about the scriptures.

Then a volunteer teacher was called, Sister Dora Dieter, an elderly lady with modest teaching experience. She did not have a deep scholarly approach to the scriptures. However, with all her soul and heart this sister loved the Lord, the scriptures, and these young people. Each week she prepared for class by study and fasting. She taught with all the love in her heart. After the class, she shared homemade rolls with her students to break her fast. Our children still believe that her rolls were the best ever.

Whenever this sweet sister found that the students had failed to read the week’s study assignments, it was not uncommon for her to shed some tears of sorrow. When the students participated with cheerful eagerness in class, she cried tears of joy. She bore testimony of the Savior and the Restoration continually. She planted in the hearts and minds of the youth the conviction that seminary and gospel living were key to their successful future. These young people could not escape the divine influence of the love this teacher had for them. There were times when they did their homework just because they did not want to disappoint their angel teacher.

Not all teachers are the same, nor should they be. We each have different talents, skills, and abilities. We need to celebrate and take advantage of these differences rather than force everyone into the same pattern. But there are some things we all should have in common: we should live righteous lives, love our students, love the gospel, love the Lord, and teach by the Spirit. We should guide our youth to set their priorities right so they will excel in their education, in school and vocational efforts, and follow the Savior. If you follow the Spirit, you will be an effective tool in the hand of the Lord to help the precious youth of the Church qualify for eternal life with our Heavenly Father. If, on the other hand, we overcomplicate the educational approach or slip into a businesslike attitude, we could easily lose track of what religious education is all about—helping our young people understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ.
5. Testify

Brothers and sisters, we are a testimony-bearing people, and this should be especially true for us as teachers. The Lord gave a charge to His disciples to teach the gospel of the kingdom “in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (Matthew 24:14; emphasis added). “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33; emphasis added).

This has been the divine pattern throughout the ages, and this pattern will continue until the Lord returns in glory. The teacher who bears testimony by the power of the Spirit will be able to touch the hearts and minds of the students.

Brigham Young found this to be true of his own conversion to the gospel. He said:

If all the talent, tact, wisdom, and refinement of the world had been combined in one individual, and that person had been sent to me with the Book of Mormon, and had declared in the most exalted of earthly eloquence, the truth of it, undertaking to prove it by his learning and worldly wisdom, it would have been to me like the smoke which arises only to vanish. But when I saw a man without eloquence, or talents for public speaking, who could only just say, ‘I know by the power of the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith is a prophet of the Lord.’ The Holy Ghost proceeding from that individual [illuminated] my understanding, and light, glory, and immortality [were] before me; I [was] encircled by it, filled with it, and [I knew] for myself that the testimony of the man [was] true.9

My dear brothers and sisters, my dear friends, let me conclude in this spirit of testimony. With all my heart and soul, I bear witness that God lives. He lives and He loves us. He knows you and He loves you; He has great confidence and trust in you. He trusts you in your great responsibility as a teacher of the youth—the rising generation—of the Church. You are entitled to heaven’s help. The Spirit will lead you and these precious young people unto new and brighter horizons. I have a personal witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Savior, the Redeemer of the world. I know this is true. I know that this is His Church; He presides over it, and He is close to His servants.

I bear witness to you that President Thomas S. Monson is the prophet for our day. I love and sustain him with all my soul. May God bless each of you and your families. May there be love and peace in your homes. I bless you with a peaceful heart and the knowledge that your sacrifices, your service, and your love for this great cause have been accepted by the Lord. I bless you as
an Apostle of the Lord and express my deep gratitude and love for you in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Notes
2. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” (address to seminary and institute of religion leaders, August 8, 1938), 2–3, 6; http://si.lds.org/teacherresources.
4. Lee Segall.
6. Author unknown.
8. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.
After studying lesson material, a good teacher ponders it, asking, What experiences have I had with this doctrine?
Religious Educator (RE): Can you please share an experience where you saw an example of a teacher connecting with a student when they were able to really make a difference?

Tyler: Yes. When I was working up in northern Idaho, I remember a teacher who taught an early-morning seminary class. He was a wonderful young husband and father. He was not an enthusiastic teacher. He had a monotone voice and would just walk though the material. I visited his class several times and saw that he had no discipline problems. The students always followed him perfectly, and you could tell they loved and respected him. After one particular class, I noticed that as each of the students left he took time to connect with them personally. You could tell that they had a good relationship with him. I still remember one boy coming up to him after class, saying, “This is the project I am turning in today in my class.” The teacher looked it over and gave him a compliment, and the student then strutted out of class, feeling confident about turning it in. Another student talked about his motorcycle not working, and the instructor said, “I’ll come over after work and look at your bike.” I later learned that the man went over later, looked at
the bike, and made just a minor adjustment. It was this teacher’s personal connection with each student outside of class that allowed him to connect with them in class. It wasn’t his energy or enthusiasm or skill that made him a good teacher. It was his caring interest in each student as an individual. He was able to help them develop an understanding of the gospel because he cared about them and they knew it. That is such a vital principle of teaching.

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

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

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

Tyler: At this stage of my life, I’ve learned the importance of Ezra 7:10 for teachers: “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel.” We talk about the spirit of Elias, the spirit of preparation. John the Baptist was an Elias who prepared the way for the Savior. Teachers are Eliases who prepare the way for the Spirit to teach their students. I have discovered that preparation does not just refer to preparing material or to outlining all the information you want to cover, though that is part of it. The Lord says, “Study it out in your mind” (D&C 9:8). He tells
us to search, ponder, and treasure the scriptures. So although a teacher must go through that process of preparing material, his main priority should be to prepare his own heart.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Preston Gledhill was a speech professor at BYU in the 1960s. He said that the keys to preparing to speak were to (1) think yourself empty, (2) read yourself full, and (3) speak yourself clear. Think yourself empty—ask yourself,
What do I already know? What do I already have in my mind about this material and information? So you go back and review. You think, “Oh yes, my mom used that scripture when I was a teenager. My mission president talked about that verse. You know, my seminary teacher talked about this passage.” After you think yourself empty, you read yourself full. What does *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* say about that word? What does it really mean to “stand in holy places”? (D&C 45:32). On one occasion I looked up the word *stand* in Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary to see what the word meant in the Prophet Joseph’s time, and the dictionary listed thirty different meanings—twenty-eight of them applied to that verse. That one word provided an entire sermon. I have never gone through all the definitions in a class, but I present the idea to my students by asking, “What two or three different definitions of the word have meaning to you?” I try to look a little deeper into what the verses could mean.

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

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

Another part of preparing your heart is asking prayerfully for the Lord to call to your attention the things he knows the students in your class need. I taught a class three months ago about giving priesthood blessings, and a week or two before the lesson, I received a lot of inspiration from personal
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studies, as well as from things my father had taught me and things his father had taught him, both of whom had been stake patriarchs. I wrote down those seven or eight ideas that I had been incubating, and I felt impressed to type them up as the list of key ideas. I ran into our stake patriarch the other day, and he said, “I have been pondering that list you gave to the high priests, and it has really been helpful to me.” I was glad I followed through on the prompting to type up that list. But when you receive inspiration about something that you are pondering, treasuring, searching for in the scriptures, and likening to yourself, write it down.

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

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

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

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

**Tyler:** Exactly. Staying with the focus and the basic information in the lesson is vital. I attended a lesson in which the instructor talked about a principle taught by the Prophet Joseph. He then asked a man in the class who had grown up in a family of another faith to say what that church teaches about
the idea. We spent only the last three minutes of class discussing the teachings of the Prophet Joseph; the other man had spent the majority of the time telling us what other religions believed. Those points had nothing to do with the lesson or the truth—in fact, they were diametrically opposed to the truth.

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

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

**RE:** Will they answer you?

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

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

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

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

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

**RE:** *Will that happen before class or during class?*

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

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

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

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

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

Tyler: I would encourage new teachers to do some pondering, to reflect on great teachers in their own lives and what made them influential. They shouldn’t try to emulate or copy the certain way a great teacher did something but ask what it was that this teacher did or how they did it. Over the years I made a list of forty different ways you can approach scripture. It is a product of my paying attention to how an idea came to me. Watch how the Spirit teaches. I think new teachers ought to watch effective teachers in their own lives when they are going to Primary, Sunday School, priesthood meeting, or Relief Society. When they feel the spirit of enlightenment and inspiration, they should pause and ask, what is bringing that on? What characteristic or
method of teaching is the Spirit using to get this principle communicated to me? Was it a personal story, bearing a powerful testimony, or asking a meaningful question and making a list of answers? When my mom was an influence for good in my life, what was it that she said and did? I think we try to teach these new teachers a lot of the mechanics of teaching, but the Spirit will teach you not only what to say but also how to teach it. The Lord is just as concerned about the methodology as he is about the content. We need to pay attention to both. I think it is helpful if a teacher ponders the lessons. A teacher in the seminary program cannot just take a minute or an hour to read the material: he or she has to allow the incubation process to occur. The mind needs to deliberate and ponder. I remember Elder Carlos E. Asay told me that as a young seminary teacher, he would allocate some time on a Sunday afternoon to go through and look at the lessons he had to teach at least a week ahead so that his mind could work on them.

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

**Tyler:** That’s right.

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

**Tyler:** You should pay attention and give the Spirit a chance to go through the process in which the Lord says to “study it out in your mind” (D&C 9:8) and then allow time for the Spirit to awaken your understanding and give direction in what to do with the students. I find that preparing for a class or a talk isn’t just sitting down at the table, opening up my scriptures, and reading through the teacher’s manual—it’s a matter of pondering. My mom taught Primary for eighteen years in the same classroom. She also had two other teaching assignments in the ward. While she was ironing or cooking meals, she was thinking about her teaching. When I’m mowing the lawn, my mind is going through the class I have to teach on Sunday. I watch very little TV—I’m not criticizing people who do, but I do not have time for that. You have to turn off extraneous distractions so your mind can focus and ponder—you need quiet time. I find that in early morning hours, I wake up in the morning and lie in bed for half an hour while inspiration flows about
any number of things. The Lord says, “Retire to thy bed early . . . [and] arise early that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated” (D&C 88:124). Some of the best preparation time happens in the morning while I am just lying there pondering and thinking. That’s why I don’t like to go to bed late, as a general rule. Also, keep a pencil handy so you can write down key ideas as they flow.

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

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

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

In February 2008, Elder Packer spoke to the seminary and institute teachers for over an hour on a Churchwide broadcast called *An Evening with a General Authority.* He had pondered, prayed, and made some notes, but he had only two or three key ideas. He spoke from his heart for over an hour, and it was powerful. He was modeling something teachers need to do.
Years ago, I was teaching for Education Week and Know Your Religion, and I felt I was getting stale as a teacher. I had these outlines I had been using for years. I would adapt them and add new information for different groups, but I was following the same general outlines. I started to think that I had about used up my time, that it was time for the younger teachers to come in and take over. The Spirit said, “No, put your outlines aside and let me teach you.” Now I prepare my heart and then walk into a teaching setting with my mind and heart wide open. It’s the Lord who is the teacher; I am only the instrument. If I go into a lesson with my mind completely decided on what I am going to do, the Spirit is less able to guide. Yes, it’s good to have some questions in mind. Sometimes I have handouts that I pass out, and sometimes I don’t. Sometimes I prepare them for one class and end up using them for another class a year later. But when you walk into the class, the Lord should take over. Since I have opened my mind and heart during my lessons, I have had greater freedom—the Lord prompts you with the questions you should ask. He brings to your mind examples, experiences, and scriptures that you had not even thought of in your preparation. We need to trust the Lord more in the moment we walk into the classroom.

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

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

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

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

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

Now for what a proper testimony is. It must include three great truths: Jesus, the Prophet Joseph, and the Church are true. Those are very general, yes, but in a classroom you may teach a specific point or doctrine and bear testimony of it, like tithing. Bearing testimony is an essential point, in my estimation, of teaching in the Church. We come out of a culture of education in which imparting information or training in some skill is the primary focus of education. There are those who say that the focus of education is to enlarge or enhance our knowledge and understanding and to give substance, meaning, and enjoyment to life, and I agree with that. People read books
and novels; they search for knowledge out of the joy of learning. But in the Church the Lord makes it very clear that the purposes of education or teaching are to change lives, to help us to follow the Lord’s pattern, and to help us become more Christlike. Because of these purposes, teaching is sometimes called wisdom. Wisdom is not merely knowledge but the proper application of knowledge through the assistance of the Spirit. In the Church, information dispensing is not the primary function of teaching. Teaching a truth so that people understand it, testifying of its correctness, and showing the application of that truth to our lives are the primary focus of teaching in the Church.

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

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

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

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

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

These different learning styles make it valuable for a teacher to invite class members to share their thoughts and feelings. The teacher may be more intellectual or abstract in nature and may not present a principle in a way that connects with a people person. But another student attending the class may understand what the teacher is saying and bear testimony of that principle if he has had experience with it. When that student likens the principle to himself and shares his experiences, he then identifies with the doctrine more clearly because of that testimony’s orientation around people. So it’s vital that we teach and share in a classroom setting. Ever since I learned about different
learning styles and the seminary program taught us the same principle with slightly different labels, I have tried to consciously address all four learning styles in the course of a lesson. I present the doctrine, bear witness that it is true, and then explain it to the students. The abstract thinker begins to understand what I am teaching when I cross-reference the doctrine to the way three other prophets explained it. Then I show how Alma applied that principle to the people, and the people person then sees how the doctrine makes sense. Then I tell the students how we can apply this doctrine and the lesson now makes sense to the task-oriented person. Then toward the end of my explanation, I show a little poetic style, or I explain that as we apply the doctrine, it beautifies our lives. The artistic person loves the power and beauty of that part of the lesson. In this way I cover all four general learning styles in the course of the lesson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The second group is those who are wandering and straying from their covenants. The prophets speak to them in a positive tone of exhortation. We would call it encouragement with the invitation to return. To this group Alma bore down in pure testimony when he stirred up the Zoramites in remembrance of their duty. Then he observed that the preaching of the word had a more powerful effect than the sword as they used the virtue of the word with those who were straying from the covenants (see Alma 31:5).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**RE:** As teachers in the Church, we are teaching a spectrum of hearts and minds. If your audience is honest with themselves, hopefully they will liken our
lessons appropriately. Chances are that if they are in sacrament meeting or seminary or institute, their hearts are already right before the Lord.

Tyler: Yes.

RE: Any additional thoughts?

Tyler: The Prophet Joseph Smith once said, “I teach them correct principles and then they govern themselves.” Elder Jacob de Jager quoted this statement and said jovially, “That is the Reader’s Digest condensed version. What the Prophet Joseph Smith really said was, ‘I teach and I teach and I teach and I teach and I teach, and finally they begin to govern themselves.’” We have to review doctrine constantly with our students. We never arrive at a full understanding in this life, and a teacher should not feel hesitant to rehearse a basic truth that he thinks everybody already knows. Often by rehearsing and revisiting an idea or doctrine, we deepen or broaden our understanding, and we enjoy a spirit of recommitment to that idea or doctrine. Human nature tends to drift. With the pressures of life and temptation all around us, we get caught up in the things of this world. So it is very appropriate and wise to keep teaching and repeating seemingly understood doctrine. In both reading the Book of Mormon and in teaching it, some people will recognize a familiar story and sometimes tend to minimize its importance. Sometimes those who are strongly intellectually oriented want to find some new wrinkle in the scriptures, but the new wrinkle ought to be an expanded understanding of basic doctrine. We have to consistently revisit basic doctrine. Why does the Lord have us partake of the sacrament every Sabbath day? To recharge our spiritual batteries! President David O. McKay said that if a student comes away from the classroom with one idea that recharges his spiritual battery, it has been worth the effort. President Spencer W. Kimball said to BYU seminary and institute teachers in 1968, “When you look at the dictionary for the most important word, do you know what it is? It could be ‘remember.’ Because all of you have made covenants, all of you know what to do and you know how to do it. Our greatest need is to remember. That is why everybody goes to sacrament meeting every Sabbath day—to take the sacrament and listen to the priests pray that ‘they may always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them.’ Nobody should ever forget to go to sacrament meeting. Remember is the word.” In the Book of Mormon, the word remember or some other form of it is used 220 times, on almost every other page. There are three sermons that really emphasize the idea of remembering. First, Nephi quotes Isaiah in 2 Nephi 27:6–10, provides some
commentary on this passage, and then gives in chapter 29 eight things for readers to remember, eight things that he wants us to keep in mind. Second, in Helaman 5, Helaman gives a sermon to Nephi and Lehi about remembering: “I have given unto you the names of our first parents . . . that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know . . . that they were good” (v. 6). Finally, Moroni concludes Moroni 10 with eight statements of exhortation. He exhorts us to “remember these things” (v. 27). The idea of remembering is essential. 

Notes

A perfectionist paradigm distorts the doctrine of perfection. When doctrine is misunderstood, spiritual and emotional problems can follow.
During the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord declared, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). For Latter-day Saints, this is a profound and ennobling invitation. As the literal “offspring of God” (Acts 17:29), we can rise to “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Indeed, the possibility of godlike perfection is fundamental to a Latter-day Saint understanding of eternal life. Those who obtain eternal life become like God and thereby can live with God. Of course, in our present state we are extremely lacking in godly attributes. Yet, as the Prophet Joseph Smith positioned our potential, “with time, growth, and grace men and woman [can] eventually arrive at a godlike station: ‘Then shall they be gods.’”

President Boyd K. Packer taught that this knowledge ought to inspire “a feeling of self-worth, dignity, [and] self-respect” in God’s spirit children. However, for some Latter-day Saints, the talk of godlike perfection is a source of anxiety and discouragement. Ironically, those most distressed by the doctrine of perfection tend to be some of the most diligent, obedient, and...
conscientious members of the Church. It is not uncommon for such souls to describe themselves as perfectionists.

Perfectionism is not some benign personality trait that simply inspires individuals to excellence. To the contrary, an increasing body of research suggests that perfectionist strivings can become maladaptive and lead to a host of debilitating mental health problems. Elder Cecil O. Samuelson of the Seventy, who has spent much of his career as a professor and practitioner of medicine, observed that there is concern among some General Authorities about perfectionism in the Church. Addressing missionaries at the Provo Missionary Training Center, he pointed out that perfectionism often troubles “the most talented people” who are “excellent students, model children, and outstanding young people.”

While it is critical to bring increased attention to the mental health issues swirling around perfectionism, it is equally vital to shed light on how a perfectionist paradigm distorts the doctrine of perfection. When doctrine is misunderstood, spiritual and emotional problems can follow. For example, Latter-day Saint perfectionists may “beat themselves up when things aren’t perfect,” live with tremendous “pressure to be perfect but never feel good enough,” or believe they must “do everything perfect” to be accepted by God. In short, they can constitute a cadre of conscientious but despondent Latter-day Saints. This paper will demonstrate that perfectionism corrupts the doctrine of perfection and creates unnecessary burdens in the lives of those who seek perfection through a perfectionist paradigm.

The Perfectionist Paradigm

The perfectionist paradigm typically combines unrealistic expectations with an unhealthy preoccupation with faults, weaknesses, mistakes, and sins. Since perfectionism entails an extreme concern over shortcomings in performance, fear of failure is a constant concern. Though it is correlated with conscientiousness, perfectionism goes far beyond diligent effort and “demand[s] absolute perfection from the self.” Thus perfectionists tend to engage in an unrelenting quest for flawlessness and berate themselves or others for falling short of this impossible standard.

For a perfectionist, any growth achieved through honest effort is eclipsed by the perceived gap between expectations and actual performance. In fact, perfectionism is not primarily focused on self-improvement at all, but rather it is focused on attaining flawlessness. Furthermore, it is not simply
good enough to be perfect in something; perfectionists must be “perfect in all aspects of their lives.” For example, a perfectionist college student may obsess about maintaining a 4.0 GPA, fuss about keeping an immaculate apartment, fret about performing their Church calling without fault, and be consumed with completing their to-do list today—all with exactness!

Perfectionist thinking constantly sets people up for failure because it creates expectations that are “beyond reach or reason.” When “impossible goals” are pursued “compulsively and unremittingly,” their achievement can become the entire basis of individual worth. Unable to consistently reach their unreasonable standards, perfectionists are constantly assaulted by feelings of inadequacy and tend to engage in “severe self-criticism and self-doubt.” Their foreboding sense of failure can even produce “feelings of self-hatred.” In time, this fear of failure can induce intense anxious feelings that can keep perfectionists from doing anything at all. “Thus, it is not high personal standards per se that contribute to poor emotional adjustment; rather, it may be the responses that people have to their perceptions that they consistently fail to meet their own standards that lead to emotional difficulties.”

Even as perfectionists are besieged with feelings of failure, they may aggressively defend their unrealistic expectations. This is a psychological necessity since they measure their self-worth by the attainment of their towering standards. By connecting self-worth to flawless achievement of expectations, failure to meet their expectations is seen as a failure of the soul. In turn, criticism of a perfectionist’s expectations is likely to be received as criticism of their individual worth. This can all become very perplexing for others since perfectionists tend to be “members of a moral militia marching bedraggled but brave to the cadence of ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’ that [they] alone can hear.” In the end, Elder Samuelson observed, this is all a very “self-centered” affair since the measures are of their own making and do not come from God.

At this point, a perfectionist reading this paper may be tempted to defend their expectations as legitimate, especially when they consider the divine decree to “be perfect,” even as God the Father and Jesus Christ are perfect (see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48). But this appeal to scripture will not help their cause. Quite frankly, godly perfection is an illusion of the highest order for any human being. It is not only unrealistic, it is impossible—that is, until we speak of Jesus Christ. In addition, the quest for perfection outside of the
Atonement of Jesus Christ is a manifestation of unadulterated pride, for we can be made perfect only in Christ (see Moroni 10:32).

Perfectionism twists and distorts the doctrine of perfection. Thus the problem with perfectionism is not high expectations; it is neurotic expectations that are unrealistic and oppressive. The problem with perfectionism is not a sense of inadequacy; it is a sense of inadequacy that ignores the fact we all “come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The problem with perfectionism is not conscientious effort; it is effort that has not been energized by Christ’s grace. The problem with perfectionism is not striving for godliness; it is striving for godliness without “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:20). Put simply, perfectionism is not what the Lord was asking for when he commanded us to be perfect.

Teleios

A study of the Greek word teleios, from which we get the English rendering “perfect” in Matthew 5:48, suggests that the call for perfection has eternal implications. Teleios denotes completeness18 and can describe someone who is fully developed or finished (see Matthew 5:48, footnote b). In some New Testament contexts, teleios19 simply describes a mature disciple of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:6; Philippians 3:15; New International Version, Colossians 4:12)20 or a divine attribute (see Romans 12:2; Hebrews 9:11; James 1:17; 1 John 4:18). However, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie instructed, we are talking about “infinite and eternal perfection.”21 Thus the Sermon on the Mount is far more than an exhortation for ethical behavior; rather, it is an eschatological22 exhortation unfolding our ultimate possibilities. Jesus invites all willing disciples to become celestial citizens in the “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3, 10). Indeed, everything about this sermon is designed to lift our eyes to a higher and holier place.23 In this sermon, Jesus Christ did not simply come to expose the chasm between God and man; he came to fill it.24 And by so filling it he opened the way for all believers, in the words of the Apostle Paul, to be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

Eternal Perfection: A Distant Objective

As the Greek prefix tele25 suggests, perfection is to be viewed as a distant objective, to be achieved far into the next life.26 The Prophet Joseph Smith made the timing of eternal perfection clear when he taught, “It will be a great while
In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”
after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned [the principles of exaltation]. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.”

The Lord counseled the first elders of the Church, “Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected” (D&C 67:13). In contrast, perfectionism, with its unrealistic expectations and obsession with flawless performance, tends to encourage impatience. So much of the anxiety and depression surrounding perfectionism can be tied to an unwillingness to accept the fact that growth in mortality takes time and is realized through small, incremental improvements.

When Jesus Christ came to earth, even he did not receive a “fulness at the first, but received grace for grace” (D&C 93:12). If the Lord “continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness” (D&C 93:13), that sends us an unmistakable signal that we work out our salvation gradually “and in due time receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19). As Elder Russell M. Nelson noted, “Just prior to his crucifixion, [Christ] said that on ‘the third day I shall be perfected.’ Think of that! The sinless, errorless Lord—already perfect by our mortal standards—proclaimed his own state of perfection yet to be in the future. His eternal perfection would follow his resurrection and receipt of ‘all power . . . in heaven and in earth.’”

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that to be like God we must go “from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.”

Success in our mortal probation is fundamentally measured by gradual improvement and is not achieved through some illusionary fast track to perfection. Elder Marvin J. Ashton reminded us that “perfection is an eternal trek,” and thus direction is more important than speed, “if it is leading toward eternal goals.” President Heber J. Grant taught the principle of improvement beautifully when he said, “If we are trying, to the best of our ability, to improve day by day, then we are in the line of our duty. If we are seeking to remedy our own defects, if we are so living that we can ask God for light, for knowledge, for intelligence, and above all for His Spirit, that we may overcome our weaknesses, then, I can tell you, we are in the straight and narrow path that leads to life eternal; then we need have no fear.” Mortality, then, is
a part of the pathway to perfection; it is not the final destination. This being the case, Elder Nelson concluded, we “need not be dismayed if our earnest efforts toward perfection now seem so arduous and endless. Perfection is pending.”

Christ, Covenants, and Perfection

A critical message of hope to all weary and worn-down perfectionists is that each of us will receive the necessary time to work out our salvation. In King Benjamin’s words, “All things must be done in order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength” (Mosiah 4:27). But even this fact may not comfort the uneasy perfectionist, for perfectionism not only entails impatience over personal performance but promotes an unhealthy notion of self-reliance. Perfectionism focuses on personal abilities at the cost of divine grace. In the perfectionist mantra, we must be perfect and we must do it on our own merits. Consequently, at its core, perfectionism is connected with the sin of pride because it diminishes, if not dismisses, the crucial role of Christ in achieving perfection.

None of us can be saved except through the “merits, and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8; see also 2 Nephi 10:24; 2 Nephi 25:23; Mosiah 3:17). We are all “unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2:21), we are all “eternally indebted” (Mosiah 2:34), and in reality we all ought to be “begging for a remission of [our] sins” (Mosiah 4:20). We all need help. More to the point, we all need the Atonement.

While the reach of the Atonement may extend into the lives of all people, the extent to which we personally experience the Atonement is dependent upon our willingness to receive Christ. While he stands at the door and knocks, we must choose to let him in (see Revelation 3:20). And how do we let him in? By making and keeping sacred gospel covenants. In fact, the degree to which we access the blessings of the Atonement is directly related to our willingness to participate in the ordinances of salvation and the associated covenants. Significantly, in the word teleios we find a nuanced reference to covenants. John Welch, quoting John I. Durham, has written that Matthew’s usage of teleios does not denote “the perfect ethical personality,” but rather employs “the Old Testament sense of the wholeness of consecration to God.’ It tends towards the meaning of ‘living up to an agreement or a covenant.’” Moreover, in Greek religious literature, teleios describes a “person who has become fully initiated in the rituals of a religion.” Welch continues: “The
word is used in Heb. 5:14–6:1 to distinguish between the initial teachings and the full instruction. Generally in the epistle to the Hebrews, the term follows a ‘special use’ of Hellenistic Judaism, with the word teleioo meaning ‘to put someone in the position in which he can come, or stand, before God.’ Early Christians continued to use this word in this way in connection with their sacraments and ordinances.”

Making and keeping covenants gives us increased access to the redeeming power of the Atonement. For instance, disciples who keep their covenants not only “retain a remission of [their] sins” (Mosiah 4:12, 26) but have their very natures changed (see Mosiah 5:1–8). Moreover, if we keep our covenants then Christ will “seal” us his, and we will “have everlasting salvation” (Mosiah 5:15). The connection between the Atonement, covenants, and perfection is made plain when the scriptures describe those who dwell in the presence of God as follows: “These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood” (D&C 76:69, emphasis added). In short, only as we make and keep sacred covenants can we achieve eternal perfection.

Where perfectionism places an unwarranted focus on flawless performance, the gospel invites us to focus on our covenant relationship with Christ. This relationship requires that we not only accept and abide the stipulations of the covenant but also joyfully embrace the promised blessings. We are not expected to change ourselves through our own efforts but to accept that even after expending our best efforts we can only “become a saint through the atonement of Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 3:19; see also 2 Nephi 25:23).

The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob assures us that the “Lord God will fulfill his covenants” (2 Nephi 6:12) and that he will “deliver his covenant people” (2 Nephi 6:17). He will deliver us from our worst enemies—even death, hell, and the devil (see 2 Nephi 8:9–10; 9:10–13, 19, 26). For this reason, Jacob implores the covenant people to “cheer up” and take solace in the knowledge that “after [we] are reconciled unto God” we will be saved “through the grace of God” (2 Nephi 10:23–24). In the context of covenants, we have every reason to live with a “perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20).
The Role of Sins and Weaknesses in the Pursuit of Perfection

Perfectionism instills a false and counterproductive view of sin and weakness. Research has found that “one of the most important functions of being raised in a perfectionistic family may be to promote not only a constant emphasis on the attainment of standards but also a preoccupation with evaluating how near or how far family members are from being perfect.” Being “highly evaluative people,” they tend to be hypercritical of themselves and others.

When the realities of daily living constantly verify how often they fall short of their lofty expectations, perfectionists can foster an acute sense of personal failure. Where a nonperfectionist may treat the discrepancy between their standards and performance as an opportunity for growth, perfectionists tend to see such discrepancies as a sign of failure. This pessimistic perspective can lead to “chronic self-doubt and anxiety.”

Fixated on failures and weaknesses, whether real or imagined, perfectionists can easily be persuaded to define themselves in terms of those failures and weaknesses. In turn, these failures and weaknesses can be exponentially magnified to the point that a cruel self-portrait is painted. Sadly, this unsavory caricature tends to discount personal strengths and successes. Thus perfectionists may give intellectual assent to the scriptural truth that “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10) but will not be able to apply and personalize this truth to their own souls.

When asked about personal growth and success, perfectionists may become tongue-tied. This silence need not be interpreted as a facade of false modesty but as evidence of blindness. They cannot speak because they honestly cannot see any improvements, at least any that merit consideration. Ask them to address their sins and weaknesses, and they will provide a lucid analysis, with a complete inventory of their shortcomings. Elder Samuelson observed, “These good people suffer from exaggerating their minor mistakes, weaknesses, or shortcomings to the point that they may become dysfunctional.”

The Need for Self-Forgiveness

One of the most transcendent and beautiful dimensions of the Lord’s healing power is his willingness to forgive us of our sins. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). And yet, even while the Lord forgives and forgets (see D&C 58:42),
perfectionists may cling to feelings of guilt for years. God’s forgiveness they can accept; self-forgiveness is a struggle.

At one level, this failure to forgive oneself might be explained by the heightened sense of right and wrong common among perfectionists. They can become pathological worriers. Their fears may lead to depressing “if only” rehashing of the past or anxiety-ridden “what if” postulating about the future. When the requirements for sincere repentance have been met but repentant perfectionists choose to doubt they have been forgiven, then a lack of trust in the Atonement may be at issue. As Stephen Robinson insightfully observed, there are times we may believe in Christ but not believe that Christ has the ability to expunge sin from our soul. In this case, what is needed is the development of real faith in both Christ’s willingness and his ability to redeem each individual sinner.

A more subtle reason a perfectionist may find self-forgiveness difficult has less to do with Christ’s capacity to redeem and more with a perfectionist’s tendency towards self-absorption. Self-presentation can become an overriding preoccupation. An obsession with others’ perceptions makes self-forgiveness nearly impossible. To continually agonize over what others might think of our past sins keeps those sins in the forefront of our thoughts. Whether those perceptions are accurate or erroneous, over time they become integrated into one’s self-understanding.

About such an apprehension over peer perceptions, one young woman admits to having lived a double life. She writes, “I used to be consumed with being ‘perfect.’ And not just being perfect in church things, but also in school work, in my appearance, in what I said and how I acted.” Focused on maintaining this flawless image, she publicly presented herself as someone “that always did everything right.” But in the end, she acknowledged, it was a “charade.” And why keep up this charade? “I was concerned that if people knew the real me, the part I kept secret, then maybe they wouldn’t want to be my friend.” When our life is a calculated facade to cover imperfections, we are infected with what Paul called “sorrow of the world” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Worldly sorrow keeps us focused on our sins for all the wrong reasons. And in the case of perfectionists, worldly sorrow keeps them so preoccupied with what others think that what God thinks becomes ancillary. In this context, one young woman lamented, “I think I try hard to be perfect for other people instead of working toward it for myself and to please the Lord.” Moreover, the longer perfectionists are focused on what others think, the
more they will base their identity on their fears. Increasingly engrossed with their fears, it is not long until they view themselves with contempt.

Satan seeks to manipulate feelings of guilt, fear, and self-doubt for ungodly ends. Since his goal is to destroy our souls, he encourages negative self-talk. For instance, the following scorn-ridden self-analysis would bring him joy: “Look at me. I have failed again. Everybody probably knows I am a loser. And if they don’t, they will despise me when they find out what I am really like. I deserve to feel bad all the time. God won’t forgive me; he probably hates me. If I would just work harder and do better, then maybe I would have a chance to be accepted and loved. But I will never be good enough. What’s the use in even trying?” Such slanderous self-analysis insulates perfectionists from the love of God and can send them into a downward spiral of self-condemnation.

To counter this destructive cycle, perfectionists need to reconsider what they do with their feelings of guilt. When, for instance, their fine-tuned conscience is harassed by feelings of fault, they need to allow those feelings to fuel “godly sorrow” that “worketh repentance to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10) rather than allow such feelings to consume them with self-condemnation. Godly sorrow, Elder Chad D. Richardson wrote, “leads us to fully recognize the wrongs we have committed without giving in to the temptation to see ourselves as worthless or beyond God’s love.” Furthermore, “there is no room in godly sorrow for self-contempt.” In short, godly sorrow leads us to Christ, and Christ always builds up, strengthens, encourages, and moves us forward.

The beauty of godly sorrow is that it inspires us to redefine the way we see our past sins. As we repent we forgive and as we forgive we forget. Elder Richardson noted, however, that this is “a special kind of forgetting. We don’t forget the sin and its effects; rather, the memory ceases to be part of how we see ourselves.” The memories of past sins lose their “edge of guilt and self-recrimination.” Thus we are not “defined by our sins,” but we are inspired by our growth, the Lord’s mercy, and the possibilities of continued progress.

It is imperative that perfectionists understand and embrace mercy. Forgiveness is an act of mercy. The Savior offers mercy because he is filled with compassion (see Alma 7:11). We don’t deserve his mercy, and we cannot earn it. No matter how hard we work, no matter how many good deeds we perform, no matter how diligently we obey the commandments, we still must “rely wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 32:19).
Though we cannot earn the Lord’s mercy, we can give him an acceptable offering—even that of a “broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Nephi 9:20; see also 2 Nephi 2:7). Contrary to the perfectionist’s worldview, a broken heart and contrite spirit is not an unblemished heart and a flawless spirit. Rather, it is submissive heart and a penitent spirit, which paves the way for a pure heart and perfected spirit. While the perfectionist falsely assumes that God expects untarnished performance for us to be saved, the scriptures declare that “none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:24).

Perfectionism places undue emphasis on performance and not enough emphasis on penitence. When we are penitent we meekly acknowledge our sins, mistakes, and weaknesses; at the same time, the penitent rejoice that through Christ’s grace sins can be forgiven, mistakes can be fixed, and weaknesses can be transformed into strengths. When we are penitent, we offer our best efforts to work out our salvation and feel solace that his “grace is sufficient” (D&C 17:8) to compensate for all of our sins and imperfections. When we are penitent, striving is more important than performing, and what we are becoming overshadows what we have done. While perfectionism is filled with self-condemnation, guilt, doubt, and despair, penitence is filled with self-forgiveness, peace, confidence, and hope.

**Imperfection Is Not Sin**

Ironically, some of the struggles related to self-forgiveness are not even directly connected with sin. One individual, for example, shared the following self-disclosure: “I am a complete ‘Type A,’ color red, tightly wound perfectionist [and] I have always had a hard time forgiving myself for my imperfections.” This confession is troubling because it implies that imperfection is equivalent with sin and therefore demands forgiveness.

Theologically speaking, we seek forgiveness for our sins and not for our imperfections. “Sin,” Elder Orson F. Whitney carefully noted, “is the transgression of divine law, as made known through the conscience or by revelation.” We sin when we do “the opposite of what [we know] to be right.”46 This being true, we can make mistakes without committing sin. On this matter, Elder Oaks taught: “A deliberately wrong choice in the contest between what is clearly good and what is clearly bad is a sin, but a poor choice among things that are good, better, and best is merely a mistake.”47 Consequently, “in the treatment process we should not require repentance for mistakes, but we are commanded to preach the necessity of repentance for sins.”48
Just as there is a difference between sins and mistakes, there is also an important difference between sins and imperfections. Synonyms for imperfection include such words as shortcoming, weakness, limitation, deficiency, defect, flaw, and fault. These words are descriptive of our inherited mortal and fallen condition, which condition includes a myriad of physical, emotional, and mental defects. Whether we struggle because of a physical deformity or are confounded by the perplexities of same-gender attraction, it is vital to understand that the existence of mortal imperfections in and of themselves do not constitute sin. We may sorrow with the prophet Nephi because of the weaknesses of the flesh (see 2 Nephi 4:17), but their mere existence in our lives does not make us sinful.

When perfectionists are unclear about the difference between sin and imperfection, they create for themselves unnecessary burdens. They may unwittingly equate sin with imperfection and in so doing double, triple, or even quadruple the dosage of guilt in their lives. Artificially elevated levels of guilt are harmful. While guilt may serve as a necessary means to move us to repentance, it can be counterproductive when applied to our imperfections. As author Wendy Ulrich wrote, “In mortality we will always be weak, we will always have some of our weaknesses, and we will always need God’s grace to respond constructively. But weakness is not sin!”

A classic example can be found in depression. It is true that “despair cometh because of iniquity” (Moroni 10:22). It is also true that dark feelings of depression can come because the biochemistry of the brain is out of sync. Hence, righteous people who fumble through the dark corridors of clinical depression are suffering from a treatable defect of their mortal bodies and are not guilty of sin. How tragic when a dedicated disciple suffering from this serious physical illness—a mortal imperfection—spends precious energy seeking self-forgiveness for their feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and despair. As Stephen Robinson observed, “The compulsive and the perfectionists among us need to realize that a large part of why things go wrong in this life is the Fall—not their own incompetence.”

The all-important issue as we consider our imperfections is whether we are wise enough to connect them to the Atonement. The Apostle Paul, for instance, prayed for the removal of “a thorn in the flesh,” but his pleadings did not bring respite. Instead of receiving deliverance from this unspecified weakness, he discovered that the Lord’s “grace is sufficient” and that through the “power of Christ” he could be strong (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). The Lord
said of the Prophet Joseph Smith, “In weakness I blessed him” (D&C 35:17). The Book of Mormon reinforces this principle as follows: “I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they will humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then I will make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27; see also Jacob 4:7). In this scriptural context, weakness, which comes from our imperfection, is a divinely ordained pathway to God’s grace.

Surely we need to recognize our imperfections, learn from them, and seek the Lord’s sustaining support to grow from them, but we do not need to seek forgiveness for them. Rather than seeking forgiveness for weakness, the conscientious should seek growth through them; rather than striving to shun their weaknesses, they should embrace them as stepping-stones to progression through the Lord’s grace.

An Inspired Alternative to Self-Condemnation

Perfectionism is not about a lack of commitment, desire, or determination to do what is right, but rather it is a problem of misunderstanding that leads to misdirection and self-deception. Consequently, to tell a discouraged and weary perfectionist to pray more often, read the scriptures longer, and provide more service may simply end up making things worse since they are likely already doing these things with great fervor and diligence. Remember, in perfectionism, there is no such thing as good enough.

Regrettably, one of the destructive mind games played by perfectionists is to equate seeking help with an undignified admission of weakness and failure. Perfectionist researchers Gordon L. Flett and Paul H. Hewitt write, “People with high levels of perfectionist self-presentation are less willing to seek help, in part because the act of seeking help can be construed as an open admission of failure to important others.” In other words, to ask for help is viewed as a shameful display of weakness and consequently perfectionists can be resistant to change. In the perfectionist mantra, you don’t ask for help; you just work harder to perfect yourself, “regardless of the stress.”

The prophet Nephi has a compelling message for self-condemning perfectionists who feel trapped and yet are unwilling to seek help. Nephi was a man of impeccable spiritual stature. Even in the face of defiant and rebellious brothers and a lifetime of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Nephi remained steadfast. Certainly he exemplifies a diligent, faithful, and conscientious servant of the Lord.
In light of his unyielding commitment to do what is right, the following lament is profoundly instructive—especially for the perfectionist tormented by a spirit of self-loathing. In a moment of intense self-criticism, Nephi wrote: “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins” (2 Nephi 4:17–19). In the context of Nephi’s life, these words perplex us. How can one who is so good feel so wretched?55 Certainly, we could accept a scathing self-rebuke if it were uttered by Laman, but what possible iniquities could cause righteous Nephi to feel deep affliction or distress to the point of intense anxiety? It should be noted that these words are not some generalized regret about the fallen nature of man but are dripping with the pain of personal disappointment. But this very fact entails a vital lesson for those self-condemning perfectionists who are acutely aware of their sins and imperfections.

These laments have potent possibilities—for good or for evil. For instance, poignant moments of self-criticism can become ironclad predictions of the future. “O wretched man that I am!” can quickly descend into “O wretched man that I will always be!” Future hopes of progress can be quashed while harsh self-judgments are pronounced with a haunting finality. In this condition, deterministic language imprisons a soul and renounces the liberating language of free will and repentance.

Convinced of their worthlessness, perfectionists may lacerate their souls with a barrage of negative self-talk. Emotional welts can appear as they call themselves losers, ugly, useless, stupid, and irrelevant. This degrading language of self-hatred is a form of emotional self-flagellation and completely undermines the liberating truth that “with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

It is vital to note that Nephi does not become a victim of such ugly self-condemnation. He does not give his sins and weaknesses control and power over his life. It is true that he frankly acknowledges them, but once he does so he moves on. Notice the pivotal word of hope he uses: “nevertheless” (2 Nephi 4:18). In other words, in spite of his sins and weaknesses he knows in whom he has trusted and that is not his sins and weaknesses (see 2 Nephi 4:34). As Nephi turns his eyes heavenward, the entire tone and texture of his psalm changes. Words of bitter contrition are replaced by sweet expressions of gratitude. With eyes focused on Christ, he recounts the Lord’s “support”
and remembers feeling his “consuming” love and the “great things” he has seen as he was caught away on “the wings of the Spirit.” Firmly fixed on his Redeemer, Nephi is empowered to “rejoice in the [Lord], my God, and the rock of my salvation” (2 Nephi 4:17–32). In essence, his despair is replaced by joy as he contemplates being wrapped in the Lord’s “robe of righteousness” (2 Nephi 4:33), which is symbolic of the Atonement.56

Yes, it is necessary to experience Nephi-like sorrow and be grieved by our sins, but we must allow those feelings of sorrow to move us to a better place—even to Christ, “the rock of [our] salvation,” where we can find an “escape” from whatever enemies we face and receive joy in our hearts (2 Nephi 4:30–33).

**Conclusion**

Latter-day Saint doctrine and culture can pose special challenges to those with perfectionist tendencies. When a religious culture that is “characterized by a pervasively systematic monitoring and reification of progress” is coupled with perfectionist inclinations for flawless performance, we may have a possible explanation for President Dieter F. Uchtdorf’s observation at a general Relief Society broadcast: “To me it appears that our splendid sisters sometimes undervalue their abilities—they focus on what is lacking or imperfect rather than what has been accomplished and who they really are. Perhaps you recognize this trait in someone you know really well. The good news is that this also points to an admirable quality: the innate desire to please the Lord to the best of your ability. Unfortunately, it can also lead to frustration, exhaustion, and unhappiness.”58

Though President Uchtdorf did not specifically address perfectionism in his talk, there can be little question that many of the frustrated, exhausted, and unhappy women in the Church struggle with it. As we have discussed in this paper, a critical means of addressing the problem of perfectionism is to teach the doctrine of perfection with clarity. When this doctrine is correctly understood, the distortions and concomitant dangers of perfectionism can be exposed. In the light of true doctrine, a perfectionist can pursue the Lord’s commandment to “be perfect” with hope and not despair. Personal weakness can become an avenue to God’s grace rather than a ball and chain that impedes progress. And finally, seeking the Lord’s help in times of trial can be seen as a means to triumph rather than a shameful admission of failure.
The power of true doctrine was recently reaffirmed to me through a student in one of my institute classes. She was the quintessential Latter-day Saint: faithful, friendly, kind, diligent, conscientious, intelligent, and personable. After a couple of classes, I was able to quickly identify her as the type of faithful institute student I could rely upon to be a class president. So I asked and she accepted. However, in the process of the conversation I discovered the plethora of good things she was doing, including serving as her ward Relief Society president. After this discovery, I pressed her why she would accept an assignment to be an institute class president when she was obviously already doing more than she could handle. Her answer was filled with the telltale signs of perfectionism.

During that semester we discussed Elder Nelson’s 1995 general conference talk “Perfection Pending.” The ensuing class discussion and several informal after-class conversations opened her eyes to the problems of perfectionism and what the Lord was really asking of her. As she came to understand the doctrine, she applied it to her life and found renewed hope. I conclude with her words:

My life has changed so much because I now understand what it means to be perfect. I know so much better what the Lord expects of me and it is a relief. The most uplifting thing I came to understand is that Jesus Christ is yoked together with me as I strive to do my best. . . . I used to beat myself up over feelings of inadequacy, weakness, doubt and because I would make mistakes. I now have a healthier attitude. Heavenly Father wants me to see my weaknesses as an opportunity for growth. I enjoy self-reflection and talking with the Lord about the progress I’ve made and where I can do better. And what is really great is I can see my progress. I still have times when I get upset with the choices I make but it’s a healthy balance that gives me motivation to do better versus tearing myself down to the point of giving up. I have daily hope and daily peace. The Spirit can dwell with me and is a source of motivation to do my best and then rely on the grace of God.

Notes

1. “(This destiny of eternal life or God’s life should be familiar to all who have studied the ancient Christian doctrine of and belief in deification or apotheosis). For us, eternal life is not a mystical union with an incomprehensible spirit-god. Eternal life is family life with a loving Father in Heaven and with our progenitors and our posterity.” Dallin H. Oaks, “Apostasy and Restoration,” Ensign, May 1995, 86–87.


4. “Perfectionism is a medical condition characterized by severe self-criticism and self-doubt, often accompanied by anxiety, depression, or obsessive-compulsive behavior. It can
lead to appetite and sleep disturbances, confusion, problems in relationships, inability to concentrate, procrastination of important tasks, and, if left untreated, major depression, anxiety disorders, and suicide. “What Is Perfectionism?” New Era, January 2006, 13. Researchers Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt have concluded, “We believe that perfectionism is associated with significant levels of impairment and distress not only for perfectionists but for their family members as well.” This “impairment and distress” is correlated with “such significant problems as anxiety, depression, suicide, and eating disorders.” Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt, “Perfectionism and Maladjustment: An Overview of Theoretical, Definitional, and Treatment Issues,” in Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment, ed. Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2002), 10.

6. Written comments received from institute students in the author’s classes.
11. The “excessively perfectionist student who views an A+ in a course as his or her expected performance will view anything but the A+ as a failure and will experience stress as a result. . . . In addition, even if a perfectionistic person performs some task flawlessly, little satisfaction may be experienced because he or she still views the performance at least somewhat as a failure. As an illustration, one of Hewitt’s patients obtained a coveted A+ in a difficult course he was taking; after receiving the A+, he continued to denigrate himself, stating that he should have been able to get the A+ without studying so hard and that his situation simply reflected that he was not as bright as he thought he should be.” Paul L. Hewitt and Gordon L. Flett, “Perfectionism and Stress Processes in Psychopathology,” in Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment, 259.
19. Paul also uses the word *teleios* in connection with becoming like God. Disciples are to come to “the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [teleios] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).


22. “The eschatological viewpoint is that which sees and judges everything in terms of a great eternal plan. Whether we like it or not, we belong to the eternities; we cannot escape the universe. All our thoughts and deeds must be viewed against an infinite background and against no other. *Eschatos* means ‘ultimate’ and refers to that which lies beyond all local and limited goals and interests.” Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986), 1–2.

23. Elder James E. Talmage noted, “The kingdom of heaven was the all-comprising text of this wonderful sermon; the means of reaching the kingdom and the glories of eternal citizenship therein are the main divisions of this treatise.” *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 217.

24. Jesus was, as Alfred Edersheim writes, “the connecting link—so to speak, the theological copula between the ‘state’ and the promise... He stands between our present and our future, and ‘has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.’” Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1994), 365.


28. Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” 87; emphasis in original. When we compare Matthew 5:48 with 3 Nephi 12:48, we find further evidence that *eternal perfection* cannot be realized until after Christ’s resurrection. But even though eternal perfection cannot be achieved in this life does not mean Jesus Christ was not perfect in his mortal ministry. In every possible way, other than not having a resurrected body and receiving all power, he was perfect. On this matter, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “None ever were perfect but Jesus; and why was He perfect? Because He was the Son of God, and had the fullness of the Spirit, and greater power than any man.” *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 187–88. In like manner, over the years prophets and apostles have repeatedly referred to the mortal Christ as a perfect man. See Thomas S. Monson, “Patience—A Heavenly Virtue,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 59; Howard W. Hunter, “What Manner of Men Ought Ye to Be?” *Ensign*, May 1994, 64; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Our Great Mission,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 89.


35. Even as we experience the weaknesses inherent in morality, through a covenant relationship with Christ we can achieve a finite, mortal perfection, as did such men as Seth, Noah, and Job (see D&C 107:43; Moses 8:27; Genesis 6:9; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). “Mortal perfection can be achieved as we try to perform every duty, keep every law, and strive to be as perfect in our sphere as our Heavenly Father is in his. If we do the best we can, the Lord will bless us according to our deeds and the desires of our hearts.” Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” 86.


37. Regarding the relationship between covenants and perfection, Elder Oaks has taught, “The gospel of Jesus Christ is the plan by which we can become what children of God are supposed to become. This spotless and perfected state will result from a steady succession of covenants, ordinances, and actions, an accumulation of right choices, and from continuing repentance” Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” Ensign, November 2000, 33. Similarly, Elder Nelson declared, “No accountable individual can receive exaltation [perfection] in the celestial kingdom without the ordinances of the temple. Endowments and sealings are for our personal perfection and are secured through our faithfulness.” Nelson, “Perfection Pending,” 87.


42. To increase confidence in Christ, the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon, must be studied with an eye for the Atonement. Personal revelation must be sought, received, and acted upon in order to verify the reality of forgiveness. In the process, an Enos-like trust can develop. Upon receiving a personal revelation that his sins were forgiven, Enos felt his “guilt was swept away” because he knew “God could not lie” (Enos 1:6).

43. Another woman writes, “I’ve always been so concerned with making everyone around me happy that it was starting to make me miserable.” In like manner, a college student confided, “I have an extremely difficult time with being a perfectionist. The first ‘B’ I had ever received in my life was the semester my dad died in college. I thought that if I let any of my weaknesses or faults show no one would love me.”

44. D. Chad Richardson, “Forgiving Oneself,” Ensign, March 2007, 32.

45. Richardson, “Forgiving Oneself,” 32.


51. In her book Weakness Is Not Sin, Wendy Ulrich persuasively teaches that when we are humble, weakness can be transformed into strength through the Lord’s help. She describes this process as follows: elimination of the weakness, growth through the weakness, perceiving that the weakness under some conditions may serve as a strength, the development of compensating strengths, and gaining an enhanced capacity to testify of God’s gracious and


55. Wretched: “Very miserable; sunk into deep affliction or distress, either from want, anxiety or grief.” Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “wretched.”


Religious educators reflect on at least two fundamental questions that can have life-changing answers for themselves and their students: What should I teach? and How should I teach it?
As a young man wrestling with religious questions that he knew would have serious ramifications for himself and his family, Joseph Smith reported that his mind was “called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness” (Joseph Smith—History 1:8). Struggling with challenging problems often causes mental, emotional, or even spiritual discomfort. However, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned that only by “serious reflection” could he come to a decision about what course of action he must pursue to find resolutions to the challenges of life (see Joseph Smith—History 1:9–13). Religious educators committed to teaching the restored gospel of Jesus Christ will also benefit from “serious reflection,” even though that reflection may, at times, lead to “great uneasiness.” As religious educators better understand and implement reflective practices and processes in a way that contributes to their sustained professional development, they will develop greater alignment between their ideals and their classroom behaviors. Such alignment will increase the positive impact of their classroom instruction.
Professional Development in Religious Education

As seminary and institute teachers in the Church Educational System, we believe that we are “accountable to God for the effort and progress [we make] in [our] personal development.” This means that we “are responsible to learn [our] duties, act in [our] assignments in all diligence, improve upon [our] talents, and seek to gain other talents (see D&C 107:99; see also D&C 82:18).” This “development results from learning and applying gospel principles, acquiring desired skills, reflecting on current assignments, and trying new ideas.”¹ In addition to our covenant relationship with God to work on our personal development, “CES employees have a contractual obligation with the Church and with the Church Educational System . . . to develop professionally by becoming better teachers and leaders, by striving to meet the objective of religious education and fulfill their commission.”³ Professional development for religious educators grows out of deep spiritual commitments,⁴ personal integrity, and a desire to bless the lives of those they teach.

Educational researchers and scholars who have studied the role of administrators and supervisors in professional development have suggested the following: “The long-term goal of developmental supervision is teacher development toward a point at which teachers, facilitated by supervisors, can assume full responsibility for instructional improvement.”⁵ While leaders can assist teachers in their professional development, teachers will be more consistent and effective when they take primary responsibility for their own professional development. Teachers who continue to grow and improve take seriously this commitment to professional development throughout the entire course of their careers.⁶

Teacher Reflection in Religious Education

In the context of professional development, reflection may be thought of as “deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement.”⁷ Though our questions may not be of the same magnitude as those the Prophet asked in the Sacred Grove, religious educators in the Church Educational System reflect on at least two fundamental questions every day that can have life-changing answers for themselves and their students: What should I teach? and How should I teach it? These seemingly simple questions contain several subqueries that make them more complicated than they might at first appear. A seminary teacher approaching a lesson on a specific chapter of scripture might wrestle with some of the following questions: What was the intent of
the inspired author who wrote this scripture block? What are the needs and abilities of my students? What principle or doctrine is the Lord inspiring me through his Spirit to teach? This same teacher seeks simultaneous resolution to other questions that pertain to teaching methodology, or how to teach the lesson: How can I help my students be ready to understand and apply what they will learn from the scriptures? Will this approach lift my students spiritually? Will the approach I have chosen offend anyone? Does the method I have chosen match the level of sacredness of the doctrine or principle the students will learn? Do I need to vary my teaching methods to help students with different learning styles?8

Beyond these questions, thoughtful teachers may reflect on even more intricate questions concerning a variety of issues, such as classroom discipline9 (How will I make sure that a student doesn’t disrupt the class, without alienating the student?), student participation (How can I help more students participate meaningfully, without minimizing the contribution of students who regularly participate?), and the impact they, the teachers, hope to have on their students (Are the truths I have chosen to teach and the methods I use to teach them going to strengthen my students’ testimonies of the restored gospel and help them be true disciples of Jesus Christ?). Conscientious seminary and institute teachers may also consider questions about whether or not the lessons they plan accomplish the S&I Objective according to the fundamentals of good teaching as outlined in the Teaching and Learning Emphasis (TLE). And these are just some of the challenges that gospel teachers might reflect on every day, whether or not they deliberately articulate these questions and the solutions they devise.

**The Reflection Dilemma**

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, who have spent several decades studying and writing about reflective theory and practice in many professional contexts including education, have shown that reflection is a more challenging process than just sitting down and thinking about something we have learned or done.10 They propose that there is usually a difference between a teacher’s “espoused theories,” which define a teacher’s ideals or beliefs, and his or her “theories in use,” which describe what a teacher actually does. They explained, “When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. . . . However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-use,
which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories.”11 They propose that successful reflection helps teachers identify incongruencies between espoused theories and theories in use to develop internal consistency that leads to “hybrid theories of practice.”12

However, in their research and training seminars and workshops, Argyris and Schön found that developing effective hybrid theories of practices was often difficult because “we try to compartmentalize—to keep our espoused theory in one place and our theory-in-use in another, never allowing them to meet. One goes on speaking in the language of one theory, acting in the language of another, and maintaining the illusion of congruence through systematic self-deception.”13 All teachers, to some degree, face this inconsistency in their personal and professional lives. Well-known educator Herbert Kohl commented that his beliefs always “ran ahead” of his personal ability to teach according to them.14 The Apostle Paul noted that in mortality we see ourselves only “through a glass, darkly,” and only at some future date will we “know even as also [we are] known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yet, we should all be striving for “greater consistency between our beliefs and our actions.”15

Fred Korthagen noted that while “there is considerable emphasis on promoting reflection in teachers . . . it is not always clear exactly what teachers are supposed to reflect on when wishing to become better teachers. What are important contents of reflection?”16 Korthagen posited an “onion model” of reflection (see fig. 1) to help teachers better understand reflection as a process of seeking “alignment” between their core beliefs and their actions. As a result of his research and workshops, he proposed that reflection should focus on “how to translate one’s core qualities into concrete behavior in a specific situation” in a quest to attain “complete ‘alignment,’” a condition that admittedly may “take a lifetime to attain, if attained at all.”17 While this process may lead to “great uneasiness” in some instances, it will also lead to teachers who teach with greater power and have a greater impact in the classroom as their professional development translates their core beliefs into effective classroom behaviors.

The Church-produced Teaching, No Greater Call manual exhorts teachers to “continually reflect on our effectiveness as teachers,”18 and the CES-produced Administering Appropriately Handbook suggests that leaders who have a habit of “reflecting on related past experiences”19 will have greater success in their assignments. However, not much research has been done
on teacher reflection in religious education, including among S&I faculty. Thus it was determined that a study of reflection among professional seminary teachers in S&I might increase understanding of reflection and promote more effective reflection as a function of professional development.

Fig. 1. Korthagen’s “onion model” of reflection.

A Model of Teacher Reflection for Religious Educators

From a recent qualitative study on the reflective practices of full-time seminary teachers, a model of teacher reflection has been developed to show how religious educators might approach teacher reflection in a way that will contribute to sustained professional development. This study sought to identify the reflective practices of professional seminary teachers and better understand how teachers perceived these practices as having an impact on their professional development. Forty-seven full-time seminary teachers participated in this study through an online survey, and six of these teachers participated in observations and interviews. These six teachers also contributed documents,
such as professional journal writing samples and copies of their Professional Growth Plans, for further analysis.22

While Korthagen’s model of reflection provided important background understanding for professional reflection in educational settings, the primary theoretical framework for this study was a model created by Neville Hatton and David Smith, which includes four levels of reflection: technical, descriptive, dialogic, and critical.23 The survey and interviews for this study were designed to identify reflective practices that corresponded to the four levels of reflection and how teachers engaged in these four levels of reflection. The study also sought to better understand how teachers felt their engagement in these reflective practices contributed to their overall professional development.

This study showed that there are a wide variety of potentially reflective practices among professional seminary teachers in S&I. The following table summarizes some reflective practices that teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators should consider as they focus on incorporating reflection into professional development activities and programs. The institutional practices are those that S&I generally promotes or encourages through policy, training, or other administrative means. The informal practices are those that seem to occur on a more localized basis, or that seem to happen without any open general administrative assertion or encouragement per se.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Reflective practices among professional seminary teachers</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>More common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Teachers observing other teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Supervisors observing teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Attending inservice training</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Reading professional material (e.g., handbooks)</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Seeking higher education</td>
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<td>· Professional training programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less common</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Professional Growth Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Writing about observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Attending professional conferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>· Professional learning communities</td>
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Comments from a majority of teachers interviewed in this study suggested that teachers do not perceive these various practices as being connected, harmonized, or integrated in any systematic way as part of a comprehensive plan for their professional development.

Some of these teacher reflection practices tended to lead teachers to engage in the specific levels of reflection proposed by Hatton and Smith. However, none of the reflective practices identified in this study could be said to lead exclusively to any particular level of reflection. Thus it is important for professional seminary teachers (and those who supervise them) to understand that the many activities, tools, or forms available in S&I will not necessarily lead to given levels of reflection by nature of the inherent design of the form itself. The direction of a teacher’s reflection will be determined by the intents and attitudes of the persons who employ these various forms. Assessment and evaluation are, therefore, essential components in guiding the professional reflection of teachers if that reflection is to have an optimal impact on the professional development of the individual teacher. It should also be noted that forms of reflection can be used to effectively lead to multiple levels of reflection when carefully designed and deliberately employed.

The next four sections will define each level of reflection and then present the findings from this study relative to the practices, processes, and impact of teacher reflection among professional seminary teachers. The fifth section will present a model of teacher reflection based on these findings and a brief case description that will hopefully help teachers and supervisors in S&I more fully understand the process of reflection in a way that will contribute to sustained professional development that results in their having an increasingly greater impact with students in the classroom.

Technological reflection. The first level of reflection posited by Hatton and Smith, called technical reflection, involves “decision-making about immediate behaviours or skills . . . but always interpreted in light of personal worries and previous experiences.”24 This level of reflection involves an examination of one’s use of teaching skills or general competencies (whether content-based or methodological) in a controlled, small setting, such as the teacher’s own classroom. This usually takes place in a “reporting” fashion, whereby the teacher simply recounts what he or she did without providing reasons or justification for the decision or course of action.

When teachers in this study engaged in technical reflection, they most frequently talked about evaluating student participation in seminary,
thinking about the need for classroom discipline, lesson pacing, and “lesson
correction reflection.” A teacher in this study generated the phrase “lesson
correction reflection” to describe the kind of technical reflection seminary
teachers engage in when thinking about how they can improve skills, compet-
tencies, and behaviors to make a lesson more effective. One teacher posed the
following question as a means for engaging in this kind of reflective experi-
ence, “If someone were to evaluate, . . . talking about a baseball pitch, did I get
the mechanics right?”

One interesting finding of this study was that when the seminary teachers
interviewed in this study engaged in technical reflection, they focused mainly
on student participation. When teachers talked about student participation as
an end in itself without any explanation as to why the participation was impor-
tant or evaluating whether or not the participation was necessarily substantive,
this represented technical reflection. While focusing on student participation
can be valuable, discussion of this issue in the descriptive reflection section
will show the potential problems of a teacher focusing strictly on promoting
student participation without considering the purposes for doing so.

Teachers need to engage in reflective practices that evaluate their effec-
tive use of teaching skills. These practices cannot be viewed as insignificant or
of little importance, as teachers claim to focus on the larger goals of the S&I
Objective or employing the fundamentals of the TLE. Teachers must also
be cautious not to overemphasize technical reflection to the point that the
pedagogy becomes an end in itself, as seemed to be the case in this study, with
the emphasis on student participation in the classroom. Religious educators
may have a propensity to do this as they subordinate the higher moral and
spiritual purposes of their teaching to pedagogy.

As with all levels of reflection, technical reflection needs to be connected
to other levels of reflection in order to be effective in promoting professional
development among religious educators. When a teacher is observed, he
may then report what happened in his classroom to a colleague or supervi-
sor—this is technical reflection. However, if he then engages in a collegial
evaluation and exchange of ideas with a colleague or supervisor—to be dis-
cussed in more detail shortly as one form of dialogic reflection—the teacher
can weigh differing perspectives with his own and then exchange, modify, or
incorporate those competing ideas. However, observers and teachers should
be aware that the level of trust in their relationship and the degree to which
the teacher being observed feels secure will have a tremendous impact on that teacher’s willingness and capacity to improve through such experiences.

While it may seem reasonable that technical reflection would inevitably lead to descriptive reflection (wherein teachers explain their actions in context of their rationale for those actions), such a transition was not automatic among professional seminary teachers. In fact, it was only rarely the case. According to the data collected from the teachers in this sample, no patterns or trends emerged that showed teachers describing *what* they did and then independently explaining *why* they did it.

Korthagen surmised that teachers who are stuck in technical reflection and focus primarily on developing skills, behaviors, and competencies that never lead to other levels of reflection will stagnate in their professional development.25 Without any inclination to consider the rationale behind their actions, teachers cannot evaluate whether their behaviors are effective or ineffective, good or bad, successful or unsuccessful—or if there is any way they might do things differently or better. Fortunately, none of the teachers interviewed in this study seemed to fit that description.

**Descriptive reflection.** The next level of reflection in Hatton and Smith’s model is descriptive reflection, which is “not only a description of events but some attempt to provide reason [or] justification for events or actions” while taking into account “multiple factors and perspectives.”26 When teachers in this study engaged in practices that led to descriptive reflection, they most often talked about such issues as writing as teacher reflection practice, evaluating student participation in seminary, reconsidering emphasis on students over content, and planning for student analysis/reflection. The phrase “lesson correction reflection,” introduced in the section on technical reflection, also described the practices and processes of descriptive reflection in many ways. When teachers engage in “lesson correction reflection” at the level of descriptive reflection, they are doing more than just reporting on their decisions and actions in the classroom; they are connecting *what* they did with *why*.

An example of the difference between the technical level and the descriptive level is how teachers talked about evaluating student participation in seminary. Evaluating student participation dominated all other categories of technical reflection—teachers talked about this twice as much as the next highest category of technical reflection. In most interviews, teachers talked about student participation as if its mere presence was an indication of successful teaching, which may lead to the following error. While evaluating
a national teacher education program, Thomas Popkewitz claimed that an “educator’s focus rendered the intellectual content (substance) of the lessons inconsequential. Substance was subordinated to pedagogic form and style.”

He said that this was most likely to happen “when enjoyment became one of the primary objects of instruction.” If “success was indicated by the degree to which students ‘felt good’ about the lesson, and whether they ‘participated’ actively in the lesson and its attendant discussion,” then pupil involvement would replace student understanding of the substance of the lesson.

Some contemporary researchers have argued that this has taken place in religious education in America, leading to a shallow understanding of basic beliefs and religious practices among teenagers in America. Rymarz warned about this danger specifically in religious education settings when he argued that “one important reason behind the lack of religious content knowledge [among students] is the reluctance of teachers to move beyond the experiential world of students.”

The guiding principles of teaching in S&I, as outlined in the Objective and the TLE, propose that effective religious education occurs when teachers maintain an appropriate balance between teaching content and engaging students in the learning process.

By engaging in descriptive reflection, teachers may be more likely to ensure that student participation in seminary is accomplishing the purposes of S&I—for example, giving students opportunities to practice articulating their beliefs so they can share them with others. Unfortunately, teachers discussed this topic in descriptively reflective terms less than half as often as they did in technically reflective terms. Thus teachers are more likely to talk about student participation as an inherently desirable or positive outcome of their teaching than they are to talk about why they want it or what they hope to accomplish with it. Or in other words, teachers may be prone to talk about student participation as the end goal rather than as a means to other objectives.

Descriptive reflection is critical for S&I teachers because it requires them to explain the rationale behind their decisions in the classroom—to engage in “deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement.” A few of the teachers in this study did engage in descriptive reflection via reflective writing about their own teaching or through evaluating their teaching performance against personal teaching goals; however, they reported feeling that they had little time to engage in these practices regularly. And when they did
engage in these practices, they did not include the S&I Objective or TLE as an explicit part of their rationale.

Through analysis and interpretation of the data in this study, descriptive reflection emerges as a key to a teacher’s ability to integrate the four levels of reflection and attain the benefits for doing so. The more teachers engage in “reflection-on-action,” the more likely they are to develop the ability to engage in “reflection-in-action.” Descriptive reflection can lead S&I teachers to align their classroom behaviors more closely with both their mission and values as religious educators and the mission and objectives of S&I. While teachers are often implicitly striving to accomplish the aims of the S&I Objective and TLE, practicing more consistent descriptive reflection could lead to greater unity between administration, supervisors, and teachers so that efforts at professional development in S&I are designed and perceived as being part of a cohesive approach to improving teaching. Teachers who articulate an explicit rationale for their classroom behaviors through descriptive reflection could also more effectively bridge the gap between “espoused theories” and “theories in use” so that their “hybrid theories of practice” become more consistent and easier to evaluate and improve.

Teachers who do not become skilled in descriptive reflection risk two potential problems. On one hand, teachers arrested in the supposedly more practical realm of technical reflection may risk being continually baffled by the fact that a particular method or activity works in one class but not in another, as they continue to blindly employ the same pedagogical practices or activities despite classroom dynamics, the needs of individual students, and subject matter differences. On the other hand, teachers arrested in the supposedly more philosophical realm of critical reflection (to be discussed later) risk ethereal discussions and ponderings over ideas and concepts pertaining to identity, mission, and values without giving sufficient consideration to how effective pedagogical practice impacts students.

**Dialogic reflection.** The third level of teacher reflection proposed by Hatton and Smith is dialogic reflection. When teachers engage in dialogic reflection, they are “weighing competing claims and viewpoints, and then exploring alternative solutions.” Teachers in this study reported that the most common ways they experienced dialogic reflection were working with the principal; seeking and receiving feedback, as well as giving feedback to others; and being empowered by education. This last way has to do with how teachers feel their educational background prepared them for teaching and...
how it informs their teaching practice. Another way that teachers engaged in
dialogic reflection was by reading professional religious education material,
such as the Religious Educator or talks from Church and S&I leaders posted
on the S&I website.

The analysis and interpretation of the data indicate that the professional
seminary teachers in this study felt that their principal was the key figure
in their dialogic reflective practices. As the primary instructional leader in
every seminary building, the principal is in the best position to influence the
improvement of teaching among seminary faculty. A principal potentially has
more direct instructional leadership interface time with seminary teachers
than any other individual has with S&I teachers. Teachers in the study had
fairly strong opinions about the difference that a principal made, or could
make, in their professional development. Working with the principal obvi-
ously overlaps with the practice of seminary teachers seeking, receiving, and
giving feedback, all of which also contributed significantly to their profes-
sional development as dialogically reflective practices. Seeking, giving, and
receiving feedback also overlaps with other dialogically reflective practices,
such as collaborating with faculty to prepare lessons and consulting with col-
leagues to solve problems. The seminary teachers in this study recognized that
dialogic reflection with an instructional leader and with immediate colleagues
or faculty could have a positive impact on their professional development.

Dialogic reflection may not be seen as having a clear connection to other
levels of reflection. However, this apparent disassociation may be a result of
the current S&I culture, in which dialogic reflection is so heavily emphasized
that its connection is almost invisible because of its obviousness, like a fish that
doesn’t realize it is swimming in water. Four of the six teachers interviewed
in this study had been teaching for more than ten years. These teachers all
reported feeling a significant shift within the last decade of S&I’s approach to
professional development, whereby teachers were more strongly encouraged
to actively seek, give, and receive feedback. Although several teachers in the
study reported feeling that the modes of operation for this practice were not
as well defined or sufficiently implemented (by teachers and principals alike)
as they should have been, there has been a deliberate effort on the part of S&I
administration and supervisors to encourage more dialogic reflection. The
qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents in this study
support this trend by showing dialogic reflection as the second most common
form of reflection among professional S&I seminary teachers in this study.
Teachers are more likely to consider student participation as the end goal rather than as a means to other objectives.
Most of the potentially reflective practices identified among professional seminary teachers in S&I inherently promote or support dialogic reflection. These practices include teachers observing other teachers and supervisors observing teachers, and the following activities: holding inservice meetings, seeking higher education, reading S&I handbooks and materials, using the Professional Growth Plan (probably the least effectively implemented method identified in this study), attending professional conferences, engaging in professional learning communities (e.g., apprentice seminars and “cluster groups”), discussing teaching practices with colleagues, planning lessons collaboratively, learning from mentors, reviewing lesson plans, and reading from professional journals. In all these potentially reflective practices, teachers are—or can be—encouraged to weigh competing claims and viewpoints as they explore possible solutions to the problems and challenges they face in their teaching and their professional development. Teachers who engage regularly in dialogically reflective practices avoid the insular dangers of a form of “intellectual inbreeding,” wherein teachers avoid broadening horizons or seeking improvement out of convenience, fear, or insecurity in one form or another.

Dialogic reflection can cross all levels of reflection in an effort to consistently engage the teacher in dialogue with others, as part of the quest for sustained professional development. “The typical milieu of the school [or seminary] makes it difficult for teachers to see themselves as learners, to reflect on practice, and to create a collaborative, intellectual environment that sustains them as a community of learners.” Teachers in individual classrooms and offices can become somewhat isolated without any form of dialogic reflection. A skilled and trusted dialogic partner can provide a helpful objective “mirror” for a teacher stuck in technical reflection. In dialogic reflection, teachers can compare what they think happened in class with what other teachers or supervisors observed. Skilled dialogic partners can ask teachers searching questions, or offer suggestions, that help them articulate the rationale behind their behavior as teachers. Skilled dialogic partners can also help teachers ask questions or put forth ideas of a critically reflective nature that help teachers consider their alignment with institutional objectives and their impact on the students, the rest of the faculty, and the larger community.

Critical reflection. Hatton and Smith wrote that there are three primary aspects of critical reflection in which professional educators might engage: (a) “seeing as problematic, according to ethical criteria, the goals and practices
of one’s profession,” (b) “thinking about the effects upon others of one’s actions,” and (c) “taking account of social, political and/or cultural forces.” Teachers engaging in critical reflection “[demonstrate] an awareness that actions and events are not only located in, and explicable by, reference to multiple perspectives but are located in, and influenced by multiple historical, and socio-political contexts.” They pointed out that teachers might engage in this kind of reflection on their own or with others.

Critical reflection was perhaps the most interesting level of reflection to investigate and analyze throughout this study. On the survey and in interviews, professional seminary teachers in S&I did not generally consider elements of critical reflection pertaining to race, gender, social justice, as do most professional religious education journals, and even the *Religious Educator*. In fact, they seemed quite reticent to discuss such issues when invited to do so during interviews. The data collected from one survey respondent indicated that he had a tendency to engage more regularly in critical reflection. However, even though he mentioned issues pertaining to gender and community during his interview, he did not engage predominantly in the kind of critical reflection that might be found in other religious education journals and books.

While there was some minor evidence of all three aspects of critical reflection in this study, the seminary teachers in this study seemed focused on “thinking about the effects upon others of one’s actions.” The largest amount of data among all levels of reflection—technical, descriptive, dialogic, or critical—pertained to the critical reflective category that dealt with “promoting the spiritual growth and development of students.” While the S&I Objective and TLE were generally not mentioned specifically in connection with critical reflection, teachers in this study were in harmony, in principle at least, with these institutional aims.

However, even though teachers seem to readily engage in critical reflection, more so than any other level of reflection, none of the reflective practices identified among the professional S&I seminary teachers seemed to effectively transmit a teacher’s critical reflection into action in the classroom. While two of the more experienced teachers tended to move from technical reflection to critical reflection in the interviews more than other teachers, there did not appear to be any particular practice that encouraged teachers to regularly evaluate or explain how particular classroom behaviors or pedagogical decisions related to “promoting the spiritual growth and development of students.” With only a few minor exceptions, teachers generally said that they
“hoped” what happened in the classroom would lead to this outcome, but they generally didn’t seek to explain specifically “how” they thought what they did in the classroom would lead to that outcome. This is not to say that the teachers in this study couldn’t do that—because they showed effectively in the interviews that they could—but this is just to say that they didn’t report that there was any particular reflective practice—either formal or informal, personal or institutional—that encouraged them to make this connection on a regular basis.

This lack of connection between the “espoused theories” of S&I professional seminary teachers (i.e., the S&I Objective and the TLE, even when not articulated as such by specific terminology) could be overcome through the effective evaluation of “theories in use” (i.e., technical practices and reflection) via descriptive and dialogical reflective means to generate effective “hybrid theories of practice,” as mentioned earlier by Argyris and Schön. It is important for seminary teachers to make explicit connections between the aims of their critical reflection and their technical reflection via descriptive and dialogic reflection. This helps them avoid the “directionless change” that comes from “competence without purpose” as well as the “inefficiency and frustration” that comes from “purpose without competence.”

An integrated model and case description of teacher reflection as a function of sustained professional development. Each level of reflection serves a useful purpose in the professional development of religious educators. However, professional development will be greatly enhanced if teachers will learn to integrate the various levels of reflection as a function of their professional development. This integration of the levels of reflection can accomplish four related purposes that have been referred to previously in this study. First, teachers who can effectively integrate the four levels of “reflection-on-action” will move closer to “reflection-in-action.” Hatton and Smith described “reflection-in-action” as “the ability to apply, singly or in combination, qualitatively distinctive kinds of reflection (namely technical, descriptive, dialogic, or critical) to a given situation as it is unfolding. In other words, the professional practitioner is able consciously to think about an action as it is taking place, making sense of what is happening and shaping successive practical steps using multiple viewpoints as appropriate.”

One teacher, in an interview for this study, shared the following basketball analogy to illustrate “reflection-in-action”: “When Kobe [Bryant] is driving the ball down the court, he sees a certain opening. Kobe doesn’t call timeout,
go over, get into his files, and say, ‘Oh yeah, this move has worked on that situation.’ He doesn’t even think about it; he just does it. I’d like to become the kind of teacher that has . . . a thousand tools at my disposal that I use often enough that at any moment I can grab that tool.” Just like a professional athlete, professional teachers are not likely to develop this kind of reflective automaticity without an understanding of and practice with the various types of reflection through activities that engage them in actual reflection.

The second objective that can be accomplished with the successful integration of the various levels of reflection is the “alignment” between a teacher’s core sense of identity, beliefs, and mission and his or her competencies, skills, and behaviors in the classroom. Teachers who develop this alignment—or, who are at least progressing toward it, since Korthagen admitted that complete alignment may “take a lifetime to attain, if attained at all”—increase their effectiveness in the classroom by having a clarified understanding of their purpose and a clear direction for how to accomplish it. This will likely also increase a teacher’s “professional trustworthiness” that one religious education professor argued will enhance the student-teacher relationship, which is so vital in religious education. Without this alignment, teachers constantly risk disruptions by “gestalts”; these are the default behaviors that teachers employ independent of, and often contrary to, professional training or espoused theories as they face inevitable dynamic challenges in their efforts to teach students. Teachers who cease striving for this professional alignment also face personal stagnation in their professional development as they potentially fixate on only one level of reflection.

Third, religious educators who integrate the various levels of teacher reflection enable themselves to see more clearly their “espoused theories,” identify incongruencies between their “espoused theories” and their “theories-in-use,” and develop working and ever-improving “hybrid theories of practice.” As teachers evaluate their actions, endeavor to make implicit assumptions explicit, and formulate new lenses for viewing and evaluating their practice—this includes persevering in “serious reflection” despite potential “great uneasiness”—they become more effective and more satisfied in their work.

Fourth, as teachers overcome the discomfort of their “cognitive dissonance” and integrate the four levels of reflection addressed in this study, they move toward Glickman’s ideal of teachers who “assume full responsibility for instructional improvement.” Of course, this does not refer to teachers who
engage in isolated professional development (this would completely ignore the dialogic level of reflection) but to teachers who successfully integrate the four levels of reflection and take primary responsibility for their own sustained professional development.

The following model (fig. 2) illustrates how the four levels of reflection operate within the reflective practices and processes of the professional seminary teachers in this study. In this model, descriptive reflection is shown as a critical link between technical reflection and critical reflection. The arrow shows how dialogic reflection crosses through the other three levels of reflection and integrates all levels of reflection in a process that leads to sustained professional development. This also reflects the emphasis on dialogic reflection found among the S&I teachers in this study and how the various dialogically reflective practices in S&I support and promote teacher engagement in other levels of reflection.

Perhaps a brief case description will illustrate how a professional seminary teacher, with the help of an informed and attentive instructional leader, can use this model to enhance his professional development efforts. While this illustrative example is hypothetical and includes more elements of reflection than might reasonably be pursued by a single teacher, it does represent actual practices and processes employed by teachers in this study.

Brother Anderson arranges several exploratory classroom observations with his principal. Each observation, with its preobservation and postobservation visits, focuses on a different aspect of Brother Anderson’s teaching. For example, one observation focuses on Brother Anderson’s use of questions in class. Another observation focuses on student participation. Another focuses on how Brother Anderson’s choice of content and methods helps him focus on the objective of S&I with his students. After each observation, Brother
Anderson writes a brief summary of what he did in class, why he chose to do it, and how his decisions relate to the S&I Objective and the TLE. After reviewing his notes and pondering the feedback from his principal, Brother Anderson uses the Professional Growth Plan to formulate a goal to work on student participation. He includes in his goal statement specific objectives he would like to accomplish, why he thinks student participation is important, and how participation will accomplish the S&I Objective. He shares this goal with his principal.

Subsequent classroom observations with the principal focus on evaluating student participation methods and whether Brother Anderson and the principal feel that the purposes for the participation are being accomplished. During each preobservation visit, Brother Anderson gives a copy of his lesson plan to the principal and together they discuss how the student participation in that lesson will help Brother Anderson accomplish his goals. The postobservation visits focus on these same objectives. Brother Anderson also asks his students occasionally to share with him how they feel about their participation in class. Sometimes Brother Anderson and the principal plan a lesson together to see how they could incorporate effective participation techniques in a way that will help the doctrines and principles of the lesson be meaningful for students.

The principal also encourages Brother Anderson to search the “Talks for Teachers” web site and the Religious Educator for material that might help him and the seminary faculty to improve student participation in their classrooms. He then asks Brother Anderson to give a faculty inservice meeting on the subject to share what he has learned and lead a discussion with other teachers. Brother Anderson and his principal use the Regular Results Discussion form monthly to discuss how Brother Anderson’s efforts to improve student participation are helping him to promote the spiritual growth of his students. When they feel that sufficient progress has been made and that Brother Anderson is ready to focus on another goal, they might employ similar reflective procedures to help Brother Anderson continue this pattern of sustained professional development.

**Conclusion**

Most teachers, including religious educators, engage in some sort of reflection whether they articulate it as such or not. The teachers interviewed in this study demonstrated and expressed both the eagerness and ability to engage
more deliberately in reflection that would help them improve their practice as religious educators. More research on the subject of reflection would be beneficial for our understanding of this aspect of professional development, including studies that explore other models of teacher reflection and more detailed investigation of the role of instructional supervisors in the reflective process. It is hoped that this study and the model of reflection generated by it will give religious educators a foundational framework for pursuing, discussing, and improving their reflective practices as we strive to fulfill both our contractual and covenantal obligations to the Church and to the Lord. We will then have a greater impact on the youth and young adults of the Church as we help them understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with our Heavenly Father.

Notes


3. Administering Appropriately, 16.


15. President James E. Faust, “‘We Seek After These Things,’” *Ensign*, May 1998, 43.
20. For a review of CES-related research over the last several decades, see Eric P. Rogers, Bibliography, Church Educational System, 2011, EricPaulRogers.Wordpress.com/publications-presentations-courses-taught/resources/.
21. For the entire study, see Ryan S. Gardner, “Teacher Reflection among Professional Seminary Faculty in the Seminaries and Institutes Department of the Church Educational System” (PhD diss., Utah State University, 2011).
22. This qualitative study employed four purposeful sampling strategies to select participants: homogeneous sampling, maximal variation sampling, extreme case sampling, and theory or concept sampling; see John W. Creswell, *Educational research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (Columbus, OH: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 204–6.
23. See Hatton and Smith, “Reflection in Teacher Education.” Qualitative researchers recommend using multiple theoretical lenses when doing qualitative research in order to better understand the multiple facets of the phenomenon being studied. See Harry Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001); and Kathy
Charmaz, “Grounded Theory as an Emergent Method,” in *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, eds. Sharlene N. Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (Guilford, CT: Guilford, 2008), 155–70.


29. See Kenda C. Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). However, Dean and Smith have both pointed out that LDS youth seem to fare better than typical American youth in both understanding and articulating their beliefs. This has been corroborated in part by research by Bruce A. Chadwick, Brent L. Top, and Richard J. McClendon, *Shield of Faith: The Power of Religion in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2010).


35. Hatton and Smith, “Reflection in Teacher Education,” 45.


37. See journals such as *Religion & Education*, *Religious Education*, or the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.


45. Both Elliot Eisner (“The Perceptive Eye: Toward the Reformation of Educational Evaluation,” Occasional Papers of the Stanford Evaluation Consortium, Stanford University, 1975) and Harry Wolcott (see *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, and Interpretation* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996]) have pointed out the importance of focused evaluations and observations as a means to increasing understanding of any event or phenomenon.
In contrast to Lucifer and his lies, Jesus Christ stands untainted by vain ambition.
He not only accomplished the Atonement but had pure motives before, during, and after the process.
Recently, a seminary student remarked that in the beginning, Satan “just wanted there to never be a wrong choice. He just wanted everyone to always make the right choices.” This assessment of Satan varies drastically from the Lord’s characterization of him as a liar and a murderer “from the beginning” (D&C 93:25; John 8:44). How did this student gain such a benign view of “the enemy of [his] soul”? (2 Nephi 4:28). The answer probably results from how Lucifer is often depicted in gospel discussions regarding the premortal Council in Heaven. Frequently, when Church members discuss a lesson on pre-earth life, someone will express the idea that two plans for our salvation were presented: one by Jesus and the other by Lucifer. Comments sometimes arise suggesting that Lucifer wanted to save all of God’s children and that he was going to force us to choose the right. Typically, the discussion then concludes with the assertion that God chose Jesus’ plan because it allowed us the opportunity to choose for ourselves, and Lucifer was cast out of heaven with those who preferred his plan.

Unfortunately, this type of discussion portrays the premortal council in such a way that Lucifer may come across as a benevolent, though misguided,

“A Liar from the Beginning”

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spirit who simply wanted all of us to be saved. Meanwhile, our Heavenly Father falsely appears to be an uncertain God, searching out ideas to formulate a plan for the redemption of his children. To some, the Father may also appear rather harsh. For instance, some may ask, “Why would God condemn Lucifer for seeking to redeem all?” Missing from these discussions are two fundamental truths that affirm the omniscient, loving nature of our Heavenly Father as well as the malicious designs of Lucifer. First, Heavenly Father established a perfect and eternal plan for our salvation, a plan which predated the Council in Heaven and needed no amendments or improvements. Second, Lucifer did not set forth a plan for our salvation. Rather, his proposal was in essence a lie. In fact, Lucifer’s proposal was deceptive in two ways. It was a lie in substance because his claim to redeem all mankind was utterly unfeasible. It was also a lie of intent because the actual motive behind his proposal had nothing to do with the redemption of our souls. The purpose of this article is to highlight the perfect and eternal nature of our Heavenly Father’s plan as well as the dually deceptive nature of Lucifer’s proposal to redeem all.

God’s Perfect and Eternal Plan

God our Father is the author of the plan of salvation (see Titus 1:2; D&C 20:17–19). We learn from the Prophet Joseph Smith that Jesus Christ also “knew the plan of salvation” in the premortal realm, though he was not the plan’s originator. The Father and the Son are omniscient beings who view all things past, present, and future as “one eternal ‘now.’” They “contemplated the whole of the events” that would befall each of the Father’s children before we ever came to earth, including our individual sins and circumstances, and they “made ample provision for [our] redemption.” Because the plan was composed by our perfect Heavenly Father, it is likewise perfect. It reflects God’s infinite intelligence as well as his perfect love, justice, and mercy (see Alma 42:13–26).

Not only is God’s plan perfect but it is eternal—both in purpose and in scope. In other words, the intent of the plan never changes, nor do the means by which that intent is accomplished. When Moses asked the Lord why he created and populated worlds, he learned of God’s universal objective: “Worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose. . . . For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:33, 39). All of God’s creative works thus converge in the accomplishment of one triumphant purpose—the
exaltation of his children. Latter-day Apostles have affirmed the eternal nature of God’s plan. Elder Neal A. Maxwell, for example, cited the words of President J. Reuben Clark in his assertion that “Our Lord is not a novice, he is not an amateur; he has been over this course time and time and time again.’ . . . The Lord himself described His course as ‘one eternal round’ (D&C 3:2; see also 35:1; 1 Nephi 10:19; Alma 7:20).” Because God’s “great and eternal plan” (2 Nephi 11:5) does not vary, the same plan that will exalt a person on this earth operates consistently throughout time and space. Elder Maxwell explained that “the plan of salvation is executed and re-executed, again and again, in realms beyond our purview.” Thus the Father’s plan presented for our redemption and exaltation was not newly conceived by Jehovah during the premortal Council in Heaven, and certainly it was not lacking in thoroughness. The Father’s plan is perfect and eternal.

A Lie in Substance

Lucifer’s proposal to redeem all mankind was a lie. In spite of his awareness of the Father’s perfect and eternal plan of salvation, Lucifer audaciously approached the throne of God and asserted: “I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost” (Moses 4:1). Could Lucifer really have accomplished the redemption of all as he boasted? The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and the devil said he could save them all.” Clearly, these assertions could not both be true. As we seek to understand these two positions, it is crucial to remember that Jesus Christ has always embodied “the Spirit of truth” (D&C 93:26), while Lucifer, in contrast, is “a liar from the beginning” (D&C 93:25). These revealed insights help us see that Lucifer’s proposal to redeem all was not in substance a plan, but a lie. Lucifer’s claim to redeem all was clearly deceptive because it suggested he could obtain better results than God in bringing about the redemption of mankind. As a divine and flawless system, the great “plan of our God” (2 Nephi 9:13) cannot be improved, especially not by Lucifer, a being of finite understanding who was and is immensely less intelligent than God (see Abraham 3:19; see also Moses 4:6). Whatever power or knowledge Lucifer may have possessed was grossly insufficient to accomplish his offer of universal redemption.

Exaltation cannot be achieved through compulsion. Comments of Church members sometimes imply a belief that Satan could have somehow redeemed all mankind by taking away our agency or forcing us to choose the right.
This faulty idea finds expression in common refrains that liken various forms of human compulsion to “Satan’s plan.” Unfortunately, such remarks do not question Lucifer’s ability to force us all back to heaven, only his methods. A weakness in this reasoning is that it ignores the most fundamental problem with Lucifer’s proposal—the fact that he could not actually accomplish what he proposed. This reasoning also disregards the primary objective of the Father’s plan of salvation, which is to provide his children the opportunity to gain exaltation. As shown below, two reasons illustrate why a plan based on compulsion could never bring about our exaltation.

The first reason Lucifer could not have executed a functional plan based on force stems from the incompatibility of compulsion and exaltation. As the ultimate purpose of Heavenly Father’s plan for us, exaltation involves so much more than simply returning to heaven. Rather, his plan entails a process of development whereby we may realize our potential as “children of the Highest” (Luke 6:35) and ultimately become like him (see D&C 132:19–24). Elder Dallin H. Oaks aptly made this point in his talk “The Challenge to Become,” wherein he explained that “it is not enough for anyone just to go through the motions” to obtain salvation or exaltation. Rather, “the gospel of Jesus Christ is a plan that shows us how to become what our Heavenly Father desires us to become.” Elder Oaks illustrated this point with the following parable:

A wealthy father knew that if he were to bestow his wealth upon a child who had not yet developed the needed wisdom and stature, the inheritance would probably be wasted. The father said to his child:

“All that I have I desire to give you—not only my wealth, but also my position and standing among men. That which I have I can easily give you, but that which I am you must obtain for yourself. You will qualify for your inheritance by learning what I have learned and by living as I have lived. I will give you the laws and principles by which I have acquired my wisdom and stature. Follow my example, mastering as I have mastered, and you will become as I am, and all that I have will be yours.”

In light of this teaching, comments suggesting Satan could have forced exaltation upon all mankind appear entirely untenable. The idea that God became as he is through a path of compulsion suggests he really is no God at all. If such were the case, he would lack the divine attributes that constitute godhood, including the attribute of omnipotence. In reality, God is an all-powerful being who possesses the fullest measure of agency. Therefore, to become like him, we must also possess and righteously use the gift of agency.
Exaltation is the result of the personal choice to exercise faith in our Heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, to access their grace and mercy through the power of the Atonement, and to willingly obey the laws upon which exaltation is predicated (see D&C 130:20–21). There are no shortcuts or alternate routes in the process, “for strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation” of our souls (D&C 132:22). Thus, exaltation, by its very definition, cannot result from a plan that operates through compulsion.

A second reason exaltation cannot be achieved through compulsion stems from the nature of agency and its relationship to our existence. The Lord linked the concepts of agency and existence in the following revelation: “All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man” (D&C 93:30–31). The view that Lucifer could have redeemed all by eliminating agency fails to consider how doing so would fundamentally alter our existence.

Our understanding of the relationship between agency and existence can be strengthened by examining the four fundamental principles upon which agency is based, which are divine law, opposition, knowledge of good and evil, and the power to choose. The first two principles, divine law and opposition, directly pertain to the relationship between agency and existence and are addressed immediately below. The latter two principles, knowledge of good and evil and the power to choose, are included in a later section that discusses specifically how Lucifer sought to destroy agency in the premortal realm.

The principles of divine law and opposition constitute the relationship between agency and existence. Without law and opposition, neither agency nor a meaningful existence could be possible. Revelation affirms the necessity of God’s laws to create order in the universe (see D&C 88:12–13, 36–38). Without law, there would be no opposition, no distinguishing feature between sin and righteousness (see 2 Nephi 2:13). Some have mistakenly surmised that opposition exists because of Lucifer. In reality, opposition exists because of God—for as he designates through laws and commandments that which is good, he concurrently indicates what is evil (see Alma 42:17–23). Thus the laws of God create the possibility of opposition, which in turn provides mankind the polarizing options of obedience and disobedience, of love and hate, and so forth. If God were to remove opposition, Lehi teaches, “all things must have vanished away” (2 Nephi 2:13), both good and evil. In fact, opposition is crucial not only to the creation of morality (good and evil) but
to creation itself. How could an earth, a person, or an intelligible formation of any sort exist without opposition—without the distinguishing properties of which it is composed? Without opposition, what would separate light from dark, energy from inactivity, protons from electrons? Science, as well as scripture, affirms that “there is an opposition in all things; . . . [or else] all things must needs be a compound in one, . . . having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption” (2 Nephi 2:11).

In failing to consider these truths, some suggest that Lucifer sought to alter divine law or eliminate opposition to bring about compulsory salvation. Is it possible that Lucifer could have altered the laws of God? Could he have eliminated opposition so that we could only choose the right? The answer to these questions is no.15 Law and opposition exist eternally, independent of Lucifer. In fact, Lucifer himself is dependent upon law and opposition for his very existence. Without divine law and opposition, there could be no order in the universe, no creation, and certainly no plan of salvation. Thus the idea that Lucifer could create a plan of compulsory salvation by eliminating divine law or opposition is simply impossible. The removal of law or opposition and the destruction of agency would also destroy our existence.

Satan sought to destroy agency through deception rather than compulsion. The notion that Satan proposed to redeem all mankind by eliminating agency stems from an interpretation of the first four verses of Moses chapter 4. In verse 1, Satan makes his claim that he will redeem all mankind, and then we read in verse 3 that he “sought to destroy the agency of man, which . . . the Lord God, had given him.” The ideas in these verses have often been combined and interpreted to mean Lucifer planned to save all through force. Please notice, however, that in these verses Lucifer never actually spells out how he planned to redeem all mankind. Indeed, no explanation of a systematic plan is given. He simply claims that he “surely” will redeem all, and then we are given the Lord’s commentary that Lucifer was cast out “because” he “sought to destroy the agency of man” (v. 3). Thus a conceptual gap exists between the ideas of universal salvation and the destruction of agency—a gap that is often bridged with the assumption that Lucifer contrived a compulsory plan of redemption. However, this assumption presupposes that Lucifer was honest in his claim. It is based on the dubious premise that Lucifer truly wanted to save all and that somehow he could have actually done so.16 Could it be that Satan didn’t really have a plan to force us back to heaven? Could it be that he sought to destroy the agency of man not by conceiving an operable plan of compulsion
but through deception—by making an offer that appeared generous and attractive but in reality constituted nothing more than a ruse to gain power? The answers to these questions are found in Moses 4, which indicates that Lucifer’s false proposal resulted in his becoming “Satan, . . . the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will” (v. 4). In other words, these scriptures suggest Lucifer became Satan not because he submitted a plan to redeem us all by force, as is often suggested in Church classes, but because he sought to destroy our agency by lying to us and persuading us to follow him. Hence, Lucifer’s first lie was not his pitch to Eve in the Garden of Eden, “Ye shall not surely die” (v. 10). Rather, it came much earlier, in the premortal realm: “I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost” (v. 1). This lie constituted Lucifer’s primeval ploy to destroy the agency of man.

To understand why Lucifer sought to captivate others through deception rather than compulsion, it is crucial to recognize that Satan did not then possess—or does he now—the ability to directly control our use of agency. Satan could never force a soul to heaven just as he cannot now force a soul to hell.17 The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “the devil has no power over us only as we permit him.”18 Because of this reality, Lucifer necessarily targets the latter two components of agency mentioned above—our knowledge of good and evil and our power to choose. These two components of agency are interdependent. On one hand, the power to choose allows us through righteous choices to increase in light and truth, to gain greater discernment of good and evil, and to expand our possibilities of choice. On the other hand, poor choices lead to the loss of light, which leads to fewer possible choices, thus diminishing our agency.

Revelation confirms that Lucifer has only an indirect role in this process of constricting our knowledge and choice: “That wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience” (D&C 93:39). This statement shows that Satan cannot directly destroy either our knowledge of good and evil or our power to choose, but he can entice us to make choices that will result in limiting our use of agency (see 2 Nephi 28:21–22).19 Satan labors cunningly to warp our knowledge of good and evil and to weaken our power to choose, fully aware that it is through our disobedience that he is able to destroy our agency.

Lucifer employed these tactics of deception and enticement while attempting to destroy agency in the premortal realm. As stated previously,
the Lord presented a perfect, eternal plan for our redemption. He presented truth, which is “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; and whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning” (D&C 93:24–25). Included in the Lord’s presentation of truth was the hard reality that some would choose not to fulfill their potential. Lucifer evidently exploited this reality to promote the lie that he could redeem all. His proposal failed in two ways to measure up to the Lord’s definition of truth cited in the revelation above. Paradoxically, Lucifer’s proposal was both more than truth—an exaggeration—and less than truth—a subtle withholding of crucial information. It was more than truth in that he claimed all would be redeemed. It was less than truth because he presented no functional alternative that could have actually brought about universal salvation.

Lacking other means to gain the power he craved, Lucifer proposed a lie, a glittering snare—“I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost” (Moses 4:1)—to obtain the ears, the hearts, and the eventual captivity of other spirits. Employing a brand of seduction that anti-Christ and apostates would later imitate in mortality, Lucifer spoke half-truths and hyperbole, “flattering words” (Alma 30:47) and “perverse things, to draw away disciples after” himself (Acts 20:30; see also 1 John 2:22). A third part of the hosts of heaven,” the Lord revealed, “turned he away from me because of their agency” (D&C 29:36).

Some might wonder how those who followed Lucifer could have allowed themselves to do so. Were they genuinely deceived? If so, how could they be held responsible for their choice? The Book of Mormon account of Korihor is helpful in addressing these questions, for it shows how a person may use his agency to “resist the spirit of truth” (Alma 30:46) and willingly accept Satan’s deceptions. Korihor confessed: “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 to 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, even until I have brought this great curse upon me” (Alma 30:53). Implicit in this confession is Korihor’s admission that he did not at first believe Satan’s deceptions, yet he embraced them because they pleased his carnal nature. Satan merely offered the philosophical framework necessary to justify the wicked course Korihor desired to pursue. In this case, the lies Satan promoted included the denial of God and of
accountability to him for one’s choices. Though Satan appeared to Korihor “in the form of an angel” (Alma 30:53) and introduced these deceptions, the ultimate cause of Korihor’s ruin was self-deception. “I always knew that there was a God,” he admitted (Alma 30:52). In spite of Lucifer’s lies, Korihor was fully aware of—and fully accountable for—his own wickedness.

Similarly, those spirits who sided with Lucifer in the premortal realm ultimately were not tricked into choosing their fate, nor were they forced. On the contrary, they knowingly “suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome, and to deny the truth and defy [God’s] power” (D&C 76:31). Their choice will lead them to an ultimate loss of light, to a place apart from this earth called outer darkness (see D&C 76:44). There the blessings of agency are quenched while their torment is not, for these spirits willfully “receive[d] not the gift” (D&C 88:33) of redemption but rather enlisted as volunteers in a great war against their Redeemer.24 Scholars have noted the poignant irony that “those who embraced the cause wherein none were to be lost became the only ones who are everlastingly lost.”25 In response to Lucifer’s false proposal, these spirits foolishly turned from the truth, freely espoused the lie, unconscionably championed the liar, and made his path their own. This is how Lucifer used deception, not compulsion, to destroy agency in the premortal realm.26

As in premortality, the choice between truth and falsehood continues today. The fundamental principles of agency have not changed. The doctrine of agency revealed in scripture helps us understand that Satan’s power has always been limited by how we respond to the truth and light which emanate from the Father and the Son (see D&C 84:44–53). Satan remains incapable of changing divine law or of abolishing opposition. He therefore continues, through the only means he can, seeking to destroy the agency of man. He attempts to distort our perspective of truth, and he entices us to choose for ourselves a dreaded fate.

In summary, Lucifer’s proposal to redeem all mankind was not a plan of salvation; it was a lie. Through this lie, Satan attempted to destroy the agency of man. As gospel instructors, it is important for us to understand and teach that Lucifer lied in offering universal redemption. President Gordon B. Hinckley warned that “small aberrations in doctrinal teaching can lead to large and evil falsehoods.”27 Mistaken notions concerning the premortal council can result in flawed views that minimize the omniscience and love of the Father and the Son while falsely attributing benevolence to Lucifer.
We can avoid these errors by affirming the perfect and eternal nature of our Heavenly Father’s plan. Additionally, when comments arise purporting that Satan had a plan to redeem all, we can kindly help others see how this notion contradicts revealed truths concerning the nature of exaltation as well as the relationship between agency and existence.

A Lie of Intent

As mentioned earlier, Lucifer’s proposal to redeem all mankind was dually deceptive—it was a lie in both what he said and why he said it. President James E. Faust commented on Lucifer’s false intent, explaining that after Jehovah declared he would fulfill the Father’s plan, “Satan . . . countered that he would come and ‘redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost,’ . . . [but] something had to be in it for him. And thus he became the father of lies and selfishness.”28 Perhaps because classroom discussions do not often consider that Lucifer lied in claiming he could redeem all, students may also fail to realize the deception behind his motives. For instance, discussions regarding the Council in Heaven sometimes involve comments suggesting Satan wanted to save everyone. While it is true that Lucifer implied this motive through his claim, the Lord—who knows the hearts of all (see Alma 18:32; D&C 6:16; 33:1)—clearly divulged Lucifer’s actual intent (see Moses 4:3). Lucifer was only ostensibly concerned with the redemption of all. As shown below, his proposal was part of a premeditated rebellion against the Father, the Son, and the established priesthood order of heaven. Moreover, Lucifer’s actions following the rejection of his proposal demonstrate that he was never interested in accomplishing the redemption of the Father’s children.

Rebellion against the Father. We learn from revelation that Lucifer coupled his claim to redeem all mankind with the following clause, brazenly spoken to the face of God: “Give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). The Father also revealed that Lucifer sought “that I should give unto him mine own power” (Moses 4:3). These important insights indicate Lucifer’s proposal to redeem all was motivated by his lust for supremacy.29 In authority and dominion, he desired to “be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:14) but certainly not in “gentleness and meekness, and . . . love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41) nor in the host of other righteous attributes that constitute both the character of God and the pattern for exercising his priesthood power in righteousness. Unlike God, who glories in the exaltation of others (see Moses 1:39), Lucifer sought his own glorification at the expense of others.
Because Lucifer’s motives were based on his lust for the Father’s honor and power rather than a sincere desire to bring about the redemption of others, the Lord has repeatedly characterized his actions during the premortal council as a rebellion (see Moses 4:3; D&C 76:25).31 In fact, the Lord marked Lucifer’s rebellion at the time he spoke his proposal: “He rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power” (D&C 29:36; emphasis
added). This designation of Lucifer’s proposal as an act of rebellion indicates his offer was not innocently given. From the beginning, Lucifer’s proposal was crafted as a means of serving his own purposes, not the Father’s.

Rebellion against the Son. Lucifer’s false proposal represented rebellion not only against the Father but also against the Son. The third chapter of Abraham shows how Lucifer sought to usurp Jehovah’s position. The account begins with the Father’s question “Whom shall I send?” (Abraham 3:27). Both Jehovah and Lucifer reply with the words “Here am I, send me” (Abraham 3:27), though Jehovah answers first. Heavenly Father then announces his decision to “send the first” (Abraham 3:27), and so the “second was angry, and kept not his first estate” (Abraham 3:28). Read in isolation from other scriptures, this account may not seem to provide much evidence of Lucifer’s wrongdoing. Indeed, it may be read in such a way that Lucifer appears to have committed no offense until after his offer was rejected. However, by situating this episode in a broader doctrinal context, two primary reasons emerge that reveal why Lucifer did not qualify to fulfill the role of Redeemer and consequently show why his offer demonstrated rebellion against the one who did qualify. The first reason centers on Jehovah’s identity as the Firstborn among God’s spirit children. The second is based on the requirement of character that was necessary to fulfill the role of Redeemer.

Comprehension of Lucifer’s rebellion against the Son begins with one’s appreciation of the following doctrine revealed by our Savior: “I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn” (D&C 93:21; see also Colossians 1:18). A statement by the First Presidency has similarly affirmed that “among the spirit children of Elohim the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors.” As the Firstborn, Jesus Christ “possessed all the rights, interests, and inheritance of the Father. He was the Birthright Son. He was in premortality the inheritor and rightful heir of all the Father possessed. He was the Father’s agent and executor.”

Jehovah’s inheritance as the Firstborn and Birthright Son included another sacred title. He was to be called the Only Begotten Son of God, meaning that “in His nature would be combined the powers of Godhood with the capacity and possibilities of mortality.” In his second estate, the Only Begotten Son would possess “life in himself” (John 5:26), including power to lay down his life at will and “power to take it again” (John 10:18). This power, which Jesus rightfully received through his birthright as the Firstborn spirit, was necessary for him to fulfill his unique role as Savior and accomplish
the infinite and eternal Atonement. Jesus Christ used his divine inheritance as the Birthright Son to bless all the Father’s children, offering us resurrection and eternal life through his merits. Mercifully, through the Father’s magnanimous plan, we may become “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17) and be numbered in eternity among “the church of the Firstborn . . . into whose hands the Father has given all things” (D&C 76:54–55).

A number of scriptures indicate Lucifer coveted the authority and power belonging to Jehovah as the Firstborn and Only Begotten Son. For example, Doctrine and Covenants 76 states Lucifer “rebelled against the Only Begotten Son whom the Father loved and who was in the bosom of the Father” (D&C 76:25). Additionally, the fourth chapter of Moses shows that Lucifer’s proposal of universal redemption was accompanied by this self-centered petition to the Father: “I will be thy son” (Moses 4:1). Because all of us are spirit children of God, the phrase “I will be thy son” refers to something greater—the birthright inheritance received by Jesus. If Satan ever had a plan in premortality, clearly it was a plan of wickedness bent on supplanting the Firstborn.

In contrast to Lucifer, Jehovah qualified to receive the role of Redeemer not only by virtue of his rightful inheritance as Firstborn but also because of his character. President Ezra Taft Benson illustrated the disparity between Jehovah and Lucifer in terms of their desires concerning the Father’s purposes: “Christ wanted to serve. The devil wanted to rule. Christ wanted to bring men to where He was. The devil wanted to be above men.” These differences existed long before the Council in Heaven. Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote that “Jesus, being sinless and being the Firstborn of the Eternal Father in the spirit world, was utterly and uniquely qualified to perform the Atonement. No one else was qualified in full conformance with the Father’s will.” Additionally, scriptures evidence that in premortality Jehovah actively and worthily fulfilled his inherited role of Firstborn Son. Well before his mortal birth, Jehovah authoritatively represented the Father, created numerous worlds, and was identified as a god (see John 1:1–4; Moses 1:1–6). The Firstborn Son also taught us the gospel plan in the premortal realm (see Joseph Smith Translation, John 1:1–2), and many of us exercised the principles of faith and repentance through his name and by virtue of his future Atonement (see Alma 13:1–10).

Thus the Father’s plan always centered on this Firstborn Son who would become, by right of inheritance and character, the Only Begotten in the flesh. There was not a “back-up savior” or “plan B,” nor was there ever need
for one. “My Beloved Son, . . .” the Father declared, “was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning” (Moses 4:2; see also 1 Peter 1:20). The writer of Hebrews emphasized this point by rhetorically asking, “For unto which of the angels said [God the Father] at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? . . . [And] to which of the angels said [God the Father] at any time, Sit on my right hand . . . ?” (Hebrews 1:5, 13; emphasis added; see also Psalms 2:7; 110:1). The unequivocal answer to these questions is none but Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 1:2–4, 8–9). Jehovah, the Firstborn of the Father, was always designated to be “the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever” (Moses 5:9). “This,” the Father testified, “is the plan of salvation unto all men, through the blood of mine Only Begotten” (Moses 6:62).

Understanding Jehovah’s identity as the Firstborn and his perfect character helps us see that when the great question was posed—“Whom shall I send?”—the choice was obvious. This is especially evident when one considers the Father’s options: his magnificent Firstborn Son or the pompous and conniving Lucifer. Yet, if the Father always knew who would be the Savior, why did he ask, “Whom shall I send?” Three reasons appear as possible answers to this question, each of which acknowledges the eternal significance of agency.

First, the Father may have asked the question so that Jehovah could make a free and willing offering of himself. Although he was designated by birthright to fulfill the role of Redeemer, Jehovah yet possessed his agency. By asking the question “Whom shall I send?” our Father allowed his Firstborn to offer himself “of his own voluntary will” (Leviticus 1:3). Through his submissive response, Jehovah established a perfect pattern for offering all future sacrifices, which were to be given with “real intent” (Moroni 7:6) and “not grudgingly” (2 Corinthians 9:7), just as he gave himself (see D&C 138:13).

A second possible reason for the question “Whom shall I send?” may have centered on the Father’s other children. Perhaps the question was asked to benefit those who witnessed Jehovah’s response. If we, as spirits, had the opportunity to see Jehovah voluntarily submit to the coming sorrow, agony, blood, and grief that an infinite Atonement required, consider how our faith in and loyalty to him may have been fortified. This may have been a powerful teaching moment to underscore in our minds the infinite costs associated with the gift of agency, as well as the benevolent determination of Jehovah to pay those costs for us. Such a scenario brings to mind the words of John: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).
Finally, the Father may have queried “Whom shall I send?” to provide opportunity for Lucifer to exercise his agency. Elder David A. Bednar has taught that the Father uses questions to allow his children to act as agents rather than “merely be acted upon” and to ensure accountability to him for their choices. Obviously aware of Lucifer’s lust for power, the Father nevertheless asked a question that allowed Lucifer to act for himself. The question may have granted Lucifer a chance to amend his apostate course and choose to sustain Jehovah, the Firstborn Son upon whom the plan was centered. Rather than defer to the prescribed plan, however, Lucifer used the opportunity to parade his fantastic ego and continue in his rebellion. Because Lucifer was given the opportunity to act, he was also accountable to receive the consequences of his actions (see D&C 101:78).

This pattern whereby God uses questions as an impetus for his children to wisely use their agency is reflected in the mortal experience of Cain and Abel. In this account, much like in the premortal council, two sons make offerings unto God. Abel’s offering of the firstlings of his flock was accepted because it was given in faith according to the prescribed plan of redemption (see Moses 5:20). Conversely, Cain’s offering of “the fruit of the ground” (Moses 5:19) was rejected because it represented a blatant change of the symbolism typifying “the great Sacrifice which God had prepared,” as the Prophet Joseph Smith explained, and therefore ran “contrary to the plan of heaven.” Like Lucifer, Cain distorted the very essence of God’s plan and sought to reshape it after his own image. After rejecting the offering, however, the Lord mercifully proffered Cain the opportunity to right his course by providing the following questions and counsel: “Why art thou wroth? Why is thy countenance fallen? If thou dost well, thou shalt be accepted” (Moses 5:22–23). Additionally, the Lord warned Cain of the consequences accompanying his course (see Moses 5:23–25). Yet “Cain was wroth, and listened not any more to the voice of the Lord, neither to . . . his brother, who walked in holiness before the Lord” (Moses 5:26).

The archetypal elements of this incident reverberate with similarities to our premortal existence. Sadly, both episodes end with the mourning of a father over the loss of a rebellious son (see Moses 5:27; D&C 76:26)—a son who eventually sought the blood of his brother (see Moses 5:32; John 8:44). If Satan, like Cain, was forewarned of the consequences of his choices, then the following line from Milton’s Paradise Lost seems to accurately portray
Lucifer’s character and the twisted reasoning behind his ongoing rebellion: “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.”

When we understand Christ’s preeminence as the Father’s uniquely qualified Firstborn Son, we can more fully comprehend why Lucifer’s proposal was a rebellion and why his intent was so pernicious. Lucifer’s proposal was not a plan to save souls, nor was this his motive. Had Lucifer truly been interested in the salvation of souls, he would have sustained Jehovah, the Father’s perfect choice as Redeemer. Instead, Lucifer attempted to deprive Jehovah of his rightful position and authority and sought to take these for himself. Because Heavenly Father was clearly aware of the vast differences in character between Jehovah and Lucifer, his question of whom to send was not the inquiry of an unknowing God. Rather, the question was a fulcrum that allowed both Jehovah and Lucifer to act for themselves and, in the process, to display their character and intentions.

Rebellion against the priesthood. Lucifer’s rebellion against the Father and the Son necessarily encompassed opposition to the priesthood, which is “called the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3; italics in original). The fact that this priesthood order is eternal, “without beginning of days or end of years” (Alma 13:7), indicates Lucifer’s rebellion sought to circumvent or reshape the established order of heaven. Lucifer’s treachery was compounded by the fact that he was “an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God” (D&C 76:25). Though further detail regarding Lucifer’s position of authority has not been revealed, it is clear that his choice to rebel included deliberate plotting against God’s priesthood government. Thus Lucifer became a traitor, the “Primeval Turncoat,” as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland once described him. President Joseph F. Smith insightfully declared that Satan “hates the Priesthood, which is after the order of the Son of God.” President Marion G. Romney taught, “It now is and has always been the objective of Satan to destroy the Priesthood of God. As long ago as the war in heaven, he sought to usurp the power of the Priesthood.” Unwilling to pursue exaltation as a joint heir with Christ by humbly submitting to “the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father” (Alma 13:9), Lucifer arrogantly sought to destroy the order and set up his own priesthood.

Lucifer’s actions betrayed his feigned desire to redeem all mankind. Not only has the Lord revealed the duplicitous nature of Lucifer’s intentions, but Lucifer has as well. A familiar adage suggests our actions speak louder than our words. In this case, Lucifer’s words “I will redeem all mankind” represent
a mere whimper when contrasted with his actions. The scriptural record of Lucifer’s deeds demonstrates that he had no real interest in the redemption of mankind. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has noted that Lucifer merely “pretended” to seek our redemption when he offered his proposal. 59 Indeed, the gaping discrepancy between his words and actions—from claiming a desire to save all to leading so many to sorrow and misery—bears witness of Lucifer’s pretense. The Psalmist’s phrase provides an apt description of Lucifer’s hypocrisy: “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart” (Psalm 55:21).

At some point during our first estate, Lucifer’s intentions became very clear. John described him as a great dragon whose tail “drew the third part of the stars of heaven” and led them to war against Jehovah, Michael, and those many other spirits who valiantly defended the plan of God (Revelation 12:4, 7–9). His well-earned title of devil, meaning slanderer, offers insight into Lucifer’s methods of war. 60 Evidently, one of his strategies was to slander the name and character of Jehovah in order to shake the confidence of Heavenly Father’s children that God’s Firstborn could perfectly fulfill the exacting role of Savior. 61 Lucifer undoubtedly spread lies against Christ’s allies as well, seeking to defame their character and diminish their stature in the eyes of the Father’s other children. In this way, Lucifer became, even before his banishment from heaven, the “father of all lies” (Moses 4:4) and the “accuser of [his] brethren” (Revelation 12:10). The War in Heaven was therefore a war of truth and falsehood, trust and doubt. Those who overcame in this war did so by faith in “the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). Perhaps Lucifer, knowing the Father would weep for the loss of his rebellious children (see D&C 76:26–27; Moses 7:28–37), believed he could pressure God into surrendering to his demands for power. Yet our Father maintained his course in righteousness.

Through his actions in the War in Heaven, Lucifer proved himself “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Indeed, he was the original mass murderer, leading whomever he could to self-inflicted spiritual death. But Lucifer’s influence over the wicked failed to appease his ravenous envy of God’s power. As the prototypical son of perdition (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3; D&C 76:26), Lucifer also desired to crucify Jesus and “put him to an open shame” (D&C 76:35). This demonic goal was finally accomplished during the meridian of time, wherein Satan tempted a uniquely wicked generation to crucify our Lord (see 2 Nephi 10:3). Furthermore, Lucifer has from the
beginning sought the rejection, scorn, and slaying of all God's prophets, each of whom is a type of Christ and “an annoyer of [Satan’s] kingdom” (Joseph Smith—History 1:20). Through these deeds, Satan has inflicted suffering upon the noble and great ones, while grasping the wicked “with his everlasting chains” (2 Nephi 28:19) and leading the indifferent “carefully down to hell” (2 Nephi 28:21).

Some of the most damning evidence of Satan's intentions is recorded in the synoptic Gospels, wherein we read of his attempts to persuade Jesus to sin during and after his forty-day sojourn in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13). This was no benign testing of the promised Messiah. Rather, these attempts represented a personal vendetta against the Father and the Son with inestimable ramifications for each of us. Had Jesus succumbed at this point or any other, even in the slightest degree, his ability to atone would have been lost, and our faith in the Father's plan and in the name of his Only Begotten would have been rendered meaningless.62 With a voided Atonement, all who had sided with Christ and come to earth would have “become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil” (2 Nephi 9:8). In this awful state of submission, “our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself” for all eternity (2 Nephi 9:9). Satan's temptations of the Christ weren't just coincidental to such an outcome—they were calculative.

Satan's failure to destroy God's plan in one fell swoop, however, did little to assuage his desires or efforts to bring God's children into a state of misery. Quite the opposite—Satan apparently has intensified his efforts upon us as individuals “because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Revelation 12:12) before he is rendered utterly impotent. In our days of probation, therefore, we must never forget Peter's warning that our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). He and his angels observe and seek to exploit our every weakness, they seek to inspire and then celebrate every sin, and they mercilessly laugh at every form of malice, abuse, and addiction (see Moses 7:26; 3 Nephi 9:2).61

In summary, Lucifer's proposal to redeem all was a gross misrepresentation of his actual intentions. This “liar from the beginning” (D&C 93:25) merely feigned a desire to redeem all mankind. The Lord has clearly revealed Lucifer's motives and the cause of his rebellion. He wanted power, honor, and
ascension. He sought to supplant the Son and dethrone the Father. Elder B. H. Roberts remarked, “Truly the ambition of Lucifer was boundless, as his selfishness was fathomless.”64 While Jehovah and Lucifer both uttered the phrase “Here am I, send me,” their motives were entirely at odds. Scriptures testify his actions were anything but naïve: “The devil sinneth from the beginning” (1 John 3:8), for he “sought that which was evil before God” (2 Nephi 2:17). Furthermore, Satan and “the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation” (Jude 1:6), have subsequently demonstrated their depravity. Day after day, year after year, and dispensation after dispensation, they have tirelessly opposed God’s redemptive work while seeking to bring about the misery of all mankind.

Conclusion

Father in Heaven’s plan of salvation is perfect and eternal. There was no oversight in the premortal council—no changes to the plan were, or ever will be, required. When students understand this truth, they will also see that Lucifer could not have proposed a plan of salvation. Instead, he spoke a self-promoting lie. It was a lie in substance because redemption for all mankind was beyond his power to deliver. There can be no alteration to the laws which govern both our agency and our existence, and compulsory salvation is simply impossible. Despite Lucifer’s claim of “surely I will do it” (Moses 4:1), revealed truth makes it clear that surely he could not. Lucifer’s words also represented a lie of intent. With utter disregard for our salvation, he promoted a prevarication to get what he really wanted—honor and power.

When we help students understand the beautifully merciful and just nature of Heavenly Father’s plan, their faith in God can become more firm. Students will not have to wonder if God’s will, disposition, or mood will change. If they know that Heavenly Father has perfectly formulated their mortal existence to bring about his “great and eternal purposes” in their lives (Alma 42:26), they can more fully trust him and turn to him during any time of trial. Moreover, when we emphasize the eternally central role of Jesus Christ in the Father’s plan, they can more fully appreciate why “there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ” (Mosiah 3:17). Students will then better understand why Church leaders continually talk of Christ and rejoice in Christ, preach and prophesy of Christ, that all of us might “know to what source [we] may look for a remission of [our] sins”
(2 Nephi 25:26). Lucifer could not have improved the manner or means of saving the Father’s children—no one could have.

In contrast to Lucifer and his lies, Jesus Christ stands eternally at the right hand of our Father, representing all that a Son and a Savior should be. Untainted by vain ambition, he is our divine Redeemer not only because he accomplished the Atonement but because of the purity of his motives before, during, and after the process. In premortality, he humbly responded to the Father: “Thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2). Shortly after experiencing the agony of his infinite and eternal Atonement, Christ exclaimed: “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 which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11). And the Savior remains just as pure and dedicated to the Father in the present: “I came by the will of the Father, and I do his will” (D&C 19:24).

The Father and the Son have left nothing undone in the great plan of happiness. Nephi testified that the Lord “doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world” (2 Nephi 26:24). Jacob, chapter 5, manifests the Lord’s tireless labor for our salvation as evidenced by his repeated question, “What could I have done more for my vineyard?” (v. 41). “Salvation is free,” Lehi declared (2 Nephi 2:4), and “all things are given [men] which are expedient unto [them]” (2 Nephi 2:27). From the premortal Council in Heaven to this very moment and on through eternity, we are blessed by a flawlessly designed plan which manifests to us the love of our Heavenly Father and his Beloved Son, our Savior.

Notes

1. See also Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 210.
2. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, 407.
3. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, 406.
5. Elder Maxwell quotes President Clark in the first half of the above quotation. See Moving in His Majesty and Power (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 21.
6. We learn from Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24 that the inhabitants of numerous worlds “are begotten sons and daughters unto God” through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. This truth underscores the central role of Jesus Christ’s infinite Atonement in God’s plan for the salvation of our world as well as the many others created by his Only Begotten.

9. Elder Richard G. Scott firmly declared that Satan “is a consummate bluff, just extraordinarily able to make people think he has power he doesn’t have.” “Elder Richard G. Scott Answers Questions Asked by Young Single Adults,” *Church News*, October 24, 2009, 5.

10. Throughout this article the term “agency” is understood to be “power to choose good or evil; to seek after that which is good . . . or to pursue an evil course.” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 213.


12. Citing this revelation, President Marion G. Romney taught, “Abridge man’s agency, and the whole purpose of his mortality is thwarted. Without it, the Lord says, there is no existence.” In Conference Report, April 1966, 99; see also Neal A. Maxwell, *One More Strain of Praise* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 77–94.

13. Elder Bruce R. McConkie asserted that these “four great principles must be in force if there is to be agency.” *Mormon Doctrine* (Bookcraft: Salt Lake City, 1966), 26, “agency.”


15. Elder B. H. Roberts of the Quorum of the Seventy taught that evil “has always existed as the back ground [sic] of good.” *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons and Deseret News, 1895–1909), 3:223; for Roberts’s complete discussion of this topic, see pages 219–30.

16. Though the scriptures accurately quote Lucifer, they do not allege he was telling the truth. Indeed, the idea that Lucifer had a plan to redeem all by eliminating agency is not specifically supported by scripture. In fact, the only scripture references that allude to anything that might be termed “Satan’s plan” speak of his desires to bring about our destruction and misery, not our redemption (see 2 Nephi 9:28; Alma 12:5; 28:13; Helaman 6:30; D&C 10:12, 23).

17. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 214.

18. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 214. President James E. Faust of the First Presidency similarly taught: “Satan is our greatest enemy and works night and day to destroy us. But we need not become paralyzed with fear of Satan’s power. He can have no power over us unless we permit it. He is really a coward, and if we stand firm he will retreat.” “Be Not Afraid,” *Ensign*, October 2002, 4. Whether in heaven or on earth, Lucifer must have our compliance to destroy our agency; there can be no outright compulsion (see James 4:7; Revelation 12:7–8).

19. The scriptures reveal his methods of enticement, including deception (see Moses 4:4), justification of sin (see 2 Nephi 18:8), “anger against that which is good” (2 Nephi 28:20), and continual efforts to stir up contention and iniquity (see 3 Nephi 11:19; Helaman 16:22). However, such enticements by themselves do not cause a loss of agency. The danger lies in our decision to yield to these enticements.
20. This truth was affirmed by the Prophet Joseph Smith in a quotation we cited earlier: *History of the Church*, 6:314.

21. While these scriptures refer to examples of the wickedness of mortals, they are also instructive of Lucifer’s strategies. Such examples provide types of Satan’s character and the methods he employs to bring others under his dominion. See James E. Faust, “Serving the Lord and Resisting the Devil,” *Ensign*, September 1995, 2–7; “The Forces That Will Save Us,” *Ensign*, January 2007, 5–9.

22. The term “third part,” as used in this passage of scripture and also in John’s account of the War in Heaven (see Revelation 12:4), may not mean the literal fraction one-third. “The phrase ‘third part’ implies a numerically undetermined segment of the population who symbolize the fact that Satan’s power over the premortal spirits was limited. Thus, the numerology in the passage implies that we have no knowledge of the fraction or percentage of the Father’s children who followed the adversary. All we know is that Satan had a limited influence over those in the presence of God.” Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Essential Guide for Recognizing and Interpreting Symbols of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 118–19, see also 359–60n69.


24. The Lord revealed that the devil, his angels (or premortal followers), and those who become sons of perdition during their second estate are “the only ones who shall not be redeemed in the due time of the Lord, after the sufferings of his wrath” (D&C 76:38).


26. Consider how the following statement from the Prophet Joseph Smith pertains to those spirits in the Grand Council who turned away from the plan of God while turning toward Lucifer: “The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 214.


29. Notice the repetitive emphasis on the selfish nature of Lucifer’s proposals in Moses 4:1 and Isaiah 14:13–14.

30. We recognize that these verses in Isaiah can have double meaning—they describe both Lucifer and the king of Babylon.

31. President John Taylor asserted that “Satan rebelled against God. He could not rebel against a law if that law had not been given. He could not have violated a commandment if that commandment did not exist.” *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor, Third President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 100.

32. Revelation affirms Lucifer “sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ” (D&C 76:28).

33. President Boyd K. Packer explained that “individual doctrines of the gospel are not fully explained in one place in the scriptures, nor presented in order or sequence. They must be assembled from pieces here and there. They are sometimes found in large segments, but mostly they are in small bits scattered through the chapter and verses.” “The Great Plan of Happiness,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 112.


38. President Joseph Fielding Smith emphasized that the “Savior was a God before he was born into this world.” *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:32.

39. Similarly, Doctrine and Covenants section 88 refers to Lucifer as “him who seeketh the throne of him who sitteth upon the throne, even the Lamb” (D&C 88:115). That Lucifer jealously craved the position and power of Jehovah is further evidenced in the Book of Moses. There we read that after Moses had seen Jehovah, Satan appeared and “cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me” (Moses 1:19).

40. *Sermons and Writings of President Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 286.

41. Scripture affirms Jehovah was “in the bosom of the Father, even from the beginning” (D&C 76:13) and “was prepared from before the foundation of the world” (Moses 5:57) by the Father to fulfill his crucial ministry (see John 8:25–28).

42. *One More Strain of Praise* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 42–43.

43. In a 1916 doctrinal exposition, reprinted in the *Ensign* in 2002, the First Presidency explained that “in all [God’s] dealings with the human family Jesus the Son has represented and yet represents Elohim His Father in power and authority. This is true of Christ in His preexistent, antemortal, or unembodied state, in the which He was known as Jehovah; also during His embodiment in the flesh; and during His labors as a disembodied spirit in the realm of the dead; and since that period in His resurrected state.” “The Father and Son,” 13.


45. Doctrine and Covenants 93:38 acknowledges that sin existed in the premortal realm: “Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God” (emphasis added). The word again indicates that we moved from clean to filthy and back to clean prior to our mortal births. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that “the spirits of men were not equal [in premortality]. They may have had an equal start, and we know they were all innocent in the beginning; but the right of free agency which was given to them enabled some to outstrip others, and thus, through the eons of immortal existence, to become more intelligent, more faithful, for they were free to act for themselves, to think for themselves, to receive the truth or rebel against it.” Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:59.

46. “It is important to remember that Jesus was capable of sinning, that he could have succumbed, that the plan of life and salvation could have been foiled, but that he remained
true. Had there been no possibility of his yielding to the enticement of Satan, there would have been no real test, no genuine victory in the result. If he had been stripped of the faculty to sin, he would have been stripped of his very agency. It was he who had come to safeguard and ensure the agency of man. He had to retain the capacity and ability to sin had he willed so to do.”


47. President Brigham Young taught, “The Lord Almighty suffered this schism in heaven to see what his subjects would do.” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 51. This statement suggests that the Lord allowed the rebellion to occur so that each spirit, including Lucifer and his followers, might exercise agency.

48. Elder David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” *Ensign*, September 2007, 63. Though Elder Bednar’s insight is specific to Adam, the same reasoning may apply to why God asked, “Whom shall I send?”

49. Cain’s offering was a deliberate corruption of the ordinance of sacrifice revealed by God to Adam. Our understanding of Cain’s apostasy is illuminated by the fact that Adam and Eve made “all things known unto their sons and their daughters” (Moses 5:12), including the knowledge that the sacrifice of their firstlings was done in “similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7).


52. The Lord himself draws this parallel by warning Cain that he would be called Perdition—a name given also to Lucifer in conjunction with his rebellion and fall in the first estate (see Moses 5:24; D&C 76:25–26).


54. To believe that God expressed uncertainty or hesitancy about his plan through the question “Whom shall I send?” besmirches his characteristics of omniscience and omnipotence. See Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 19–20.


56. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 262; emphasis in original.

57. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, October 1960, 74.

58. Lucifer “desired to set up his own priesthood order. The order was designed to set himself up at its head and none would preside over him, not even God. . . . Those who are willing to give Lucifer honor as their father form his priesthood order and are known as the sons of perdition.” McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*, 218.


61. Gospel scholar Robert Matthews wrote: “Quite often I find when I talk to students about the Savior, some of them wonder if there was an alternate plan; they seem to be asking, ‘What if Jesus had failed?’ Now, not intending to cast aspersions on these students, I think that that question typifies one of the tools the devil used in the premortal life. I think he not only ‘guaranteed’ salvation without effort for everybody but also probably went around saying something like this: ‘Now look, if you allow yourselves to be born into this world subject to the fall of Adam, subject to sin and to death, and if Jesus doesn’t come through, then you
have lost your salvation.’ That is true; that is what would have been the case. If Jesus had not performed the infinite atonement, we all would have become sons of perdition, and he would have also.

“I can almost hear Lucifer in that premortal sphere saying, ‘Are you going to put all of your faith in Jesus?’ And those spirits who were not strong in their faith were thus prompted by the devil to wonder, to doubt, and to think to themselves, ‘Well, I don’t know if I want to trust Jesus or not. What if he fails?’ Such a thought is just about like going tracting without purse or scrip but having ten dollars in your shoe just in case. That is not faith. During our pre-mortal life, having faith in Jesus Christ meant that we knew he would not let us down. That is why the gospel is called the ‘good news.’ The good news is that there is a redemption for mankind and that Jesus successfully performed the Atonement in order to bring that redemption about.” A Bible! A Bible (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 287–88.


63. As President Harold B. Lee taught, “There are carefully charted on the maps of the opposition the weak spots in every one of us. They are known to the forces of evil, and just the moment we lower the defense of any one of those ports, that becomes the D Day of our invasion, and our souls are in danger.” The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 167.

Moses’ prophecy binds all the holy prophets and scriptural records—those of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants—together as one.
While leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses uttered what would become one of the most oft-quoted of all the messianic prophecies—a prophecy which in turn would spark the spirit of prophecy anew in his fellow prophets in succeeding dispensations. The Messiah, he declared, would be a great prophet like unto himself. The Messiah would be the covenant spokesman, uttering the words of his Father. All would be accountable for their obedience or disobedience to the words which he would speak. Many subsequent prophets who repeated this prophecy offered additional insight into, clarification about, and identification of the forthcoming Messiah, illustrating the fact that pondering on existing revelation begets further revelation.

The title of this paper comes from this messianic prophecy and begins with the words spoken to Moses by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is a prophecy that has a dual fulfillment; it embraces both Christ’s first and second comings. It binds together the testimony of all the ancient holy prophets from Moses, who first gathered Israel to the covenant of salvation, to the latter-day prophet Joseph Smith, who was destined to stand at the head of the final great gathering to Christ. It seals the Old Testament to the New
Testament and the testimony of the Old World to that of the New World. It shows that, where there is true testimony of Christ, the spirit of revelation will also be found. Through these many prophecies, we see the power of that Spirit as it rests upon each of the prophets in turn, inspiring them not only to embrace what those before had known but also to add revelations of their own. It dramatizes the necessity of obedience to the words of Christ as they were given to those of the past and also as they are spoken by modern prophets in our own day and time. It is the story of a true and living Church and the ordinances of salvation that can only be found in it.

Key terms such as “raise up,” “prophet,” and “like unto thee,” stipulations that the Messiah would be born into the house of Israel, and reminders that the people would be required to obey his commands are frequently repeated themes in the scriptures. We will examine the frequent repetition and implications of these phrases and also references to Moses’ brass serpent in the Book of Mormon, New Testament, Joseph Smith—History, and Doctrine and Covenants.

**Moses’ Prophecy**

In defining how the Levites’ inheritance was different from the rest of the other tribes of Israel, explaining how their sacrifices were to be distinguished from those of other nations and clarifying the role of true prophets, Moses made this majestic prophecy: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. . . . I [God] will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18–19; emphasis added).

Appropriately, the context of this prophecy is a message to the tribe of Levi, which symbolized the Messiah as the sacrificial offering of the house of Israel to God. (This is the tribe God designated to hold the lesser priesthood and charged with the authority to minister and keep pure the sacrifices in the temple; their primary role was to prepare the way for the Israelites to accept Christ.) After explaining that the Levites are to be “perfect with the Lord,” Moses identified how the people are to recognize this particular prophet. He declared that a prophet would be raised up by God, born in the house of Israel, and like unto Moses (a man foreordained by God). He would also be
a giver of God’s law, as Moses had been on Mount Sinai. Just as the Mosaic law required obedience, so would obedience be required of the laws that this future prophet would declare. The house of Israel would in part be able to recognize the true Prophet because he would command obedience to his word.

Moses used a physical symbol as a powerful reminder of this prophecy when he raised up the brass serpent to offer Christ’s healing power to those who had been bitten by the flying fiery serpents (see Numbers 21:6–9). Direct references to this event, as well as allusions to it, are found throughout the Book of Mormon and the Gospel of John.

**Book of Mormon Witnesses**

Among the numerous Book of Mormon prophets who testified of Christ were Lehi, Nephi, Abinadi, Alma the Younger, and Nephi (son of Helaman), who significantly added to our understanding of Moses’ prophecy. It is noteworthy that Lehi quoted from Joseph of Egypt, Nephi quoted from Zenos, Zenock, and Neum, and Alma quoted from Zenos and Zenock to add further light and revelation to Moses’ prophecy.

*Lehi.* Lehi briefly alluded to Moses’ prophecy, apparently because the Nephites were familiar enough with the prophecy to recognize even a brief phrase such as “a prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews.” He linked Moses’ prophecy about the prophet-Messiah who is “like unto thee” (Moses) to a prophecy made by Joseph of Egypt that utilized similar phraseology. This prophecy mentions that a “choice seer” would be raised up in the latter days who also would be “great like Moses” and “like unto me” (Joseph of Egypt).

Lehi’s vision of the Jews referred to and supplemented Moses’ prophecy:

[Lehi] spake unto them concerning the Jews. . . .

*A prophet would the Lord God raise up among the Jews—even a Messiah, or, in other words, a Savior of the world.*

And he also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things, concerning this Messiah, of whom he had spoken, or this Redeemer of the world.

Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer.

And he spake also concerning a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord—

*Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.* . . .
And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world. . . .

And after they had slain the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest, by the Holy Ghost, unto the Gentiles. (1 Nephi 10:2–11; emphasis added)

In this prophecy, Lehi repeated Moses’ pronouncements that the prophet would be (1) “raised up” (that is, be established), and (2) from “among the Jews.” But Lehi’s prophecy gave four additional pieces of information. First, Lehi testified that this great prophet would be the Messiah, anointed to be Savior and Redeemer, who would make recompense for the sins of the world. Second, instead of repeating Moses’ words that heeding this prophet was “required,” Lehi explained why obedience is necessary: the chosen one is a Savior and Redeemer who will deliver mankind from their lost and fallen state. Third, he linked this prophet to Isaiah’s prophecy of a forerunner who will baptize and testify of the Messiah: “the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3). Fourth, Lehi taught that the Messiah would be slain by the Jews, and be resurrected from the dead and that his words would be given to the Gentiles (or the nations) through the Holy Ghost.

Significantly, Lehi also quoted Joseph of Egypt, who just before his death prophesied of two choice seers whom the Lord would raise up. Neither of these would be the Savior and Redeemer; however, the “raising up” and “like unto you” themes common to that earlier prophecy are repeated in this prophecy, pointing to the connection between the three prophet-seers. One of these choice seers would deliver his people out of Egyptian bondage, and the other would restore knowledge of the covenants of salvation made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

A seer shall the Lord my God raise up, who shall be a choice seer unto the fruit of my loins. . . . A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins. . . .

And he shall bring them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers; and he shall do whatsoever work I shall command him.

And I will make him great in mine eyes, for he shall do my work; and he shall be great like unto him who I have said I would raise up unto you, to deliver my people, O house of Israel, out of the land of Egypt. . . .

And again, a seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins, and unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins; and not to the bringing forth of my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word, which shall have already gone forth among them in the last days. . . .
And that seer will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise I give unto you; for I will remember you from generation to generation; and his name shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father; and he shall be like unto you; for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation. (Joseph Smith Translation [JST], Genesis 50:24–33; emphasis added)

Lehi obtained these “great prophecies” made by Joseph of Egypt concerning the latter-day seer from the brass plates (see 2 Nephi 3:4–21), and he quoted them in teaching his son, Joseph. The Lord promised Joseph of Egypt that in the latter days this branch would learn of covenants with God by a choice seer whom the Lord would “raise up” from Joseph’s posterity, and who would be great “like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:5–7). Joseph of Egypt knew that this latter-day seer and the seer’s father would have the same name, “Joseph” (2 Nephi 3:15).

Joseph Smith’s patriarchal blessing, given to him by his father, Joseph Smith Sr., proclaimed the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joseph of Egypt and announced that Joseph Smith Jr. was the one who would restore covenants and lead the gathering of Israel in the last days. This blessing reaffirmed Joseph of Egypt’s knowledge of Joseph Smith and identified Joseph Smith as the choice seer, who would bless Joseph of Egypt’s posterity, as well as begin the restoration of the house of Israel.

Nephi. In his first book, Nephi, while preparing a separate set of records called the small plates of Nephi, alluded to the teachings of his father regarding Moses’ prophecy. On those plates, he quoted Zenos, Zenock, and Neum from the brass plates, adding their prophecies to the accumulating knowledge about the forthcoming Messiah. This triad of prophets, by centering on the visitation of the Lord God to all the house of Israel after his resurrection (see 1 Nephi 19:10–11), amplified the words spoken by Moses. Nephi also noted the time line for the fulfillment of their prophecy: “He cometh ... in six hundred years from the time my father left Jerusalem” (1 Nephi 19:8). Nephi added to his father’s words by focusing solely on the atoning sacrifice and quoting more precise language to express what would take place. Nephi declared that the “very God of Israel” would, in the words of Zenock, be lifted up, and, in Neum’s more definitive account of his death, would be crucified, and in Zeno’s description, “buried in a sepulchre” (1 Nephi 19:7, 10). Nephi emphasized these multiple sources by summarizing their words and then adding and explaining two prophecies from Isaiah regarding the love of the “Lord their Redeemer” for all the house of Israel. He recounted these prophecies so
that his people, “a remnant of the house of Israel,” could have hope for their own redemption (1 Nephi 19:24).

Nephi concluded his first book by quoting, explaining, and identifying the Messiah in Moses’ prophecy, by focusing this time on his Second Coming:

Wherefore, the righteous need not fear . . . if it so be that they [the wicked] will harden their hearts against the Holy One of Israel.

For behold, the righteous shall not perish; for the time surely must come that all they who fight against Zion shall be cut off.

And the Lord will surely prepare a way for his people, unto the fulfilling of the words of Moses, which he spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that all those who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people.

And now I, Nephi, declare unto you, that this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel; wherefore, he shall execute judgment in righteousness. (1 Nephi 22:17–21; emphasis added)

Nephi’s recitation of Moses’ prophecy included this additional valuable information: first, a promise of protection to the righteous (defined as all those who are obedient to the Holy One of Israel); second, a warning that failure to heed the “requirement” would bring forth the pronouncement of a curse, “cut[ting] off” all who were disobedient to the words of this prophet; and third, an identification of the spokesman as not just a prophet, but as the Holy One of Israel. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declares that this passage of Nephi echoes and clarifies Moses’ prophecy and presages messianic writings of Malachi and John the Beloved, “underscoring the fact that common gospel themes have been taught by all the prophets in all ages, even to the point of commonly revealed language and imagery in some of their messianic teachings.”

Nephi also mentioned the story of fiery flying serpents as he told how Moses led the house of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Initially, Nephi used the visual illustration of Moses’ brass serpent as a tool to teach about the “simpleness of the way” and the “easiness” of looking to the Lord for healing (1 Nephi 17:41). In his second book, Nephi again referred to the brass serpent placed on the rod and noted that this serpent was a powerful representation of Christ. He began and ended his testimony with a sacred Semitic oath: “And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations after they had been bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them. . . . Yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other
name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved” (2 Nephi 25:20; emphasis added).

Abinadi. Centuries later, while teaching the wicked priests of King Noah, Abinadi used Moses’ prophecy to compare the preparatory law given through Moses to the new law that would come from God, explaining that salvation could not come through the law of Moses alone: “For behold, did not Moses prophesy unto them concerning the coming of the Messiah, and that God should redeem his people? Yea, and even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began—have they not spoken more or less concerning these things? Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth? Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted?” (Mosiah 13:33–35).

First, Abinadi focused on the difference in the power of the sacrifices that were part of the law of Moses and “the atonement, which God himself shall make for the sins and iniquities of his people” (Mosiah 13:28). He taught that God would become mortal in order to bless the dead with resurrection. He then quoted what is often called the “Song of the Suffering Servant,” Isaiah’s magnificent prophecy of Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 53). Abinadi both introduced and concluded his quotation of Isaiah with his testimony “that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 13:34; 15:1).

Alma the Younger. Alma, in teaching the Zoramites, referred to the messianic teachings of Zenos, Zenock, and Moses. Alma emphasized the mercy of Jesus Christ by alluding to the brass serpent with these words: “Behold a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live” (Alma 33:19; emphasis added). Alma then connected his previous teachings on humble faith in Jesus Christ as key to receiving mercy: “But few understood the meaning of those things, and this because of the hardness of their hearts. But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them. O my brethren, if ye could be healed by merely casting about your eyes that ye might be healed, would ye not behold quickly, or would ye rather harden your hearts in unbelief. . . . If so, wo shall come upon you; but if not so, then cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God” (Alma 33:19–20).
Alma, just prior to his being translated, again alluded to the “look and live” message of the brass serpent when he passed along sacred relics—the records, interpreters, and Liahona—and gave instructions to his son Helaman. He declared that “it is as easy [in his day] to give heed to the word of Christ” as it was in the days of Lehi to give heed to the Liahona (Alma 37:44). Alma identified the director as a type given by God to lead Lehi’s family safely to the promised land “that if they would look they might live” (Alma 37:45–46). He concluded with the admonition “See that ye look to God and live” (Alma 37:47).

Nephi, son of Helaman. In an effort to prove to the disbelieving Nephites that he was a prophet and his words were equivalent to those of the ancient prophets, Nephi referred to Moses’ prophecy and cited the example of lifting up the brass serpent. “Yea, did he [Moses] not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come. And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal” (Helaman 8:14–15; emphasis added). By denying Nephi’s prophecies, the Nephites were denying not only him but all the preceding prophets, Abraham, Zenos, Zenock, Ezias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, as well as Lehi and Nephi, who had also testified of the Messiah.

New Testament Witnesses

Matthew, Luke, and John each took different approaches in demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. Matthew expended considerable effort linking Moses and Jesus through their shared experiences: membership in the house of Israel, sojourn in Egypt, baptism, theophany, temptations from Satan, and law-giving roles. Luke linked Jesus to John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way for Jesus’ earthly advent. John the Apostle quoted from John the Baptist clarifying his role as a preparer of the way. He quoted from Jesus’ exchange with Nicodemus regarding the brazen serpent; he also used various “I am” and “raising up” or “lifting up” passages to show that Jesus is the promised messianic prophet. In the book of Acts, Peter and Stephen also testified that Jesus fulfilled Moses’ prophecy.

Matthew. One of the primary focuses of Matthew’s testimony was proving to the Jews that Jesus was a prophet like Moses. For example, Matthew 1 cites the genealogy of Jesus Christ, linking him to the house of Israel through
the lineage of David. Matthew 2 records that both Moses and Jesus came out of Egypt. Matthew 3 proclaims the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan at Bethabara by John the Baptist, analogous to the symbolic baptism of the house of Israel as Moses led them out of Egypt through the Red Sea. Matthew 4 begins by detailing Jesus’ forty-day communion in the wilderness with his Father, culminating with the temptations by Satan, similar to Moses’ temptation by Satan (Moses 1), and forty days on Mount Sinai. Matthew 5 follows with the giving of the new law, the Sermon on the Mount, which shows that Jesus is a lawgiver like Moses. Additionally, Matthew quoted Isaiah, calling Jesus “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). This points to Nephi’s and Abinadi’s fuller expositions of Moses’ prophecy that this prophet is the “Holy One of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:21), or “God himself [who] shall come down among the children of men” (Mosiah 13:34; 15:1).

Toward the end of his record, Matthew again connected Jesus to Moses by alluding to Moses’ ancient messianic prophecy. Joseph Smith, as part of his inspired translation (Joseph Smith—Matthew), reordered the verses of Matthew 24, clarifying which parts of the prophecy refer to the immediate future of Jerusalem and which ones refer to latter-day signs of the Second Coming and the destruction of the wicked. At the conclusion of the latter-day signs, the Prophet Joseph added a passage to Matthew’s parable of the wise and evil servants. The wise man is watching and working as he awaits the return of his Lord, while the evil man is neither watching nor working. The distinguishing characteristic of the evil man is hypocrisy—he is one who knows about Jesus Christ but chooses apostasy and disobedience to the commandments. Accordingly, he is judged by his actions: “And thus cometh the end of the wicked, according to the prophecy of Moses, saying: They shall be cut off from among the people; but the end of the earth is not yet, but by and by” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:55).

Luke. This Gospel account used parallel birth stories to link John the Baptist and Jesus Christ; this refers both to the connection mentioned by Gabriel (“He [John the Baptist] shall go before him [Jesus Christ] in the spirit and power of Elias . . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” [Luke 1:17]) and to Isaiah’s prophecy about Jesus Christ’s forerunner. When Zacharias named and blessed his son, an occasion known as the Benedictus, he announced the coming of the Redeemer, the one prophesied by all the prophets, and declared that John’s mission is to “go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways” (Luke 1:76).
John. Evidently, John the Beloved borrowed from an earlier record by John the Baptist to tell the following unique incident, which clarifies John the Baptist’s mission:

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him; Who art thou?

And he confessed, and denied not that he was Elias; but confessed, saying; I am not the Christ.

And they asked him, saying; How then art thou Elias? And he said, I am not that Elias who was to restore all things. And they asked him, saying, Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as saith the prophet Esaias.

And they who were sent were of the Pharisees.

And they asked him, and said unto him; Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias who was to restore all things, neither that prophet?

John answered them, saying; I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

He it is of whom I bear record. He is that prophet, even Elias, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose, or whose place I am not able to fill; for he shall baptize, not only with water, but with fire, and with the Holy Ghost. (JST, John 1:20–28; italics show JST additions and clarifications)

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to the Jordan River to ask John the Baptist a series of questions. The priesthood from the temple was obviously threatened by his appearance (see 1 Maccabees 4:42; 14:41), and they decided to ask him who he thought he was. They feared that he was a prophet and that his coming would put an end to their power, wealth, and authority. Hence the question, “Who art thou?” (John 1:19). This was not an inquiry about his name, but rather about his status and claim to authority among the Jews. John answered that he was not the Messiah spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15–19.

In his interchange with the Jerusalem questioners, John the Baptist emphatically rebutted “any of the traditional eschatological roles for himself.” He denied being the Messiah, the Elias who was to restore all things, and the latter-day prophet (see JST, John 1:21–22). Having exhausted the known possibilities, the questioners asked again: “Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?” (JST, John 1:23). In his answer to this question, John identified himself as the fulfillment...
of Isaiah’s prophecy about a man who would prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ; he also explained his limited role to baptize with water (but not with the fire of the Holy Ghost) and to bear witness of the greatest prophet (see JST, John 1:24, 28). John’s answers teach who he is not, as well as who he is.

John the Beloved’s Gospel also records what some believe is a direct quotation of Jesus’s teaching to a Pharisee about being born again. In this instance, Jesus explained that the brazen serpent was a representation of himself and that his being raised up on the cross was similar to how Nicodemus could be raised up: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:13–15; emphasis added).15

Peter’s testimony. Subsequent to Jesus’s crucifixion, resurrection, forty-day ministry, and ascension into heaven and the day of Pentecost, Peter became a renewed and more committed disciple. Following the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, he testified that “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up” (Acts 2:22–24; emphasis added), alluding to Moses’ prophecy that this is the foreordained prophet that God resurrected. This brief testimony was followed by a second testimony in which he closely paraphrased Moses’ prophecy and added the phrases “times of refreshing” and “restitution of all things.” With these phrases, he referred to the last dispensation and Second Coming of Jesus Christ and clarified the dual fulfillment of the prophecy. Instead of using Moses’ phrase regarding obedience (“God will require it of him”), Peter stated that those who will not hear the words of Jesus Christ will be destroyed at his Second Coming:

Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? . . .

Those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.
And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. (Acts 3:12, 18–23; emphasis added)

Stephen's testimony. Just before his martyrdom, Stephen defended himself by recounting key names in the lineage of the house of Israel, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph of Egypt, and Moses (see Acts 7:8–9, 20). Stephen particularly emphasized the Lord's hand in preparing Moses, and he concluded his testimony by linking Moses' prophecy to Jesus Christ: “This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear” (Acts 7:37; emphasis added). By concluding his testimony this way, he accused them of persecuting and slaying the prophets who testified of the “Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:52).

Jesus Christ’s Declarations in the Book of Mormon

Following his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the righteous remnant of the Nephites, showed the tokens of his sacrifice, gave the new law, and introduced the sacrament. He then made certain they recognized that he was the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy: “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: ‘A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be cut off from among the people’” (3 Nephi 20:23; emphasis added).

Next, Jesus identified the sign that will indicate when the promised covenant of future gathering and restoration will begin to be fulfilled. He linked this sign to his servant, explaining that the coming forth of the Nephite record from the Gentiles to the latter-day Lamanites will signal that the gathering has begun (see 3 Nephi 21:1–7). The restoration or “great and marvelous work” is linked to “a man [who] shall declare it unto them” and “my servant . . . [who] shall be marred” (3 Nephi 21:9–10).16 This, then, is the latter-day servant who will bring forth the Nephite record and restore many other great and marvelous things, preparing the way for the Second Coming. Jesus warned that “whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ, which the Father shall cause him [the latter-day servant] to bring forth unto the Gentiles, and shall give unto him [the latter-day servant] power that he shall bring them forth unto the Gentiles, (it shall be done even as Moses said) they shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant” (3 Nephi 21:11). Although he did not name him in this instance,
the Lord was prophesying of Joseph Smith, who would bring forth the testimony of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, that all must obey or be cut off. Jesus promised that the servant—although marred—would be healed, perhaps symbolizing that although Joseph Smith would be slain as if he were a false or fallen prophet, his reputation as a true prophet would eventually increase as truth began to fill the earth (see 3 Nephi 21:10). Moroni alluded to this point when he told Joseph that his name “should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). Joseph Smith called it the “deep water . . . I am wont to swim in” (D&C 127:2). Regardless of his marring, “the work which he would set in motion, the marvelous work and a wonder—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—would roll forward to eventually fill the whole earth.” Just as Joseph of Egypt prophesied, the “choice seer” of the latter days “shall be great like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:6, 9).

This message—that if you do not accept the testimony of Jesus Christ as it comes through Joseph Smith you will be “cut off” from the blessings promised to the covenant family—is the most important warning found in the Book of Mormon. Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared, “Those who will not hear the voice of the Lord, as proclaimed by his servants the prophets, shall be cut off from among the people when he comes again. . . . There ought not [to] be any confusion or misunderstanding on these points.” This is the promise to the faithful house of Israel that all enemies will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 21:11–21; Isaiah 34). As the book Valiant in the Testimony of Christ expressed it, “Joseph Smith is the great revelator of Christ for this dispensation. To reject his testimony, his authority, and the doctrine that comes through him, is to reject the living Christ.”

Jesus followed up his teachings by quoting from Isaiah about the vast numbers of people who will be gathered into the house of Israel in the latter days (see 3 Nephi 22) and from Malachi the promise of servants who will prepare for his Second Coming: (1) “Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant” (3 Nephi 24:1; Malachi 3:1); and (2) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord . . . lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (3 Nephi 25:5–6; Malachi 4:5–6). The prophecies in Malachi refer to several messengers who prepare the way and also to the
messenger of the covenant. By quoting these passages right after he had spoken about his marred servant, Jesus again identified one who prepares the way for his millennial coming as the servant spoken of in 3 Nephi 21:11 and the prophet Elijah as the servant mentioned in 3 Nephi 25:5. Thus the “marred servant” is the “choice seer” prophesied of by Joseph of Egypt, namely Joseph Smith. He, John the Baptist, and the prophet Elijah make the way straight by revealing lost doctrines and ordinances before the Second Coming of the covenant giver, Jesus Christ.

Jesus concluded his testimony to the Nephites by again bearing testimony that he is the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. Rather than using Moses’ phrase “raised up,” he identified himself as the one who was “lifted up.” He repeated this phrase five times for emphasis:

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.

And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:13–15; emphasis added)

The Latter Days

In this dispensation, Moroni appeared to seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith and quoted Old Testament prophecies—notably, prophecies by Moses, Isaiah, and Malachi. The story of Christ is woven perfectly through this first angelic ministration, the translation of the Book of Mormon, the translation of the Bible, and the receipt of the Doctrine and Covenants revelations. In his first visit to Joseph Smith, Moroni quoted from the same chapters of Malachi that Christ had given the Nephites and then recited from Isaiah 11, which identifies Jesus Christ to a latter-day ensign who will gather the Gentiles and the house of Israel. Moroni culminated his testimony with Moses’ prophecy of Christ as quoted by Peter and recited it precisely as it is found in Acts 3 (Joseph Smith—History 1:36–40). As Moroni explained to Joseph Smith, “That prophet was Christ; but the day had not yet come when ‘they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people,’ but soon would come” (Joseph Smith—History 1:40). His decision to quote these
particular scriptures implied that he was showing Joseph Smith his role as one of the messengers to prepare the way. Moroni suggested Joseph would do this by raising the standard (or ensign) to gather all to Christ before the great and dreadful day of his Second Coming.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord’s preface (section 1) and appendix (section 133) pick up the theme of “cutting off.” The prophecy of Moses acts as bookends in the Doctrine and Covenants, holding the entire story of the restoration of the gospel together. In the preface, the Lord warns all the inhabitants of the earth: “Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh. . . . And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people; for they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant” (D&C 1:12–15; emphasis added).

In addition to warning of the curse, the Lord explained the need for the Restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Because of apostasy, ordinances have been changed and the everlasting gospel covenant has been broken. The result has been the temporary triumph of selfishness, pride, and worldliness—Babylon (see D&C 1:16). Moroni told Joseph Smith that the time for the curse “soon would come” (Joseph Smith—History 1:40) and the Lord himself warned that the day is “nigh at hand” (D&C 1:35). Joseph Smith was the prophesied servant who would come before the Second Coming to declare God’s commandments and to reestablish God’s everlasting covenants that all might have the opportunity to be partakers of glory (see D&C 1:17, 22; 133:57, 60).

The appendix to the Doctrine and Covenants (the great revelation in section 133 about the last days) draws together the prophecies of Moses and Malachi and warns of the need to heed the commandments of the Lord: “And upon them that hearken not to the voice of the Lord shall be fulfilled that which was written by the prophet Moses, that they should be cut off from among the people. And also that which was written by the prophet Malachi: for, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch” (D&C 133:63–64; emphasis added).
These passages reiterate the warning that those who do not accept the testimony of Christ as it comes through Joseph Smith will face spiritual and temporal destruction. Thus the immediate consequence of rebellion is loss of the Spirit, a kind of hell on earth, while the long-term consequence is being cut off from the family of Jesus Christ, having no binding ties to forebears or progeny.

Conclusion
Moses’ prophetic testimony about Jesus Christ was spoken to the tribe of Levi during the initial gathering of the house of Israel. All the rituals and ordinances the Levites performed were to prepare the house of Israel to accept the Lamb of God, make them ritually clean and prepare them to stand in his presence. This makes it profoundly important that John the Baptist be born into this tribe, that he be the rightful heir to the responsibilities of Aaron, and that he and his priesthood prepare the way for Christ not just once, but twice in restoring the keys of the ministering of angels and the gospel of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins (see D&C 84:26–27).

In the wilderness, Moses raised up the brass serpent, a symbolic archetype that could heal those with the faith to look at it, foreshadowing the power of Christ’s Atonement. Book of Mormon witnesses repeatedly reference this symbol in teaching lessons about obedience, faith in Jesus Christ, mercy, and the easiness of the path to return to God.

In the New Testament, Matthew, Luke, John, Peter, and Stephen bore powerful testimony that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah of whom Moses had prophesied. Book of Mormon witnesses offered additional insight, clarification, and identification as they quoted from the brass plates and the writings of other prophets and alluded to the messianic prophecy. Jesus Christ quoted the messianic prophecy given by Moses to identify himself to the Nephites. Christ clarified that even though they heard his words personally, their descendants (and the nations of the world) would hear them through his latter-day prophet, Joseph Smith; he clarified that the words of latter-day prophets have the same power as his words do—to save or condemn.

Our examination of Moses’ messianic prophecy has encircled all the scriptures and they sustain it as the most important prophecy given. This oft-repeated prophecy binds all the holy prophets and scriptural records—those of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—together as one. In
this way, the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants become perfect companions to and provide commentary on the Old and New Testaments. The repetition of all or part of Moses’ messianic revelation throughout the scriptures illustrates the nature of prophets of God—they all drink from the same fountain of pure water and tell the same story. They all teach the same doctrine about the coming of Christ from the same original prophecy, providing internal evidence that the Bible and Book of Mormon come from the same source, God, and teach the same doctrine. Their testimonies are the quintessential evidence that no scriptural text is to be seen as complete or final. The Holy Ghost is always willing to give further revelation to aid in the understanding of previous revelation.

When examined together, the prophecy, the symbolic archetype, and attendant additions and clarifications help us better understand the roles of Jesus Christ and those who herald his coming. We also see the importance of obedience to prophetic words. For example, Moses told us that the Lord requires our obedience, but only Lehi explained why; he said that “all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state” and would remain in this state unless they turn to the Savior. Peter warned that those who are disobedient “shall be destroyed.” Christ, Moroni, and Joseph Smith echoed this warning but use a different phrase, “cut off.” Joseph Smith quoted Christ and added to the phrase when he said, “cut off . . . without branch or roots,” emphasizing the full magnitude of what spiritual destruction means. The “lifting up” of the brass serpent teaches that the only way to be healed from the effects of the Fall of Adam is to look to Christ. Unifying these scriptures clarifies the meaning of this prophecy and underscores the importance of obedience.

The perfection of this story reaches far beyond what Joseph Smith could have been expected to know. It demonstrates that his testimony is one with the ancient prophets—that he is like them. He restored and enlarged upon their testimonies. One cannot separate the messenger and the message from he who sent them; to accept Jesus Christ also means to accept the testimony of Joseph Smith, who was a “choice seer,” “raised up,” and “like unto Moses” (2 Nephi 3:6–7, 9).

Notes

1. *Messiah* (Aramaic) and *Christ* (Greek) both mean “the anointed” and are used interchangeably. See Bible Dictionary, “Messiah,” 731.

2. Moses’ writings from Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of Genesis also refer to this prophecy. Speaking to Moses, Jehovah declared: “Thou shalt write the things which I shall
speak. And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shalt write, behold, I will raise up another like unto thee; and they shall be had again among the children of men—among as many as shall believe” (Moses 1:40–41, emphasis added).

3. Lehi added to Joseph of Egypt’s testimony by prophesying that the record kept by Lehi’s family would go to his posterity long after his death through this latter-day seer: “And I, behold, I will give unto him [Mormon] that he shall write the writing of the fruit of thy loins [the Nephites], unto the fruit of thy loins [the Lamanites]; and the spokesman of thy loins [Joseph Smith] shall declare it” (2 Nephi 3:18). The bracketed words are from Robert L. Millet, Joseph Fielding McConkie, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 121.

4. “A marvelous work and a wonder” has the Lord wrought by thy hand, even that which shall prepare the way for the remnants of his people to come in among the Gentiles, with their fullness, as the tribes of Israel are restored. . . . Behold, he [Joseph of Egypt] looked after his posterity in the last days, when they should be scattered and driven by the Gentiles, and wept before the Lord; he sought diligently to know from whence the Son should come who should bring forth the word of the Lord, by which they might be enlightened, and brought back to the true fold, and his eyes beheld thee, my son. . . . He [Joseph of Egypt] said . . . my seed are to inherit the choice land whereon the Zion of God shall stand in the last days, from among my seed, scattered with the Gentiles, shall a choice Seer arise. “The Seed of Joseph,” Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine, October 1932, 175; emphasis added.

5. According to Jewish legend, Joseph had additional dreams not recorded in Genesis 37 that he shared with his brothers. “Behold, you have gathered fruit, and so did I. Your fruit rotted, but mine remained sound. Your seed will set up dumb images of idols, but they will vanish at the appearance of my descendant, the Messiah of Joseph” Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967–69), 27.


7. Interestingly, in our modern scriptures the chapter divisions match the first five chapters in Matthew to Moses’ five books of the Torah.


9. This is the canticle or song of Zacharias.

10. Doctrine and Covenants 93:18 reports that John the Baptist’s record will be restored to us.


13. His questioners were initially identified as priests and Levites—those from the temple. However, at this point in the account the questioners are identified as Pharisees, contradicting the previous statement. Perhaps two accounts have been merged, suggesting
that leaders from various groups were aware of the prophecies and were coming out to ask John questions.


15. John has other passages in which he connected Jesus Christ to “that prophet” (see John 4:25–26; 6:14; 7:40) and identified him as “I am” [he], the great I AM, from Jehovah’s introduction to Moses in Exodus 3:14 (see John 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 23–24, 28).

16. The original “marred” servant in Isaiah’s prophecies refers to Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 52:14). This passage was quoted by Jesus to the Nephites in promising the redemption of the Jews and the land of Jerusalem (see 3 Nephi 20:44).

17. Christ quoted Isaiah’s initial prophecy, “As many were astonished at thee—his visage was so marred” (Isaiah 52:14) as he fully identified himself to the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 20:44). He is the first fulfillment of this prophecy, and he linked himself to the latter-day servant who will also be marred.


The most powerful teaching moments can occur as teachers directly reach out to students as individuals.
The Very Best Teaching: Reaching Out to Individuals

JOHN HILTON III

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The most powerful teaching moments may not always occur in the classroom but rather in other contexts, as teachers directly reach out to students as individuals. Consider this experience of President Thomas S. Monson:

When I served as a bishop, I noted one Sunday morning that one of our priests was missing from the priesthood meeting. I left the quorum in the care of the adviser and visited Richard’s home. His mother said he was working at the West Temple Garage. I drove to the garage in search of Richard and looked everywhere but I could not find him. Suddenly I had the inspiration to gaze down into the old-fashioned grease pit situated at the side of the station. From the darkness I could see two shining eyes. Then I heard Richard say: “You found me, Bishop! I’ll come up.” He never missed another priesthood meeting. The family moved to a nearby stake. Time passed, and I received a phone call informing me that Richard had been called to serve a mission in Mexico, and I was invited by the family to speak at his farewell testimonial. At the meeting, when Richard responded, he mentioned that the turning point in his determination to fill a mission came one Sunday morning—not in the chapel, but as he gazed up from the depths of a dark grease pit and found his quorum president’s outstretched hand.1
President Monson showed his concern by reaching out to one in need. Often the individuals who need to be reached out to are those who contribute the least in class. President Howard W. Hunter cautioned, “Do not fall into the trap that some of us fall into by calling on the ones who are always so bright and eager and ready with the right answer. Look and probe for those who are hanging back, who are shy and retiring and perhaps troubled in spirit. If calling on such a person in class is not the best thing to do—and in some cases it may well not be—then find a reason to speak to him or her before class or after, in the hallway or, better yet, in your office. Remember that the very best teaching is one on one and often takes place out of the classroom.”

It is acknowledged that a lot of powerful teaching does take place in the classroom. This paper discusses some of the ways teachers can facilitate the one-on-one teaching that takes place out of the classroom. This teaching can occur as we

1. know students by name;
2. contact the one;
3. find ways to serve students;
4. follow the Spirit; and
5. teach by the way.

**Know Students by Name**

One key that facilitates one-on-one teaching is to know students’ names. A pattern exists in the scriptures that heavenly ministrants know the names of those whom they are called to teach. Consider the following examples:

- “The angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias” (Luke 1:13).
- “The angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary” (Luke 1:30).
- “An angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:14).
- “One of them spake unto me, calling me by name” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

The Lord himself has said, “I know thee by name” (Exodus 33:12) and “I, the Lord, . . . call thee by thy name” (Isaiah 45:13). As William D. Oswald of the Sunday School general presidency taught, “Teachers who love their students and call them by name are following a heavenly pattern.”
In some contexts, learning the names of students is quite simple. If a teacher has seven seminary students and sees them daily, learning their names should not be hard. But suppose there are an additional seven students who should be coming to class but are not active. Are their names known? If their names are not known, the likelihood that they will be ministered to is substantially decreased. Perhaps this is why amongst the Nephites “their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God” (Moroni 6:4).

Even those with large classes can strive to remember as many names as possible. One student said, commenting about how caring a particular teacher was, “I really liked how personable he was. . . . He really did learn everyone’s name in a class of about 130.”

Another student shared the following experience. “After my mission I returned to school full of excitement to take the classes to prepare one to be a seminary teacher. But my experience in the first class was not what I had expected. The teacher said that we should only be in the class if we were juniors and that most of us would not succeed as seminary teachers anyways. I was a sophomore and left the class feeling discouraged. I dropped the class but needed another religion class. I didn’t know which class to sign up for, and I was worried about it. I remembered that I had enjoyed my freshman Book of Mormon class and decided to take another class from that same teacher. As I walked into his classroom, feeling somewhat nervous after my experience the day before, I felt so happy as the teacher greeted me by name. I could not believe that after two years he still remembered my name. Although I still remember some things I learned in class, the thing that stands out to me the most is that he remembered my name.” Learning the names of students can open the door to the one-on-one teaching that occurs outside the classroom.

Contact the One

Related to knowing the names of each student is the willingness to reach out to individual students who may be struggling. President Hunter stated:

I . . . encourage you to think about the students you teach and try to reach them on an individual level. Even though I work with large units like stakes, regions, and areas of the Church, I have to constantly remind myself that those units consist of individual people with individual problems and individual hopes and dreams. You have large classes. You have preparations to make and examinations to correct. The numbers can be staggering, but you must remember that you are teaching and trying to reach individual students. . . . It will be hard for you to give all of the personal
attention some of your students both want and need, but try the best you can to think of them individually, to let them feel something personal and special in the concern of you, their teacher. Pray to know which student needs what kind of help, and remain sensitive to those promptings when they then come.4

The Lord has set a clear pattern of ministering to individuals. Consider the following examples:

- “Ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel” (Isaiah 27:12; emphasis added).
- “The multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet . . ., going forth one by one” (3 Nephi 11:15; emphasis added).
- “He took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them” (3 Nephi 17:21; emphasis added).
- “Jesus . . . touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, even until he had touched them all” (3 Nephi 18:36; emphasis added).
- “Jesus . . . spake unto his disciples, one by one” (3 Nephi 28:1; emphasis added).

At times it can be simple to be content with those who are present in class, forgetting those who are not. Elder Clayton M. Christensen shared an experience of a mission president in France who made an effort to reach out to those individuals who had not attended church:

At the end of Sunday meetings, the branch councils and missionaries together named the members and investigators who could have been there but didn’t come. They each took an assignment to contact one of those individuals that same day with this message: “We sure missed you today. Are you OK? It’s not the same for the rest of us when you can’t come. Can I help? Can you come next Sunday?” Within two years, sacrament meeting attendance in the district increased from 540 to 725—in a region where convert baptisms are infrequent. 5

Elder Christensen went on to point out that many less-active members got that way because they didn’t return to the fold one Sunday and nobody seemed to notice.6 Reaching out to individual students who have missed class can be as simple as e-mailing or calling them. Many teachers have also found power in following the example of President Monson described previously by physically going out to visit students who are missing. One institute teacher shared the following experience:
At a training meeting we were invited to make occasional home visits to students who were not attending classes. I was quick to justify why this was not feasible with my schedule but eventually decided to give it a try. I had not visited the home of a student for several years, and so I approached the visits with trepidation. Over the course of a semester I probably visited five or six students. I never found a student at home—but I always left a note. Three of those students—each of whom I had called several times previous to visiting them—starting coming back to institute when they saw I had been to their homes. One of those students is on a mission right now.

Contacting students individually can open the door to one-on-one teaching opportunities outside of the classroom.

**Find Ways to Serve Students**

In a sense, reaching out to individuals is a form of service. Serving individuals facilitates the very best teaching not only because it can potentially prepare the heart of the person being served but also because it changes the heart of the person doing the serving. One need look no further than the ministry of Ammon to see the power that can come in teaching as a result of service (see Alma 17–18).

As the teacher’s heart becomes filled with love for individual students it becomes easier to teach them. President Henry B. Eyring shared the following insights about the connection between serving and loving students:

I bear you my testimony that you can prepare the hearts of your students: serve them; find little things to do for them. You have heard stories of a seminary teacher who shows up at the track meet, or wherever a student is performing. I will tell you this: It does not matter whether the students see you in the stands. Do not worry about that. Just go. Pay the price of service for them, and God will honor it. I will make you that promise. Do not worry if your students are not lovable. They will not be lovable many times. And you will say, “There was something in an in-service lesson once about how I am supposed to love them.” Do not worry about that. Serve them. Just serve them. Do something for them, and they will seem a little more lovable to you; it will be a gift. It will be a gift from God.

Never, never underestimate the spiritual value of doing temporal things well for those whom you serve. . . . Pray to God and tell him that you love him and ask him what you could do for him. I will tell you something. Be silent for a moment after you ask that in prayer and see what comes into your heart. The name or the face of one of your students may come to you, and you will know something you can do for them. To love God and your fellowman are not two different things; they are related. As you love one, you will love the other.

By serving individual students, even in small ways, teachers increase the likelihood that they will have opportunities to influence these students for
good. Chad H. Webb, administrator of Seminaries and Institutes, shared an experience about a teacher who found a very simple way to serve a struggling student named Patrick. The teacher noticed that although Patrick slept in class, he was always excited about soccer. Although the teacher was not particularly interested in soccer, he expressed interest in watching Patrick demonstrate his soccer skills. Later Patrick loaned the teacher some soccer movies. Simply showing interest helped a friendship develop and improved Patrick’s experience with seminary.8

Undoubtedly the seminary teacher in this story was busy and would have preferred to do something besides watch some soccer videos. But the simple act of showing interest sparked a student’s willingness to learn. The student in this story began learning in the classroom because of a simple one-on-one service activity that took place outside the classroom.

**Follow the Spirit**

As teachers strive to serve their students so as to facilitate “the very best teaching,” it is vital that they follow the Spirit. In 1988, Elder M. Russell Ballard spoke to the Church Educational System on the subject of following the Spirit. In his talk, he emphasized how the Spirit will guide us to reach out to individuals.

In one experience he shared, he felt impressed to go visit a friend in the hospital. Although he had a very busy schedule that afternoon, he followed the prompting. When he arrived, his friend had just suffered a massive heart attack. Elder Ballard was able to give him a blessing, and the man recovered.

A short time later, Elder Ballard was returning home from a stake conference in Georgia. Although he was very tired, he kept thinking about this same man and his wife and felt impressed to go to their home before returning to his own. This couple was planning to take a cruise to China while en route to pick up their son from his mission. Elder Ballard had felt impressed to tell them not to go. They had already made a deposit on the cruise, with the balance of the money due the next day. The wife was not very happy with Elder Ballard, but they nevertheless decided to follow his counsel. About a week later, they found out that the cruise ship they were going to take had been taken and held in port at Hong Kong because of payments that had not been made. Given the man’s recent heart condition, the stress of having been stranded in a foreign country would have been devastating for them.
At first, these stories might not seem to apply to teachers. Good examples of personal ministry, yes, but how do they relate to what a teacher can or should do regarding “the very best teaching”? After sharing these two stories, Elder Ballard made the connection by saying to teachers:

Suppose a student sitting in your class is hurting, struggling within, and you have a prompting to write a note or to call on the telephone or just to ask that student to stay after class for a minute where you can give encouragement. Do you heed those promptings? To me, when my ministry is all over, it will not be any talk that I gave that will be very important in the sight of the Lord; but what will be important to him will be my hearing his voice and responding to his promptings. I constantly pray that the Spirit might direct me to be an instrument in the hands of the Lord to do his will and his bidding. God bless each one of you in your great challenge and responsibility as you work with others, many of whom may be struggling, searching to come to a testimony of the truth on their own. When you receive a prompting from the Spirit, whatever it might be, may you recognize it and then be willing to respond in order that you might bless someone’s life.9

Most of the opportunities to have one on one teaching outside the classroom will occur only as teachers make room to receive promptings of the Spirit. The simple practice of asking God who needs help and pausing to ponder on the needs of individual students can create opportunities for the Spirit to communicate to teachers how they can facilitate one-on-one teaching outside the classroom.

Teach by the Way

Another way that teachers facilitate one-on-one teaching is to preach by the way. Ten times in the Doctrine and Covenants, missionaries are exhorted to “preach by the way,” or in other words, preach along the route they are traveling (see D&C 52:9, 10, 22–23, 25, 26, 27; 58:47, 59, 63). Rather than rushing to get to their next location, they were to share the gospel on the way with people while they were en route. Put differently, this phrase could mean that what would happen on the way was just as important as the destination. Sometimes the experiences that happen “by the way” may be even more meaningful than those tasks that we initially set out to do.

This principle could be applied in many ways. For example, suppose a teacher is on his way to an appointment. Along the way he runs into a student and feels impressed to stop and talk with him for a few minutes. A teacher focused on the destination might say to himself, “I do not have time; I am going to be late.” However, a teacher willing to preach by the way might
discover that this student had been praying to connect with somebody who could help him and that the few additional minutes spent talking to this student do not significantly affect his other appointment.  

The Savior set the example in this one-on-one teaching as he preached by the way. Several miracles recorded in Matthew 9 happened while the Savior was en route to another destination. Thus he “gave us the example of ministering as He went.”

Preaching “by the way,” even while in the midst of other pressing activities, can help us focus on one-on-one teaching.

**Conclusion**

Elder L. Tom Perry said, “I would encourage you to think of your assignment as teaching a group of individuals—not just a class. . . . Most of all, each must know of the love and appreciation you have for them.”

As teachers it is often easy to lose focus of what it is we are teaching. A person might say, “I teach Old Testament” or “I teach four classes” as opposed to focusing on the individuals he or she is truly teaching. There is no doubt that lesson preparation is important, and students’ lives change because of what happens in the classroom. In addition, however, the one-on-one teaching moments that take place outside the classroom can have powerful effects on students’ lives. Teachers can facilitate this teaching as they know their students by name, contact individuals, follow the Spirit, find ways to serve their students, and teach by the way.

President Monson has repeatedly shared stories and experience in which he and others sought after individuals. Although it can be tempting to think of the class as a collective whole, we are in fact teaching individuals. Elder Neal A. Maxwell eloquently expressed this idea when he said, “Our impact is less likely to emanate from the pulpit—more often it will occur in one-to-one relationships, or in small groups where we can have an impact on an individual.” As teachers reach out to individual students, more of the very best teaching described by President Hunter will occur.

**Notes**

10. This principle is also applicable to parents. Consider a mother who needs to have a private talk with a child. At the same time, a church assignment requires that the mother drive 30 minutes to pick up food from a cannery. This parent might “preach by the way” by inviting the child to go on the trip; perhaps adding in a stop for ice cream to sweeten the moment. This is more than just multitasking. As Sister Colleen K. Menlove taught, “It may be during the informal one-on-one times that the Spirit will prompt us to ask just the right questions or to say just the right thing to help our children know and feel the light of the Lord. If we make the opportunities, the Spirit will guide us.” “All Thy Children Shall Be Taught,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 14.
13. In fact, his life story is aptly named *To the Rescue: The Biography of Thomas S. Monson*.
The work of the Lord—the work of restoration—depends on faithful women and men.
“No More Strangers”: LDS Scholars in Women’s Studies

Rachel Cope, Amy Easton-Flake, Brett C. McInelly, Jennifer C. Lane, Guinevere Thomas Woolstenhulme, and Janiece Johnson

Introduction

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History tells us very little about women; judging from its pages, one would suppose their lives were insignificant and their opinions worthless,” former general Relief Society president Emmeline B. Wells wrote. “Volumes of unwritten history yet remain, the sequel to the written lives of brave and heroic men. But although the historians of the past have been neglectful of woman, and it is the exception if she be mentioned at all; yet the future will deal more generously with womankind, and the historian of the present age will find it very embarrassing to ignore woman in the records of the nineteenth century.”

Wells’s counsel is haunting. In neglecting women in history, what insights and truths have we forfeited? What understanding do we lack? And thus how might studying the history of women enrich and deepen our sense of the past? How might it strengthen our sense of individual and collective identity?
Furthermore, how has historical forgetfulness limited our understanding of who men and women are and who they can become? How might having a history—indeed, having roots—matter?

In the September 2010 general Relief Society broadcast, Julie B. Beck, the current general president, shared a message that echoed the words penned by Wells nearly one hundred thirty years earlier. Sister Beck revealed the following: “Our presidency has prayed, fasted, pondered, and counseled with prophets, seers, and revelators to learn what God would have us do to help His daughters be strong in the face of ‘the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth.’ An answer has come that the sisters of the Church should know and learn from the history of Relief Society. Understanding the history of Relief Society strengthens the foundational identity and worth of faithful women. In consequence of this, a history of Relief Society for the Church is being completed. . . . The preparation of the history has been an inspired and revelatory experience.”

Joseph Smith taught that the organization of the Relief Society was an essential part of the restoration of all things. He taught that women were to engage in the work of salvation and help build and strengthen the kingdom of God, as Sister Beck explained. We need to remember that the work of the Lord—the work of restoration—depended on and depends on faithful women and men.

Knowing the history of Relief Society—the history of Mormon women—will dissolve the forgetfulness that Emmeline B. Wells and Julie B. Beck have identified. It will, as Sister Beck teaches, remind us of who we are and what we are to do. It will encourage unity and promote personal change through the Atonement of Christ. Indeed, it will provide “definition and expression to who we are as disciples and followers of our Savior.”

Women’s studies can and should be the work of faithful Church members, as past and present general Relief Society presidents have taught. Recognizing the commitment others feel to studying the history of women—of all varieties—I have invited five scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds and with a plethora of research interests to share their stories and views about the subject of women’s history. The discussion begins with an autobiographical piece I wrote—a piece that explains implicitly why I decided to undertake this project, and then leads into the more specific contexts and approaches of the other contributors. Although each writes as an individual, our thoughts collectively demonstrate the very unity and commitment Sister Beck
encouraged us to cultivate. We hope our experiences and ideas will encourage future reflection and remembrance as we all, in our studies of the past, seek to engage with records about women.

**Women's History: A Field of Legitimate (and Faithful) Inquiry**

*Rachel Cope*

“You study women’s history?” my aunt asked incredulously. “They have that?” Although stunned that she would ask such a question, I managed to nod in the affirmative. In response, she simply mumbled, “Surely BYU doesn’t.”

Instead of being exasperated or offended by my aunt’s obvious disapproval and seeming unawareness, I found myself aching for her and many other women like her who do not realize they have a past and who fear it is somehow wrong to entertain the thought that they do. Furthermore, I felt sad for men and women who miss important dimensions of the human experience—past, present, and future—because they have been taught, often unwittingly, to see in halves rather than wholes, to sustain a history that is incomplete.

Why was it, I wondered, that my aunt was so afraid to acknowledge women’s history? Did she automatically equate a study of female life with radicalism, with extreme decisions, with immorality and selfishness? Did she assume that exploring women’s experiences would foster antireligious and antifamily sentiments? If so, how could I convince her that while some scholarship certainly fits these stereotypes, they alone do not define the field? Furthermore, how could I explain to her that she was allowing a vocal but limited minority to maintain ownership over how all women’s lives are perceived? Why, I questioned, was she allowing them to determine how women’s pasts are remembered and, ultimately, what she understands about herself?

By assuming women’s history should not exist, my aunt seemed to be bound by the idea that this academic discipline is (and only can be) a tool through which the adversary is destroying families—she could only see a catalyst that causes women to forget who they are. Certainly there are elements of truth in that conclusion—doesn’t evil try to appropriate all that is good?—but I wonder if a fear of a female interest in history is yet another tool through which the adversary keeps men and women from recognizing their full potential and from uniting together in the pursuit of “everything virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy.” If this is the case, and I think it is, might women’s history be threatening to the adversary because it reminds us who
women and men are and suggests that we are all engaged in the same work of salvation?

In what ways, then, might a more complete picture of history, one that explores the unity that exists between men and women, one that acknowledges gendered relationships in all their complexity, enhance our understanding of the plan of salvation? How might gospel truths—such as temple covenants—become more meaningful as we take male and female experience into account? Furthermore, how might women’s studies enrich our experiences as followers of Christ?

As a scholar of women’s history, my intellectual knowledge and my testimony have been strengthened simultaneously. Simply stated, my sense of self, family, and God have been enhanced as I have explored female as well as male experiences. And my understanding of spirituality—of faith, testimony, grace, conversion, sanctification—have become more vibrant, more poignant, more powerful and more personal as I have learned to see through a variety of lenses.

As an undergraduate at BYU, I read an article by historian Ann Braude titled “Women’s History Is American Religious History.” Her argument for inclusiveness, and her examples of female religiosity, indeed her conviction that women have always filled the pews and that their stories must influence and shape the larger historical narrative, opened my mind to a plethora of thoughts: how had I missed the importance of the obvious? Why had I failed to ask the types of questions she posed? Why had I never written a history paper about a woman, short of my sixth-grade report on Helen Keller? Could history be richer and deeper, as well as more inclusive and meaningful, than I realized?

The answer to my latter question proved to be a resounding yes! In graduate school, where I began a formal study of women’s history, I read two reviews that became catalysts for my own work and that also encouraged me to ruminate on my own spiritual development. In the first article, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese suggests that historians of religion and historians of women need to consider the importance of theology and examine the nature of female religious experiences rather than merely contributing to consensus history. In the eyes of religious women, she suggested, faith was central to personal identity. Those who overlooked or omitted this crucial sphere misunderstood the intricacies of their subject’s lives. Similarly, R. Marie Griffith demonstrated the importance of viewing female religious experiences as something of consequence. Permanently altered by the arguments made by
these scholars, I resolved to consider the “vital role” religion played in the lives of American women.7

Perhaps it was inevitable that I would focus my own research on female conversion in the early nineteenth century and that my work would encompass the extended nature of religiosity—almost immediately, I was drawn to process rather than event. For months I traveled from one archive to the next: friends and family members would call and say “Where are you this week?” Sometimes I had to think before I could provide an accurate response. I lived out of suitcases. But none of those inconveniences mattered to me because I had the privilege of pouring over endless manuscript pages that depicted personal spirituality. I knew the depth and breadth of women’s religious experiences because I was privileged to read heartfelt expressions of belief day after day: I was aware of strengths and shortcomings, hopes and fears, certainties and doubts. As a result, Catherine Livingston Garrettson, Emilie Royce Bradley, Caroline Ludlow Frey, and many others became real people to me; their experiences touched me, changed me, and inspired me. I became one with them as I learned to follow their examples. I began my dissertation as a believer who longed to live right; the lives of “my ladies” convinced me that longing was not enough. Their stories of extended conversion helped me discover my own path and to discover how constant transformation through the Atonement of Christ—even from good to better—is a daily necessity. I always believed that, always knew that, but in my research I embraced and grappled with and was transformed by that lovely truth. Academic work, I learned, can be spiritual.

My research also made it clear to me that I could challenge notions that nineteenth-century women diluted theology or that they used religion simply to attain social and political power. Instead, I could argue that religion was the means through which women sought to attain a personal relationship with Christ and that their quests for sanctification underlay every thought they expressed and influenced every action they performed. The very foundation of my work rested upon the importance of religion to women, and consequently to their families, their communities, and their churches. Religion mattered; it shaped the individual and the collective. Not only is women’s history American history, I discovered, but women’s religious history is American history, in part.

I will never forget the day of my dissertation defense (will any PhD recipient?). I sat before a group who could be described as relatively skeptical.
scholars. One of my professors, in particular, believed religious history should have political or economic explanations. I wondered how he would respond to my work. The questions began: to my relief, the answers came easily to me, particularly to his queries. As our time drew to a close—a surprisingly pleasant experience—I realized that I had been able to use the evidence I had gathered from manuscript sources to convince him that women’s religious experiences should be acknowledged as an important part of their lives. A skeptical mind had accepted work about conversion as academically credible.

As I think back to my conversation with my aunt, and as I continue to pursue women’s history, I recognize that the risks of forgetting are more serious than the risks of remembering. More completeness can be woven into the traditional narratives we are all familiar with if we commit ourselves to exploring female as well as male experience. As we make this happen, our views of self, others, and God will become deeper and richer. Family, the temple, and the plan of salvation will become more meaningful. And, most importantly, our need for the Savior will become more pressing and powerful. Unity, rather than separation, will reside at the center of our stories. As the Book of Mormon teaches, we should be “one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Nephi 1:17).

**Representing Our Past**

**AMY EASTON-FLAKE**

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Who will tell the history of Latter-day Saint women? In 1871, Latter-day Saint women founded the *Woman’s Exponent* and proudly proclaimed it the first journal “owned by, controlled by and edited by Utah ladies.” The stated impetus of the *Exponent* was to build one another through the “diffusion of knowledge and information” and to correct the “gross misrepresent[ations]” of Latter-day Saint women found within the popular press by providing them with a means of representing themselves. Latter-day Saint women had a complex and unique understanding of what it meant to be a woman in nineteenth-century America, but as the editor of the *Woman’s Exponent*, Louisa Lula Greene recognized the journal was often misunderstood and misrepresented by others. Consequently, she proclaimed, “Who are so well able to speak for the women of Utah as the women of Utah themselves? 'It is better to represent ourselves than to be misrepresented by others!'”
As we think about the future of Mormon women’s studies, Greene’s words take on added significance. The study of Mormon women is still in its early stages. Such scholars as Jill Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher have set the initial parameters of this field. However, with religious studies gaining popularity, scholars of various theoretical and political orientations will increasingly tell the stories of Mormon women and shape these narratives according to their perspectives. In its opening edition, the *Woman’s Exponent* acknowledges the power wielded by whoever decides to tell the story, and we, as Latter-day Saint scholars, must do the same. Writers, authors, critics, and scholars have authority to shape the narratives they tell and will usually infuse them, to some degree, with their perspectives and biases.

This fact became clear to me as I sifted the scholarship within the field of women’s studies during my time in graduate school. I soon realized that many women were being left out or misrepresented. I noticed that female scholars of today have sought to locate their own predecessors in the lives and stories they have recovered; consequently, the vast majority of women recovered have either naturally fit an acceptable feminist model or scholars have taken the liberty to present them in a distorted light by emphasizing aspects they approve of and suppressing those they do not. Women and works that scholars perceive as religious, didactic, or conservative continue to receive only minimal attention in comparison with the few women and texts that apparently prefigured the dilemmas facing “modern” women.

A desire to provide underrepresented women a voice in the scholarly conversation motivates my own scholarship. Central to many of my projects is an appeal for today’s feminist scholars to continue to open up women’s history to incorporate all women—to give voice not merely to the exceptional woman but also to the everyday woman, to understand her choices, sacrifices, and triumphs. Simply recovering these women, however, is not sufficient: we must recover them fairly and accurately. As one scholar acknowledges in the biography she wrote, her own interpretations “have more to do with me and my moment in history than with hers.”9 This tendency reiterates the power held by the storyteller. While multiple ways of reading an event or individual will always exist, scholars—though they most often strive for objectivity—will regularly create narratives based upon their personal standards.

For this reason, scholars of faith must take the lead in the initial stages of Mormon women’s studies. If Latter-day Saint scholars choose not to engage in women’s studies, we cede ground and allow others to interpret our past.
Our past prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, encouraged members of the Church to be the vanguards in their chosen fields: “I do not advocate a retreat from society. On the contrary, we have a responsibility and a challenge to take our places in the world of business, science, government, medicine, education, and every other worthwhile and constructive vocation. We have an obligation to train our hands and minds to excel in the work of the world for the blessing of all mankind.”

As Latter-day Saint scholars and teachers, we have an obligation to ensure that women of the past and present are represented fairly and accurately. In committing a portion of our scholarship to these ends, we will gain new truths and knowledge. For instance, studying nineteenth-century politics and culture has enhanced my comprehension of men and women’s divine attributes. By recognizing that many aspects of gender are socially conscribed, I now see more clearly the inherent gender differences that do exist and in turn am able to argue convincingly for the benefits society accrues when individuals of either gender embrace these differences and use them to promote the social good. Regarding women’s present situation, I have often found myself explaining in classes why a woman’s decision to stay at home and raise her children is not only a valid but also an intelligent decision. Abundant scholarship validates the wisdom of this choice, but unless scholars write these women’s stories from a position of appreciation or at least acceptance, other scholars will have the only voice in the conversation.

In 1888, Bishop Orson F. Whitney called for the Latter-day Saints to become more involved in the production of knowledge to show “that this people are the friends, not the foes, of education; that they are seekers after wisdom, lovers of light and truth.” We, as Latter-day Saint scholars, will fulfill this mandate as we engage critically with women’s stories of the past and honestly and openly assess what their lives reveal about themselves and their communities. Women’s studies will go on with or without scholars of faith, but the contours of the field will be determined by whoever decides to tell the story.

Taking Faith Seriously and on Its Own Terms

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I don’t consider myself a feminist, but not because I think it’s a dirty word. I don’t resist the label because I’m a man, either. Frankly, I support much of the
feminist project, particularly efforts by historians and others to recover the experiences and voices of women from our past, to say nothing of the fight for gender equality. At the same time, I believe that “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” is a divinely inspired document and that men and women play different and unique roles in bringing about God’s plan for his children, a belief that some feminists might view as antiquated and chauvinistic. I suppose that this is part of the problem so many members of the church have with feminism; feminism, or at least some versions of it, can be hostile toward religion generally and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints specifically. When visiting with other scholars at professional conferences, I’m sometimes reluctant to tell them that my wife stays home with our five children, fearing they might be critical of such a traditional arrangement. In fairness to most of these folks, they’ve never given me any real reason to feel this way.

I’ve also often wondered how I might respond to a professional colleague who questioned my core beliefs regarding marriage, gender roles, and the family. In imagining such a scenario—particularly in the wake of Proposition 8—I’ve come to realize that the argument would probably not go well. Even if the discussion remained collegial, we would likely not get past the fact that we would be arguing from two different registers of experience—a faith-based position and a more secularized position. I would likely struggle to rationalize attitudes and behaviors informed by faith to a person who may not subscribe to metaphysical realities. Generally speaking, the academic world, particularly higher education, has had an uneasy relationship with religion for decades, and feminism’s relationship to religion is merely symptomatic of a larger problem.

Part of the issue is that scholars, and some feminist scholars, have a difficult time taking faith seriously and on its own terms. Religion and religious experience are often politicized in academic conversations. Take, for example, the way scholars have approached women’s religious involvement over the last several decades. Gail Malmgreen’s introduction to Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760–1930 effectively defines the scope of a good number of these studies: “Perhaps the most important task confronting the historian of women’s spirituality is to keep alive the central paradox, the complex tension between religion as ‘opiate’ and as an embodiment of ideological and institutional sexism, and religion as transcendent and liberating force.” But regarding religion as “institutional sexism” or “liberating force” distorts the analysis of women’s religious experiences. Certainly, religion might prove
oppressive in some cases, and women may well experience forms of liberation as a result of religious involvement; but stressing the political consequences of religious activity may mean that scholars lose sight of religious activity as just that, religious activity—a sincere expression of faith that, from the point of view of the religiously devout, overshadows the political. Many members of the Church who campaigned for Proposition 8, after all, did so because of their religious convictions, not for political reasons.

Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti’s comments regarding the state of early modern studies in 2004 are relevant to my point here. Jackson and Marotti suggest contemporary critics and historians are apt to translate “religious issues . . . into social, economic, and political language,” “assuming that religion itself is a form of ‘false consciousness.’” Jackson and Marotti go on to argue that “there is often a relentless ‘presentism’ in political readings of early modern culture. The otherness of early modern religious agents and culture(s) is translated into (for us) more acceptable modern forms conformable to our own cultural assumptions.”13 Accordingly, women from the past who exercised their spiritual gifts in public and perhaps even political ways become protofeminists, a designation that likely would have seemed alien to the very women to whom it is applied.

We might consider, for example, the experiences of Methodist women in eighteenth-century Britain. Methodism originated in England during the 1730s when a group of Oxford students, all of whom were men, began meeting together to study religious texts and to practice a regimented form of religious observance. The movement eventually moved into the wider society when George Whitefield and John Wesley began preaching in the open air about the “new birth” and salvation by faith and when Wesley began to organize his followers into religious societies. Whitefield and Wesley, both ordained clergymen in the Church of England, set out to revitalize the church, not to create a new denomination. Methodism did not become an independent sect in Great Britain until the 1790s.

From the outset of the revival, women gravitated toward Methodism, and they came to outnumber men by two to one in many Methodist societies. The high profile of women in early Methodism has led some historians to describe the revival as a women’s movement.14 Women were not only drawn to the heartfelt religious experience Methodism promoted, but they also found a kind of fulfillment in the opportunities Methodism afforded for public ministry. Women were encouraged to visit the sick and the poor,
they served as leaders within the Methodist societies, and they even preached
to large congregations. Such activity occurred at a historical moment when
women were admired most for an unassuming modesty and the work they did
in the domestic sphere as wives and mothers. Needless to say, those outside
the movement criticized Whitefield and Wesley for encouraging this kind of
activity among their female followers, and the anti-Methodists drew atten-
tion to the ways women supposedly disrupted the social order by neglecting
their wifely and maternal duties as a result of their religious involvement.
Critics of the revival, then, tended to view the women of early Methodism as
willful and even rebellious, not as faithful and devout.

As I have suggested, modern scholars similarly politicize women’s reli-
gious experience; rather than see public ministry as a sincere expression of
faith, they choose to focus on the sociopolitical outcomes of women’s reli-
gious involvement. The problem, Phyllis Mack explains, is that some modern
scholars are “tone-deaf to religious sensibilities.”15 The reality is that most of
the women who participated in the Methodist revival during the eighteenth
century were motivated more by faith than a desire to turn the social order
on its head. Most of these women, in fact, were reluctant to exercise their
spiritual gifts in ways that transgressed social norms and boundaries. Most
would have preferred to stay on the sidelines; or, as one Methodist woman
explained, “I had rather be obscure. But I dare not.”16 Ultimately, spiritual
conviction compelled these women to overcome their anxieties relating to
public ministry.

Having said this, I do not mean to suggest that we should ignore or dis-
count the sociopolitical outcomes of women’s religious involvement. Clearly,
there was a political dimension to the activity of Methodist women. I also
do not mean to suggest that sexism doesn’t exist in religious circles or that
religion isn’t used for political ends. But to be fair to the women whose lives
and experiences have become the focus of historical study, we need to attend
to the religious as religious, in addition to examining the social and political
dimensions of women’s religiosity.

This brings me to my point: as people of faith who do serious scholarship,
religious educators are uniquely positioned within the academy to contrib-
ute something meaningful to the feminist project and the larger academic
community. We aren’t (hopefully) “tone-deaf to religious sensibilities,” even
sensibilities that do not completely accord with our own, whether it be the
feelings and experiences of Methodist, Catholic, or Muslim women. And in
giving faith serious scholarly attention, we may even create a space in which our own faith is respected and taken seriously by others.

Learning to Hear Others’ Voices

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As I began contemplating possible dissertation topics, I found myself at a loss. During this time, I had a conversation with my mother in which she mentioned, rather randomly, that she had read about fellowships offered by BYU’s Women’s Research Institute for those working in women’s studies. My initial reaction was dismissal. I didn’t do women’s history. But then I started reflecting on some of my previous work and realized that the culmination of my study of late medieval Jerusalem pilgrimage had been the study of the religious experiences of Margery Kempe—a woman—as depicted in her autobiographical writings. Although I did not apply for the fellowship (I believe they were only for full-time faculty), I did have a dissertation topic, as well as an additional framework through which I would approach my study of the past.

And thus Margery Kempe and, at some level, a dimension of women’s studies shifted from being one paper written for one class during one semester, to becoming the intellectual quest that would drive me for the next five years. By the time of my dissertation defense in the fall of 2002, I had been influenced deeply by one of the central contributions of women’s history: I had learned to consider the specifics as well as the whole.

For some, the particularity of individuals’ stories is what captures their attention and draws them into the study of the past. For me, the initial pull of history was its focus on patterns and explanation. But in trying to explain Margery Kempe and her extraordinary behavior in her pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the early fifteenth century, I came to realize both that her particular story was illustrative of a pattern of Franciscan-inspired Passion piety and also that she was an individual who had made unique choices and had her own distinctive attitudes. These choices and attributes made sense in the cultural context in which she lived, but, I realized, they were not determined by it. Margery Kempe’s crying and weeping at the thought of Christ’s suffering was informed by the context of Passion piety, and thus was understandable to her contemporaries; nonetheless the intensity of her devotion also stood out in her time and place.
When I studied Margery Kempe, I was examining practices of late medieval Catholic piety that had very little to do with my life as a contemporary Latter-day Saint. At the same time, as a woman of faith with a love for the Savior, I recognized that I can understand and connect with Margery Kempe’s emotional meditations on Christ’s suffering and death in a way that may be inaccessible to those for whom the Savior is merely an academic or historical figure. I know that I don’t see everything the way that she did, but I can understand the importance of her faith and beliefs about reality in shaping her actions.

As a professor, I seek to help my students be able to understand the reality of others’ experiences and to be able to understand them in their own terms. As I attempt this, I recognize that one source of anxiety or tension for a Latter-day Saint scholar or professor, particularly at a Church school, might not be the topic studied but rather how the topic is perceived by others. And thus, for some undergraduates, women’s history or women’s studies may seem dangerous because it is unfamiliar and thus suspicious, sounding radical or threatening. In his famous interviews in the video, The Faith of an Observer, Hugh Nibley commented on students who were shocked that he was trying to teach them something that they didn’t know before—imagine that!

In some ways, then, seeking to teach something new and unfamiliar has become a pedagogical question for me, rather than a question of subject matter. We know for ourselves what we’re studying and teaching is important and meaningful, but it is easy to become defensive when we feel as though our choices or judgment are being questioned. The challenge in the classroom becomes how to present the topic to others in a way that opens up the possibility of a new perspective rather than having them feel stymied by the initial lack of information.

While I haven’t taught courses in women’s history per se, I’ve encountered resistance to what seems new and threatening as I have taught history classes to students at BYU and BYU–Hawaii. I’ve taught a number of history and religion classes over the years in which the students’ perceptions of “apostate Catholicism” seem to resist any of my efforts to offer a nuanced approach to sympathetically understanding Christianity after the death of the Apostles.

This challenge arises in scripture classes when we are talking about how different passages have been understood and practiced in different Christian traditions. To many students, any divergence from what they know as scriptural truths or the gospel is interpreted as a religious worldview that should be
shunned and ignored as apostate. It is initially more satisfying for them to be right and to know that others are wrong than to try to understand why others believe and teach what they do.

I’ve learned through sad experience that it’s not the logos of my argument that persuades them to be more open-minded, but the ethos of my presentation. When I look down at my students as benighted and ignorant and, internally, belittle their concerns, I am very unlikely to get them to see things from a more informed perspective. When, however, I do succeed in helping them have confidence in my faith in the restored gospel, along with my respect for others who have sought to be true to the light they have, I have found I can also help the students be more sympathetic to people for whom they might have previously only had disparaging thoughts.

As I express my faith and gratitude for the truths and leaders that we have and point out the struggles brought on by the loss of authority, the students become less defensive and more teachable. I have seen attitudes shift as they learn to see the practice and teaching through others’ eyes. When, for example, we can see the second- and third-century Christians immersed in a Hellenistic worldview and struggling to make sense of scriptural passages without having help from authorized apostolic leaders, it becomes more evident that they are not villains. Doctrinal changes and the introduction of new practices no longer have to be something that we feel threatened by, but something that we can sympathetically understand in context.

To those seeking to better understand the lives of others from a sympathetic point of view, the field of women’s history and women’s studies offers an important opportunity to practice these intellectual skills and dispositions. One experience with this came in a medieval history class that I taught during which we examined late medieval piety through the study of Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Some of the seemingly outlandish beliefs and extreme devotional practices of this era were difficult for the undergraduates to fathom. But at the same time, as we gradually worked through the connections between their understanding of how to get access to the Atonement and the behavior of these women, students were able to have a sympathetic perspective into lives of women who lived in a very different world.

The ethos of humility in teaching finds a parallel in the willingness to learn from other people’s perspectives as we explore the lives of women and men in the past and the present. As I look at what I know and what I do and
then I look at others in the past, I continue to seek to understand them and hear their voices. Because of the Apostasy, I know more about the fullness of the doctrine of Christ than Margery Kempe had access to in the later Middle Ages, but the sincerity and intensity of her love and devotion humbles me and invites me to learn more and become more. My hope is that as we all seek to pursue the paths of research and teaching we feel called to pursue, we can do so with humility and respect for each others’ differences and contributions.

**My Sister’s Keeper—This Too “Should Be Written”**

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Calling twelve disciples. Healing the sick. Instituting the sacrament. Blessing the children. When Christ visited Lehi’s descendants in the promised land, his days were filled with teaching, blessing, and organizing. But before the Savior left, before his work among them was complete, he asked to see the Nephite records (see 3 Nephi 23:7). Nephi brought the records to Christ, who examined them and found them unacceptable because the fulfillment of the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite had not been recorded (see 3 Nephi 23:8–11). The Savior asked, “I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people. . . . Was it not so? . . . How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many?” (3 Nephi 23:9, 11). After this undoubtedly painful peer (superior?) review, Nephi remembered and admitted that it was left out (see 3 Nephi 23:10, 12). Samuel’s prophecy and the Nephite people’s individual accounts of its fulfillment were witnesses of Christ and of the reality of the Resurrection. Their omission would have been a great loss. Christ did not belabor the source of the omission; he did not accuse anyone of carelessness, racism against a Lamanite prophet, or poor editing. He did not condemn the record keepers. Instead, Jesus merely commanded, “It should be written” (3 Nephi 23:12–13).

This is not the only lacuna, or place where sacred records contain a gap. It is, however, evidence of the Savior’s concern over omissions in the historical record, where inclusion of an individual voice could strengthen others and lead them to Christ. Another significant and problematic lacuna in ancient and modern records is the omission of women’s experiences, omissions that deny readers access to a powerful source of strength and inspiration. The field of women’s studies addresses a similar concern contained in Christ’s ancient
instruction to Nephi and his fellow historians by making women’s experiences accessible to current and future generations.

Women’s experiences are part of the human experience and offer instructive examples of faith, courage, discipline, and every other virtue. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we place great emphasis on our historic and sacred records as a source of instruction, inspiration, and identity. We are commanded to read the scriptures daily, to “liken all scriptures,” and then await the promised “profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). We are encouraged to keep journals and family histories, for “the angels may quote from it for eternity.”17 Women’s experiences are an essential part of these records, just as women represent at least half of the audience to be benefitted by them. It is fitting that the Relief Society recently renewed its emphasis on its history to strengthen and unify women of the Church by giving them a sense of purpose.18

The accounts of women that are extant in the scriptures illustrate how women’s experiences can strengthen modern readers and bring them to Christ. All Christian denominations look to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an example of tremendous faith, humility, and spirituality. We find powerful examples in the strengths and weaknesses of Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Anna, Martha, and Tabitha/Dorcas. Scriptures of the Restoration give us missionary-minded Abish and solace-seeking Emma (see Alma 19; D&C 25). Indeed, the Latter-day Saints include many women of courage, kindness, creativity, ingenuity, and every other virtue. Giving voice to these women cannot help but strengthen current and future Church members.

Women need women’s examples—and so do men. Scriptural and historical accounts of individual women can pique the interest of a youth, giving them inspiration where a parent’s admonition falls on willfully deaf ears. With the many detractive voices in today’s world, every positive, strengthening voice is needed. Media and popular culture provide an overabundance of female celebrities, rock stars, and idols that scream for attention and imitation. If we find these role models unsatisfactory, we must provide our women and men with powerful alternative examples of what womanhood can and should be.

Until recently, the historical record tended to omit women’s experiences. Unfortunately, women’s lives and experiences are extremely fragmented in ancient scriptural and historical records. Most often women, if mentioned at all, are peripheral characters in the accounts chosen for inclusion in these ancient histories. The named women in the scriptures are the exception,
rather than the rule: we read of many named fathers and husbands and sons, with a few mothers, daughters, and female servants thrown in.

Of those women who are included, details regarding them are sketchy; additional information would have tremendously added to the insights available for modern readers. We may read and appreciate, but wonder: Was Noah’s wife ever depressed in that dark, damp, and smelly ark? How did the daughters of Onith strengthen themselves amid the terrible wickedness? Why, exactly, did Abish keep her conversion secret? How many other times did Sariah complain to Lehi, and did he help her with laundry? Did anyone do laundry? How long had Anna waited, and did she ever lose faith? Who taught Huldah to read, and was that normal? What sort of family home evenings did the mothers of the stripling warriors have, and what did they feed those boys?!

Certainly the very different cultures of antiquity, the difficulty of record-keeping, and the scarcity of the extant records help explain omissions from the record. They couldn’t write everything. The self-aware Book of Mormon authors repeatedly tell us that they wrote “but a small part” of their experiences—and then Mormon had to abridge that! I don’t know how many words per minute Mormon could inscribe on the gold plates, but certainly it was a different world from today’s, with our extreme proliferation of blogs, tweets, and podcasts. I imagine that Nephi might have struggled to inscribe on metal plates during the chaotic days of thick darkness when Samuel’s prophecies were fulfilled. Compounding the problem, in ancient times women were often illiterate, so few left their own records. Few of the scriptural accounts focus on the domestic sphere where women’s influence was most prominent.

The stories of women in later eras are often similarly fragmented; official histories may refer only to a few extraordinary women, may include only small pieces of women’s experiences as deemed relevant by traditional historians, or may omit women’s experiences entirely. Fortunately, however, it is still much easier to recover the voices of these more recent generations than those of the ancient past.

Yet many of these women’s experiences must be preserved now, or they will be lost forever. This recovery effort often requires a different kind of research than traditional archival research, because many women are either underrepresented or unrepresented in the records and histories. Women’s letters and diaries provide a wonderful resource, but external sources also illuminate women’s experiences. Relief Society and other organizations’
cookbooks provide insights into the economic, social, and spiritual life of women and families. Material studies examine artifacts of daily life—textile patterns, cookware, or a Christmas ornament—to illustrate the experiences of the artifact owner. Studies in folklore trace the oral histories passed from mother to child when the mother did not keep a written record. Studies in art reveal that for millennia, women have left their stories in paintings, rose gardens, quilts, and lullabies. These diverse methodologies allow women’s stories to be told, even in the absence of a written personal history.

The field of women’s studies thus documents women’s lives, rewarding the searcher with new understanding. These efforts illuminate Isaiah’s personification of Zion as a woman, Christ’s parable of the woman seeking a lost coin, Mary’s experience as Jesus’s mother, the suffragist zeal of the early Relief Society, and God’s love for all of his children. Women’s studies gives us the experiences of LDS pioneer women—not just the wives of the prophets and their close associates, but also the lay members of the Church who sacrificed everything to build Zion. These studies strengthen, and then preserve, the faith and courage of modern women and their families throughout the world.

*Placing blame for past omissions is not as important as the recovery of these women’s voices.* As a scholar, I am more concerned with triage—getting the factual pieces of women’s histories put back together—than I am with pointing fingers over whom is to blame for past losses. Christ did not condemn any of the Nephite record keepers for omitting Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies; he pointed out the problem and asked them to fix the records. I find that filling in the historical record is the most useful and productive outlet for my energies. By seeking women’s voices for inclusion in our histories, scholars in women’s studies remedy some of these past losses, thereby strengthening individuals and families of today and tomorrow.

As an aspiring Saint, I am most concerned with achieving a perfect “unity of faith” (Ephesians 4:13). This unity of faith requires inclusion of all God’s children. God teaches that “all are alike unto [him],” and “he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:33). God has repeatedly asked that we record our histories and has shown continued interest in the records kept. His divine version of history includes all people. Christ took time to correct the Nephite records when they failed to record the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecy. We should try to be sure that our own histories contain no such omissions.
Through faithful women’s studies we can recover, record, and preserve women’s experiences that would otherwise be lost. When our sisters throughout history become familiar to us, we will obey the exhortation to be “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). This helps us to be “of one heart and one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness” (Moses 7:18). These are records that, as Christ said, “should be written.”

“Unto All”

Janiece Johnson (janiecejohnson@gmail.com) is general editor of the Mountain Meadows Prosecution Papers for the Church Historical Department. My master’s thesis at BYU examined the experience of the earliest Mormon women. As I reviewed the extant research, I struggled to understand why some religious historians seemed to equate LDS patriarchy with the oppression of women. These historians assumed that no woman would ever unite themselves with Joseph Smith’s church and his return to the patriarchal fathers except under duress. This was a completely foreign concept to me. My research did not align with such assumptions; nor did my experiences. So I adeptly argued with these historians in lengthy dramatic footnotes.

I then went to the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University, and my naïveté was shattered. In my feminist theology class, I quickly learned that patriarchy was the great evil in the world.

Prior to that time, it never occurred to me that for some, patriarchy could only ever be seen as a negative. I knew that the written history of the world is still essentially the history of men the world terms great—and oftentimes greatness and ruthlessness went hand in hand. Much of this history includes tales of men exploiting, oppressing, and terrorizing others—men who “exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men [and women], in [m]any degree[s] of unrighteousness” (D&C 121:37).

I knew that all this existed, yet I did not equate patriarchy with this history.

I grew up in a church that some said was oppressively directed by men, yet I didn’t feel oppressed. On the contrary, I felt cared for, I felt loved, I felt encouraged, and I felt like I could contribute. I felt I could do whatever the Lord and I decided to do together.
The world’s version of patriarchy is one plagued by unrighteous dominion. Though my experience was certainly not perfect, in contrast to the world’s view of patriarchy, I grew up in an environment where neither my father nor my priesthood leaders tried to “exercise control or dominion or compulsion” on my soul. This nurturing environment was created by “persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” from the men in my life working in conjunction with the strong women who stood equally at their sides (D&C 121:37, 41).

Unfortunately, most of the women in my feminist theology class could not envision such an environment. Sadly, in too many families and wards, members likewise cannot envision such an environment.

Joseph’s vision of the three degrees of glory tells us of a celestial kingdom where all those worthy of celestial glory are “equal in power, and in might, and in dominion” (D&C 76:95). We all have the potential to become joint heirs with Christ. As we stand amidst consistent inequality in mortality, it is difficult to fathom absolute divine equality. Yet equality reigns in the celestial kingdom and should stand as our goal in earthly things. As the Lord taught the Saints the law of consecration, he made it clear that the goal was equality in “heavenly things.” Equality in “earthly things” expedites the “obtaining of heavenly things” (D&C 78:5).

Everything we can do to understand and teach that equality in mortality will help us better understand our roles and ourselves now and in eternity—when all of us might ultimately “receive [our] inheritance and be made equal with him” (D&C 88:107).

Those who only see Latter-day Saint history as a history of leading despotic men see an engorged caricature defined by the world’s ideals of power. They miss the whole point of the Restoration. They miss God speaking to prophets and God speaking to individuals—truth and power revealed and individuals knowing of that truth for themselves. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught that revelation is the “fundamental fact of the Restoration”—revelation to prophets and revelation “unto all” (D&C 25:16).

Our history is an aggregate of individuals who felt God speak to them individually. They asked, they received, and it changed their lives. If we tell our history only as the history of the men who led the Church, we miss valuable parts of the greater story of revelation and truth restored.

We miss the powerful testimony of Phebe Crosby Peck as she implored her sister-in-law Anna—who ran off to get married rather than leaving New
York with the Colesville Saints—to give up all and follow her Lord. Though the widow Phebe had been through great hardships as the Colesville Saints moved from New York to Ohio and then on to Missouri, she wrote to Anna, firm in her conviction. She declared to Anna, “Did you know of the things of God and <could you> receive of the blessings I have from the hand of the Lord you would not think it a hardship to come here.” Her letter shares her amazement at the truths she was learning and the mysteries being revealed.20

We miss the fantastic story of the visionary Laura Clark Phelps, to whom the Lord revealed a plan to free her husband Morris, Parley P. Pratt, and King Follett from Columbia Jail in Missouri. Parley had the same dream, and the plan burst forth. The escape was successful, though no one considered what would happen after Laura was left without a horse and a mob began to form outside the jail.21

We likewise miss the testimony and dedication of Sally Phelps as she shares her own experience hearing Hyrum powerfully testify of the Restoration in a “beautiful” discourse to a small branch on the periphery of Mormondom. And her bold declaration to her brother and sister-in-law that though she was far from the Maine of her childhood, she could “niver have wish [her]self back.”22

The valuable parts we miss don’t just include women, but Saints in distant lands, Saints of different ethnicities, Saints who would never meet Joseph or ever make it to Salt Lake City—average members of the Church. All of these testaments of faith improve our own testimonies and ourselves as they help us create a richer tapestry of the Restoration based in revelation “unto all.”

As I grew up reading the scriptures I saw Nephi as a good example as much as Sarah or Ruth. I believed the Lord when he said “this is my voice unto all” as much when he said it to Hyrum as when he said it to Emma (see D&C 11:27, 25:16). Yet as I began to learn more about women’s lives, I hungered for their example.

Seeing Rebecca Swain Williams hope against hope that her father would come to truth and work unfailingly to share her testimony with him gives me hope and strength to share the gospel. Reading Melissa Morgan Dodge’s eloquent scrawl pouring forth gratitude to God for the “feast of fat things” she had been blessed with, despite the desperate trials of Missouri makes me reconsider my trials and my sometime lack of gratitude. Reading Mary Fielding Smith’s words of trust and faith as she experienced personal and collective chaos in Kirtland gives me hope that I too can continue faithful and find peace amidst chaos.23 Learning of these examples makes a powerful
impression not only for women, but it likewise teaches men to recognize and value the experiences and contributions of all.

As a missionary, I served in Buenos Aires. Sister Margareth Costa came to teach us in a Zone conference with her husband Elder Claudio Costa. Elder Costa was a member of our Area Presidency, and the Costas lived near my area. It was not uncommon to see them, but for me this day was not common. I clearly remember where I sat as Sister Costa powerfully dissected and expounded Alma 27. I still remember the light that poured into that chapel—Argentine sunshine and spiritual illumination filled the room and my soul. Seeing a woman put the Lord’s admonition to Emma to expound scripture into practice so specifically and so powerfully made a deep impression on my soul that remains with me. Sister Costa became an influential model for how I read the scriptures and how I teach. Women grow stronger through examples with whom they can identify.

In the 2010 general Relief Society meeting, Julie B. Beck taught that “the sisters of the Church should know and learn from the history of Relief Society.” She argued that “we study our history to learn who we are. There is a worldwide hunger among good women to know their identity, value, and importance.” Though we may not be able to reach every hungry woman in the world, the more readily we offer examples of strong and faithful women, the more opportunities we give for all of our students to “know their identity, value, and importance.”

We all know Joseph’s, Brigham’s, and Wilford’s narratives. They will always necessarily be a central and inspiring part of the story of the Restoration—we can all learn from them and their examples. But they alone do not make up the story of the Restoration. The blessings of testimony and faith are offered “unto all.” It requires effort to expand the way that we tell our history. But as we extend the scope of the gospel we teach, we offer all of our students more possibilities to be inspired and to see themselves and the pattern of their own lives in the tapestry of the Restoration more clearly. 

Notes


The proper sequence for teaching is to obtain the word through diligent study and then to declare it. We cannot teach what we do not know.
As a Gospel Doctrine teacher, I was more than a little concerned when I came to the lesson on the law of consecration. Many ward members still remembered how it had been presented some years before by a teacher who believed the law of consecration was a failed “experiment” in communal living, an embarrassing folly, a socialist dream. I read the lesson, including all of the scriptures and quotations, a week early, but I struggled to know how to present it. I was stumped. I had lots of questions, and each question I answered seemed to lead to two more. I pondered the scriptures again and again. Not until the following Saturday night did my studies click, becoming clear in my mind, and I finally got an idea of how to present this subject. I used mint patties to represent stewardships—one patty represented one person’s needs, wants, and circumstances. At the beginning of the lesson, I used class members to create a minisociety with different types of families or individuals represented. I turned to the scriptures to show how people would consecrate their belongings and then receive a stewardship (a mint patty) by a deed and a covenant.

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Learn to Teach, Teach to Learn

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The exercise led to a most stimulating discussion. Class members raised interesting questions that I had not anticipated, and each time the Spirit led me to a scriptural passage that not only answered the question but opened new vistas of understanding. For example, one class member asked, “What about those who don’t carry their share of the load?” This question was easily answered by discussing Doctrine and Covenants 42:42: “Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer.” Another class member half-jokingly challenged me with this question: “Under the law of consecration, will I be able to own a boat?” He was referring to his very expensive ski boat with twin V-8 engines, a luxury that symbolized other luxuries such as campers, home theaters, ATVs, and so forth. I answered, “I don’t know, but let’s consider this passage.” We turned to Doctrine and Covenants 82:19—a verse I had not included in my lesson outline. I asked, “What role will a speedboat have in a righteous society in which ‘every man [is] seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God’?” This scripture and question, prompted by the Spirit, turned a mildly tense situation into a moment of profound self-reflection. Toward the end of the lesson, one sister expressed the feelings of many in the class, “This is the first time I have ever wanted to live the law of consecration.” She had been taught by the Spirit. That was probably the most memorable lesson I have ever taught, and I attribute its success to the guidance of the Spirit. Since then, what I learned by the Spirit has formed a framework for any additional study of this marvelous doctrine, and it has been confirmed repeatedly by prophetic teachings.

This experience, and others like it, showed me that learning and teaching interact dynamically. When we prepare and then teach a subject, we learn twice over. It is almost proverbial to state that the teacher benefits most from a well-prepared lesson. President Boyd K. Packer said, “As you give that which you have, there is a replacement, with increase!” This article explores the beneficial relationship between learning and teaching.

**Owning the Word**

We are commanded to obtain the word before we declare it (see D&C 11:21–22). The proper sequence for teaching is to obtain the word through diligent study and then to declare it. We cannot teach what we do not know. Conversely, we can teach only that which we do know. As Nels Nelson said to an agrarian nineteenth-century audience, “Out of the fulness of the heart the
Obtain means to attain by planned action or effort. It comes from a Latin word meaning to “hold on to,” which recalls those in Lehi’s vision who were “clinging” or “holding fast” to the rod of iron (1 Nephi 8:24, 30). It also means to possess, attain, or acquire, suggesting rightful ownership through successful goal-directed effort. To teach the scriptures, then, we must plan to study and exert the effort to carry out our plan. President Marion G. Romney described this kind of spiritual effort: “For those of us who desire to effectively share the gospel, there are some very important lessons taught in this message [D&C 11:15–18, 21]. We must put our lives in order so the Lord’s Spirit can influence our thoughts and actions—so we can be taught from on high. We must work and study his word with full desire until his teachings become our teachings. Then we will be able to speak with power and conviction.”

Such study and preparation to teach is inherently rewarding: “His teachings become our teachings.” We have indeed obtained the word. Holy words become burned into our souls by the Spirit through prayer and through experience in living them and explaining them to others. We come to own them, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie exemplified in his concluding testimony: “I shall use my own words, though you may think they are the words of scripture, words spoken by other apostles and prophets. True it is they were first proclaimed by others, but they are now mine, for the Holy Spirit of God has borne witness to me that they are true, and it is now as though the Lord had revealed them to me in the first instance.”

Remembering the Word

Again, the Lord has promised that if we “treasure up” the word, we will be given in the very moment that portion that shall be meted, or measured, to the circumstances (see D&C 84:85). To treasure means, of course, “to store for future use,” but it also means “to cherish.” Storing and cherishing truth are interdependent. Brigham Young said, “If you love the truth you can remember it.” We remember more easily those things we value. President Henry B. Eyring said, “You may have noticed, as have I, that with the words that you recall came feelings, as if they were retrieved from your heart as much as from your mind. . . . If the words touched your heart when you heard them, they are easier to memorize and to recall. You can more easily treasure up what you hear or read today if it touches your heart.”
Many of our most profound learning experiences come when we have a burning question, a paradox or apparent contradiction that needs to be resolved before we can rest. Such questions often arise in a teaching setting, when a student raises a question that we are not prepared to answer and we are compelled to search until we are satisfied. These experiences add to our storehouse of knowledge, which the Spirit can call upon in the very moment, according to the need (see D&C 84:85). Teaching a subject, with all of the preparation and searching and mental effort that implies, rivets what we learn in our memory.

Believing the Word

Knowledge is essential but not sufficient; we must also be convinced. We “know” many things that we do not believe. We “know” many things that we do not value or cherish. Spiritual conviction is critical. We must not only know doctrine cognitively; we must also feel it, and feel it deeply. Concerning our duty to teach, President David O. McKay said: “Do you believe it? Do you feel it? Does that testimony radiate from your being? . . . If so, that radiation will give life to the people whom you go to teach. If not, there will be a dearth, a drought, a lack of that spiritual environment in which the Saints grow. . . . You can teach effectively only that which you yourselves feel.”

Teachers are told, “Declare the things which ye have heard, and verily believe, and know to be true” (D&C 80:4). The teacher is to “bear record . . . of that which he knows and most assuredly believes” (D&C 58:59). A teacher must, like Alma, speak in “the energy of [his] soul” because he knows the gospel with a surety born of the Spirit (see Alma 5:43–48).

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “When a man is reined up continually by excitement, he becomes strong and gains power and knowledge; but when he relaxes for a season, he loses much of his power and knowledge.” We attain and retain such excitement by continually refreshing and expanding our knowledge. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Part of what may be lacking, at times, in the decent teacher is a freshening personal excitement over the gospel which could prove highly contagious.”

I once observed a missionary in training at the Provo Missionary Training Center. This was at a time when the missionary discussions were learned almost word for word. This young man struggled mightily. By the end of his three-week training period, he had not learned, in any real way, a single line from the discussions. His presentations were painfully dependent
on his printed script, and his speech was halting and unconvincing. One day I entered the classroom and saw the other ten missionaries in his district huddled around him, in rapt attention. The missionary, it seems, was something of an expert on Harry Potter, and he was talking with passion about many details of that fictional story. His speech was lively, articulate, and engaging. As I watched, I had a little epiphany. I thought, “When he knows and enjoys the gospel like he knows Harry Potter, no one will be able to constrain him from teaching.”

A scriptural scholar described the experience of searching the scriptures in preparation to preach: “The preacher leans over the text wanting to say what the lesson says: not merely to repeat an order of words, but to speak the text into life for a particular place and time, to speak the fullness of the text.”

One of the most satisfying experiences in teaching is to “speak the text into life for a particular place and time.” The Savior said that his words “are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). We treasure up “the words of life” (D&C 84:85) so that we can speak and teach and testify of the “Word of life” (1 John 1:1), having lived in and with his words until they become part of us, until we can bring them to life for our students. President Hugh B. Brown said, “There must be contagion if your teaching is to be effective. If your students are going to receive inspiration and if the subjects which you teach are to have meaning to them, those subjects must continue to have meaning to you. Only as you keep growing and stretching your own minds will the subjects you teach retain their interest and challenge and not grow old by repetition.”

This “obtaining” the word, this ownership of scriptural meaning, this holding fast to the rod of iron is both essential for teaching and personally enriching for the teacher. Thus, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “we must strengthen ourselves and our people to get our teachers to speak out of their hearts rather than out of their books, to communicate their love for the Lord and this precious work, and somehow it will catch fire in the hearts of those they teach.”

Expounding the Word

We are commanded to “expound” the gospel from the scriptures (see D&C 68:1–4; 71:1), as exemplified by Jesus Christ (see Luke 2:42; 3 Nephi 25:6, 14; 24:11; 26:1–3). Expound means to explain systematically. A system is a set of things that work together as an interconnecting network; orderliness; an organized scheme or method. This provides a clue concerning the nature of
teaching and also our preparation to teach. We can’t explain to others what we can’t explain to ourselves. To explain something to ourselves we need to see how things work together; we need to see the order and logic of the doctrine. When Peter was questioned by the Jewish members about the conversion of the Gentiles, “Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them” (Acts 11:4). Peter’s rehearsal was a narrative of events, but the same thing applies to doctrine. We should expound doctrines by order. We should strive to combat complexity with simplicity, a primary virtue in a teacher. We should strive to clearly state the unity and organization of a scriptural passage or book. It was said of Joseph Smith that “he would unravel the scriptures and explain doctrine as no other man could. What had been mystery he made so plain it was no longer mystery” or that “he could hand out to all mankind God’s divine law and make it so plain to the understanding of the people, that on reflection one would think he had always known it, whereas you had only just been taught it.”14 Nephi delighted in “plainness” so that his people could learn (2 Nephi 25:4). He said, “I have spoken plainly unto you, that ye cannot misunderstand” (2 Nephi 25:28).

Teachers derive great benefit from teaching the basic principles of the gospel, always striving to expound them more clearly. The Spirit “unfolds” them, or reveals them gradually to our view with increasing clarity. We see new connections and patterns. Hyrum Smith said, “Preach the first principles of the Gospel—preach them over again: you will find that day after day new ideas and additional light concerning them will be revealed to you. You can enlarge upon them so as to comprehend them clearly. You will then be able to make them more plainly understood by those who teach.”15 Hyrum Smith here describes the depth of doctrinal understanding. The simple first principles never grow old, and we never quite plumb their depth. Continually receiving new ideas and additional light is a highly satisfying experience, one we should desire earnestly. It is an important way of refreshing our knowledge and conviction. Commenting on Hyrum’s sermon, Heber C. Kimball said, “Suppose you had only one seed to plant, and that seed was an acorn, and you spend your time in cultivating it till it comes forth a great and mighty tree, branching forth with many branches and bearing fruit abundantly after its own kind. So it is with the first principles of the Gospel, they branch out in all directions, unfolding new light continually.”16 President Spencer W. Kimball explained how this happens: “We learn to do by doing. If we study the gospel to teach it we have acquired knowledge, for where we carry the lantern to
light the path of others we light our own way. As we analyze and arrange the scriptures to present an acceptable lesson to others, we have clarified our own minds. As we explain that which we already know there seems to come to us an unfolding of additional truths, and enlargement of our understandings, new connections and applications.”

Taught from on High

When we teach from the scriptures, we learn new things from the Comforter, who will “teach you all things” (John 14:26). We are taught from on high (see D&C 43:16; 1 John 2:27). President Romney said, “I always know when I am speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost because I always learn something from what I’ve said.”

Lehi was carried away in vision and received a book from “One descending out of the midst of heaven.” He read the book, and as he read, “he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 1:12). When Lehi searched the records that Nephi had obtained from Laban’s treasury, he was “filled with the Spirit” (1 Nephi 5:17). The scriptures are a springboard to personal revelation. Elder McConkie said, “Those who preach by the power of the Holy Ghost use the scriptures as their basic source of knowledge and doctrine. . . . Many great doctrinal revelations come to those who preach from the scriptures. When they are in tune with the Infinite, the Lord lets them know, first, the full and complete meaning of the scriptures they are expounding, and then he oftentimes expands their views so that new truths flood in upon them, and they learn added things that those who do not follow such a course can never know.”

The teacher who teaches the word of truth by the Comforter, and the student who receives the word of truth by the Spirit “understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:17–22). Teaching by the Spirit is mutually beneficial. The CES Teaching Emphasis encourages seminary and institute teachers to “help students learn how to explain, share, and testify of the doctrines and principles of the restored gospel. We are to give them opportunities to do so with each other in class.” This practice helps students learn by the Spirit. The same thing is true of teachers who explain, share, and testify. When we publicly declare that which we know and most assuredly believe, we commit ourselves more firmly; our convictions grow deeper. “A testimony is to be found in the bearing of it!”
Applying the Word

Both study and teaching should end in the same place—action, application, experience, and character. We have not learned a principle until we apply it. “Apply yourself wholly to the text; apply the text wholly to yourself.”²¹ Paul wrote to the Jews, citing their expertise in the law and their presumed prerogative to stand as teachers to all mankind. He noted that they “restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,” that they are confident that they “art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes.” But then he castigated them for the incongruity between their teachings and their actions: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?” (Romans 2:17–22).

The message? How can you claim to instruct others when you do not apply what you teach in your own lives? Abinadi said much the same thing to the wicked priests of King Noah, condemning them for teaching but not keeping the Ten Commandments. Abinadi read the commandments of God and said, “I perceive that they are not written in your hearts; I perceive that ye have studied and taught iniquity the most part of your lives” (Mosiah 13:11).

Long before Paul was converted, the Savior likewise condemned the hypocrisy of teaching principles that one does not observe: “All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matthew 23:3). We are told, “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; compare Mosiah 2:4). President Harold B. Lee taught, “Do you think you could teach any of the . . . principles of the gospel if you do not believe it sufficiently to implant it in your own lives?”²²

Obedience precedes effective teaching, for the instructor must teach by precept and example. But it is more than obedience; it is a process of becoming like the Savior. The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote:

The person who is going to preach ought to live in the Christian thoughts and ideas; they ought to be his daily life. If so—this is the view of Christianity—then you, too, will have eloquence enough and precisely that which is needed when you speak extemporaneously without specific preparation. However, it is a fallacious eloquence if someone, without otherwise occupying himself with, without living in these thoughts, once in a while sits down and laboriously collects such thoughts . . . and then works them into a well-composed discourse, which is then committed to
memory and delivered superbly, with respect both to voice and diction and to gestures. No, just as in well-equipped houses one need not go downstairs to fetch water but has it up there on tap, under pressure—one merely turns on the faucet—so also is that person an authentic Christian speaker who, because the essentially Christian is his life, at every moment has eloquence present, immediately available, precisely the true eloquence.23

The teacher enters into a symbiotic relationship with the students: teachers and students interact in a cooperative association that is advantageous to both. When we instruct one another, we are to “bind” ourselves to act in holiness (D&C 43:8–10). Bind has a number of relevant meanings. First, it means to put under an obligation, to make a firm commitment. It also means to “hold fast,” firmly, deeply, securely. It also means to tie or fasten tightly together, to hold in a unified or cohesive group, as when the Saints are knit together in unity in love (see Mosiah 18:21). It can also mean restraint, as when we willingly abstain from sin. “Bind” suggests covenant language (see D&C 82:11; Ezekiel 20:37). Finally, to bind means to wrap or encircle tightly, as when the Lord encircles us in the arms of his love (see 2 Nephi 1:15; D&C 6:20). Once we have learned the truth from an instructor and felt the edifying influence of the Spirit, we should apply what we have learned. The instructor is the guide who leads the way, having previously committed to holy actions, and whose behavior reflects a character molded by righteousness. We should hold fast to these instructions, change our thoughts and beliefs, and act upon what we have learned. We act in holiness when we faithfully discharge our duties with a pure heart and pure motives. As we do so, the Lord promises that his grace—his enabling power—will attend us.

When both teachers and students study with real intent—when they intend to act upon what they learn—their Spirit-directed application becomes their own, and personal ownership of the action deepens their commitment. By continuing in the word, they become the Lord’s “disciples indeed”; they “know the truth” (John 8:31), and they “know of the doctrine” (John 7:17). Teachers thus incorporate scriptural teachings into their lives, become genuine examples, and experience the blessings of obedience. They hold up their light—that which they have seen the Savior do (see 3 Nephi 18:24).

Learning from One Another

The Lord said, “Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may
have an equal privilege” (D&C 88:122). This direction implies reciprocal teaching and learning, as does the command to “teach one another” (D&C 88:77). Many teachers have marveled at how much they have learned from their students. Elder David A. Bednar emphasized that the blessings promised in Doctrine and Covenants 88:77–78 “are intended specifically for the teacher.” When we teach diligently, grace does indeed attend us, and we ourselves are instructed more perfectly in doctrine and principles.

President Eyring admonished all of us, including teachers, to learn from one another. “I would be more eager to be taught. I would listen to others, as if I believed the Spirit could teach me through their words.” Can a veteran seminary teacher learn gospel truths from a new high school freshman? President Eyring told this story:

When I was the president of Ricks College years ago, I remember having a man who was my priesthood leader come to my house each month to interview me about my home teaching. He brought with him a notebook in which he wrote notes. He recorded not only my report as a home teacher, but my observations about the gospel and life as well.

I remember at first being very flattered. Then one Sunday he and I were visiting what was then called junior Sunday School. He was a few rows in front of me. The speaker was a little girl, no more than six or seven, probably not yet old enough to have the gift of the Holy Ghost. I glanced over at the man and noticed with surprise that he had that same notebook open. As the little girl spoke, he was writing with as much speed and intensity as he had in the study of my home. I learned a lesson from him that I haven’t forgotten. He had faith that God could speak to him as clearly through a child as through the president of a college.

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian (see Acts 8:26–39) illustrates our need to learn from one another. While Philip is traveling, he meets the Ethiopian, who is sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah 53. Philip asks the Ethiopian if he understands what he is reading, and the Ethiopian replies, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” Elder Holland comments on this passage: “We are . . . all somewhat like the man of Ethiopia to whom Philip was sent. Like him, we may know enough to reach out for religion. We may invest ourselves in the scriptures. We may even give up our earthly treasures, but without sufficient instruction we may miss the meaning of all this and the requirements that still lie before us. So we cry with this man of great authority, ‘How can [we understand], except some [teacher] should guide [us]?’”

Matthew O. Richardson noted that the Ethiopian was a religious man who had just come from worshipping at Jerusalem, that he was a student of the scriptures and that it would be absurd to think that he lacked any capacity
to understand the scriptures on his own. “The Ethiopian was wise enough to seek further insight, clarification, and understanding to add to his own discoveries.” He “sought after a guide—someone with the background, experience, understanding, and necessary knowledge of the road—to point out things in his journey that were beyond his own perspective, skills to understand, or powers to grasp. Thus Philip, as a guide, was able to add substance, understanding, clarity, purpose, and even motivation to a journey that had already begun.”

Learning the gospel is a community affair including the interpretive community. It takes a village—a congregation—to raise a scriptural scholar. No man is sufficient unto himself; no man is an island.

Confirming the Word

Concerning truths that we discover in our personal studies, Elder Richard G. Scott said, “As each element of truth is encountered, you must carefully examine it in the light of prior knowledge to determine where it fits. Ponder it; inspect it inside out. Study it from every vantage point to discover hidden meaning. View it in perspective to confirm you have not jumped to false conclusions. Prayerful reflection yields further understanding. Such evaluation is particularly important when the truth comes as an impression of the Spirit.”

One of the best ways to validate what we learn is to teach it to others. By doing so, we expose ourselves in a sense. Our conclusions may be challenged. Our ideas will be tested as we counsel together. Teaching in a Church setting provides checks and balances. This is one reason why “there is safety in learning doctrine in gatherings which are sponsored by proper authority.”

I have often had to revise my thinking and beliefs, sometimes with a measure of pain. But pain can bring humility. When I first encountered the word *eisegesis* as it relates to scriptural study, I was curious. The word is rarely used in Latter-day Saint literature. My search led me to conclude that *eisegesis*—reading meaning *into* the text—was almost always bad interpretation. But then I read an article by a Latter-day Saint scholar who said, “There are two ways to read a text, through exegesis and through *eisegesis*. The first means, approximately, ‘reading out of the text,’ while the second means, approximately, ‘reading into the text.’ Both are legitimate ways of approaching a text.” My ideas were challenged, which caused considerable cognitive dissonance for me, but I gained greater understanding as I wrestled with and found a satisfactory solution to this problem.
President Eyring said, “I know a few of the reasons why the Lord requires us to listen to mortal servants. One of the reasons is that you and I need a check on our own inspiration occasionally. We can be mistaken. At times, even with real intent and with faith and with careful prayer, we may come to wrong conclusions. Listening to others can provide correction.”

**Conclusion**

We are to teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Sometimes we are teachers; sometimes we are students. At all times, we are learners, and often teachers learn more than pupils.

When Lehi tasted the fruit of the tree of life, he exclaimed that it was “most sweet, above all that I ever before tasted,” and he immediately desired that his “family should partake of it also” (1 Nephi 8:11–12). The tasting of the fruit and the sharing of it were equally desirable. Joseph Smith said, “Those who have tasted the benefit derived from a study of those works, will undoubtedly vie with each other in their zeal for sending them abroad throughout the world, that every son of Adam may enjoy the same privileges, and rejoice in the same truths.” Truly, learning and teaching are flip sides of a coin—they are the medium of exchange in the kingdom of God.

**Notes**

5. Bruce R. McConkie, A New Witness for the Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), xii.
The Whitmer log home was a house of refuge for Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in troubled times.
The Peter Whitmer Log Home: Cradle of Mormonism

LARRY C. PORTER

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Orson Pratt joined the Church on his birthday, September 19, 1830. He was baptized by his brother, Parley P. Pratt, in Old Canaan, Columbia County, New York. Orson came to see the Prophet Joseph Smith at the Peter Whitmer log home in western New York the following month of October and later reflected: “It was a very interesting period of my life, when but nineteen years of age, to visit the place where this Church was organized—the room of old father Whitmer—where the Lord spoke to His servant Joseph and others, as printed in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. In that same room a revelation, through the prophet Joseph, was given to me, November 4th, 1830, which is also printed [D&C 34]. That house will, no doubt, be celebrated for ages to come, as the one chosen by the Lord in which to make known the first elements of the organization of His Kingdom in the latter days.” Let’s review some key events surrounding the Whitmer home and the organizational meeting of the restored Church that occurred at that celebrated dwelling place.
The Whitmer Log Home

The Whitmer log home was a house of refuge for Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in troubled times. While yet in Harmony, Pennsylvania, they had been the recipients of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods at the hands of heavenly ministrants during the month of May 1829.² Their engagement in the translation of the Book of Mormon was well known locally and had long stirred the ire of the religious community. The Prophet spoke of “the spirit of persecution” that had already been “manifested in the neighborhood.” He further stated, “We had been threatened with being mobbed, from time to time, and this too by professors of religion.”³ One of the principal antagonists proved to be Emma Hale’s own uncle, Elder Nathaniel Lewis, a local preacher in the Methodist faith, who would later declare that “Joseph Smith Jr. is not a man of truth and veracity” and that “his general character in this part of the country, is that of an impostor, hypocrite and liar.”⁴ Mother Lucy Smith described just how serious the situation had become for her son when she affirmed that “an evil-designing people were seeking to take away his (Joseph’s) life, in order to prevent the work of God from going forth to the world.”⁵

Because of this desperate situation, Joseph and Oliver temporarily suspended their work of translating the Book of Mormon, instead seeking and obtaining sanctuary at the Peter Whitmer home in Fayette, New York. David Whitmer came down to Harmony and provided transportation back to the farm in late May. He reported that the translation process was begun anew at his father’s and “occupied about one month, that is from June 1st to July 1st, 1829,” the point of completion.⁶ The Prophet found “Mr[.] Whitmer’s family very anxious concerning the work, and very friendly towards ourselves.”⁷ David, John, and Peter Whitmer Jr. expressed their desire to know what duties the Lord had in store for them in the unfolding state of events. Joseph made inquiry through the Urim and Thummim, and these men became the recipients of a series of revelations giving them the requested guidance.⁸ The Whitmer log home became a temple of revelation and learning in that formative period.

Witnesses and Scribes

As the work proceeded, it was determined that three special witnesses of the plates would be chosen. Those identified by revelation—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris (D&C 17)—accompanied Joseph Smith
as they retired to a secluded location. David remembered that June day with some detail. He affirmed: “I was plowing in the field one morning and Joseph and Oliver came along with a revelation stating that I was to be one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon. I got over the fence and we went out into the woods near by, and sat down on a log and talked a while. We then kneeled down and Joseph prayed.” Being even more specific, he said that they went to a place “cleared of underbrush, at a point equally distant between two public highways.” This would suggest that they went out from the house in an easterly direction, placing them at a point bracketed between the intersection of the Aunkst Road to the south and the Miller Road on the east—the only “two public highways” immediately adjacent to the Whitmer farm. Here they viewed the golden plates and other artifacts as presented by the angel Moroni. David recalled “the voice of God spoke out of heaven saying that the Book was true and the translation correct.”

Mother and Father Smith were at the Whitmer home when the witnesses returned. Lucy said that Joseph exclaimed, “Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am; the Lord has now caused the plates to be shown to three more besides myself. They have seen an angel, who has testified to them and they will have to bear witness of the truth of what I have said.” Lucy explained that she and Joseph Sr. returned to Palmyra the following day as “a cheerful, happy company” and were followed a few days later by Joseph, Oliver, and the Whitmers. There the male members retired to a wooded place “where the family was in the habit of offering up their secret devotions to God.” It had been revealed to the Prophet that eight additional witnesses were also to bear record—Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith Sr., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel H. Smith. They were shown the golden plates as exhibited by Joseph (without the angel being present) and were allowed to handle them. The Whitmer and Smith families were indelibly linked to the unfolding of the Restoration: David Whitmer had become one of the Three Witnesses, and Christian, Jacob, Peter Jr., John, and Hiram Page, a brother-in-law, represented five of the Eight Witnesses.

Of interest is also the report, given in considerable detail, that yet another Whitmer family member, Mary Musselman Whitmer, was likewise a witness of the plates. Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith conducted an interview with David Whitmer in which he told them of his return trip from Harmony to Fayette in the spring of 1829 and of his mother’s experience with the angel and the plates. David explained:
When I was returning to Fayette with Joseph and Oliver all of us riding in the wagon, Oliver and I on an old fashioned wooden spring seat and Joseph behind us, while traveling in a clear open place, a very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon who saluted us with, “good morning, it is very warm,” at the same time wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation, and by a sign from Joseph I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said very pleasantly, “No, I am going to Cumorah.” This name was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant. We all gazed at him and at each other, and as I looked around enquiringly of Joseph the old man instantly disappeared, so that I did not see him again. . . . [I] remember that he had on his back a sort of knapsack with something in, shaped like a book. It was the messenger who had the plates, who had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony. Soon after our arrival home, I saw something which led me to the belief that the plates were placed or concealed in my father’s barn. I frankly asked Joseph if my supposition was right, and he told me it was. Sometime after this, my mother was going to milk the cows, when she was met out near the yard by the same old man (judging by her description of him) who said to her, “You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase of your toil, it is proper therefore that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened.” Thereupon he showed her the plates. My father and mother had a large family of their own, the addition to it therefore of Joseph his wife Emma and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother. And although she had never complained she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much, or at least she was perhaps beginning to feel so. This circumstance, however, completely removed all such feelings, and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities.13

In addition to this particular statement, David’s recorded testimony of the event was given a number of times, each consistently bearing witness of the essential elements that his mother had seen the angel and the plates.14 Andrew Jenson also reported an interview which he and Edward Stevenson conducted with John C. Whitmer, a grandson of Mary Musselman Whitmer and son of Jacob Whitmer, wherein John asserted, “I have heard my grandmother (Mary M. Whitmer) say on several occasions that she was shown the plates of the Book of Mormon by an holy angel, whom she always called Brother Nephi. (She undoubtedly refers to Moroni, the angel who had the plates in charge.)”15 Mary’s witness of this occasion was well known in the Whitmer family. Based on David Whitmer’s testimony, various historians have cited the event in context with the occurrences of that day.16 The Whitmers provided critical leadership and support to the infant Church. John Whitmer would be called as Church historian and recorder; David Whitmer later served as branch president in Jackson County at the Whitmer settlement; David also presided over the high councils in Clay and Caldwell
counties, while John served as his counselor; and Christian and Jacob became high councilors in Clay County. It was during the continuation of the translation in June 1829 that Joseph and Oliver retired to the chamber of Father and Mother Whitmer’s home and called upon the Lord for guidance relative to their exercise of the Melchizedek Priesthood keys which they had heretofore received on the Susquehanna, but which had been momentarily kept under restraint as they awaited the Lord’s command to organize. Joseph said that while they were in the attitude of fervent prayer,

The word of the Lord came unto us in the Chamber, commanding us, that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office, and that after having been thus ordained, we should proceed to ordain others to the same office, according as it should be made known unto us, from time to time, commanding us, that as soon as practicable we should call together all those who had already been baptized by us, to bless bread, and break it with them, also to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them doing all these things in the name of the Lord, but to defer our own ordination until we had called the Church together our brethren and had their sanction, and been accepted by them as their teachers, after which we were commanded to proceed to ordain each other and then call out such men as the spirit should dictate unto us, and ordain them, and then attend to the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost.

Though deferred for the present, that pronouncement would become the exact prototype or pattern which they would use to exercise their existing priesthood to officially organize the Church when commanded to do so on April 6, 1830. It is the writer’s belief that this revelation in the Whitmer chamber did not confer new priesthood powers by “voice command” that were necessary to organize the Church, but rather “the word of the Lord” outlined the steps which would be carried out by Joseph and Oliver and the other organizers when directed to do so some ten months later on April 6th. They already had the Melchizedek Priesthood and the keys of the apostleship which had previously been bestowed upon them by Peter, James, and John while yet on the Susquehanna. Hiram Page, son-in-law of Peter Whitmer Sr., would be present on the day of organization and later inform William E. McLellin that “Peter, James, and John” had come and bestowed the Holy Priesthood “before the 6th of April 1830.” Orson Pratt, who first met the Prophet at the Whitmer log home in October 1830, was familiar with the organizational process. He taught:
Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery sought after this higher authority, and the Lord
gave it to them, before the rise of the Church, sending to them Peter, James and
John. What for? To bestow upon them the Apostleship. . . . Now, who would be
better qualified to administer the sacred office of the Apostleship than the three
men who held it while they were here on the earth? It has to be a man who holds
authority in heaven that can bestow it here on the earth; and such men were Peter,
James and John, who restored that authority to earth in our day, by bestowing it
upon Joseph Smith. When this authority was restored, the Church was organized
on the 6th day of April 1830.

Printing of the Book of Mormon

With the translation of the Book of Mormon nearly finished, the necessity of
acquiring a copyright on the volume became more apparent. Here the initial
decision was made to acquire the copyright. An application was subsequently
submitted to Richard Ray Lansing, clerk of the Northern District Court,
who had his home and office in Utica, New York. Lansing entered the title
as a matter of record on June 11, 1829, and later forwarded the document to
the US Patent Office in Washington, DC.

The decision to make application to Egbert B. Grandin to print the Book
of Mormon originated at Fayette, but oversight of the printing process itself
soon moved to the Joseph Smith Sr. log home at Palmyra as a matter of conven-
ience. John H. Gilbert stated that E. B. Grandin began printing the book at
Palmyra about mid-August 1829. Martin Harris stood as surety for the pub-
lication under a mortgage agreement with Grandin dated August 25, 1829.
Joseph Smith remained in Palmyra through September 1829. Assured that
the details of publication had been arranged, he returned to Emma and his
Harmony homestead in Pennsylvania, where he corresponded with Oliver
and notified him that he had arrived home safely on October 4, 1829.

Persecution

While Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, and Martin Harris were shepherding
the printing of the Book of Mormon in Palmyra, they had to face a serious
boycott levied against its publication by sectarian members of that com-
munity. Lucy Smith said that the opposition had formed a committee that
resolved “never to purchase one of our books, when they should be printed.”
In this same period, the Whitmer log home became a bastion against sectar-
ian encroachment in Seneca County. Following publication of the Book of
Mormon, a boycott similar to that in Palmyra was organized in Seneca County
by the Reverend Diedrich Willers (1798–1883) of the German Reformed Church. This was the church to which members of the Whitmer family belonged before their conversion to Mormonism. Reverend Willers, who first entered his pastorship with the Christ Reformed Congregation at Bearytown (the hamlet of Fayette) in April 1821 and continued without interruption until January 1, 1882, was one of several ministers with whom the Whitmers worshipped during their sojourn in New York.26 His correspondence is on file at the Waterloo Historical Society.

Peter Whitmer Sr. had brought his family to Fayette from the Harrisburg–York, Pennsylvania, area in about 1809. The Whitmers had attended services at “Christ’s Church” in Bearytown, six miles distant, and also at the log house of worship, Zion’s Church, which stood just one and one-half miles south of the Whitmer home. It later burned to the ground on February 7, 1835, and was replaced with a two-story brick structure, the Jerusalem Church.27 Today no building remains on the site. Only an array of headstones with German names marks the place in the old churchyard. Reverend Willers called on Peter Whitmer Sr. at his home in June 1830 and attempted “to expose the clumsy deception”—all to no avail; Peter and his family remained resolute. An estimated one hundred converts had swelled the Mormon ranks in the area. Willers alerted his contemporaries in York to the situation: “Since last year all of the neighboring congregations [German Reformed and Lutheran] have been frequently and earnestly warned to beware of this so-called Golden Book and not to buy any. . . . Already in this region more have been sold than one would have expected, and the unbelieving and godless vermin have now gone to Pennsylvania in order to scatter their books among the public.”28

Willers further emphasized his concern by calling upon his fellow ministers to publish abroad a warning cry against the heretical doctrines being taught within the Book of Mormon, stating, “And so I am, your brother, commissioned by the Zion Congregation, imploring you to warn with utmost urgency the residents of the Union, wherever our Magazine of the Reformed Church is read, against these new doctrines and against the purchase of these books.”29 Reverend Willers gave unyielding service in the Reformed Church for over sixty years. During a succession of years he preached for eight German congregations—Christ Church in Bearytown (Fayette), Zion’s/Jerusalem Church in Fayette Township, Seneca in Seneca Falls, Lyons in Wayne County, Dansville in Livingston County, Scipio in Cayuga County, Lansing in Tompkins County, and Salmon Creek in Tompkins County.30 It is tempting
to criticize anyone who contends against the Prophet, not always considering a legion of good works done in the ministry and perhaps not empathizing with their earnest desires to protect the flock. Reverend Willers, however, is revered locally for his steadfastness and exceptional service to mankind. He is buried in the Burgh Cemetery on the Yellow Tavern Road, three miles southeast of the Whitmer home.

Announcement of the Plan to Organize the Church

The Prophet rode up to Palmyra from his Harmony home with Joseph Knight Sr. to be present for the public release of the Book of Mormon at the E. B. Grandin Book Store on March 26, 1830. Knight said, “When we was on our way he [Joseph] told me that there must be a Church formed But did not tell when.” Knight emphatically noted this circumstance a second time, saying, “I stayed a few Days [in Palmyra] wa[i]ting for some Books to be Bound. Joseph said there must Be a Church Built.” The anticipated organization occurred at the Peter Whitmer farm just eleven days after the release of the Book of Mormon on Main Street in Palmyra. Joseph Smith reported receiving a revelation prescribing the specific day of organization. In a preface to this revelation, he declared:

We still continued to bear testimony and preach to such as would hear as far as we had opportunity. And we made known also to those who had already been baptized, that we had received commandment to organize the Church (see D&C 20; see also D&C 21), and accordingly we met together, (being about 30 in number) besides a number who were believing—met with us on Tuesday the Sixth day of April in the year of our A.D. One thousand, Eight hundred thirty, and proceeded, as follows, at the house of the above mentioned Mr. Whitmer.

The six organizers were identified as Joseph Smith Jr., Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, Peter Whitmer Jr., Samuel H. Smith, and David Whitmer. Numbers of other persons were present on that occasion. In an interview with Edward Stevenson, David Whitmer stated, “On the 6th of April, 1830, 6 elders were at Peter Whitmer’s, David’s father’s 2 rooms were filled with members—about 20 from Colesville, 15 from Manchester Church and 20 from Father Whitmers. About 50 members & the 6 Elders were present.” The Whitmer households alone had fifteen people who either lived on the farm or nearby, verifying the statement that there were twenty who were “round about my father’s place.” Three of the fifteen were infants, however, and may not have
been numbered with those who crowded into the two rooms mentioned. There were certainly other children—if not from the Whitmer households, maybe from among the other attendees. Elizabeth Ann Whitmer, daughter of Peter Sr., was fourteen and undoubtedly attended. One individual, David Lewis, professed to be there, but he gave false testimony.35

**Day of Organization (April 6, 1830)**

The Church was organized on the designated day. Joseph Knight Sr. remembered that those in attendance “all kneeled down and prayed and Joseph gave them instructions how to build up the Church and exorted them to be faithful in all things for this is the work of God.”36 The Prophet himself gave the most comprehensive statement of that day’s extended proceedings:

Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our Heavenly Father and the brethren & Sisters having by unanimous vote, accepted us as &c> I proceeded to lay my hands upon Oliver Cowdery—and ordained him an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [this title is obviously inserted as the result of the later name change in 1838; see D&C 115], after which he ordained me also to the office of an Elder of said Church. We then took bread, blessed it, & brake it with them, also wine, blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present, to confirm them members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and that they might receive the Holy Ghost, when immediately the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the whole community us all in a miraculous manner <to a greater or less degree.> [Thirteen lines of strikethrough sentences occur at this point before continuing on with the corrected text.] ... We afterwards called out and ordained Several <some others> of the brethren to the respective offices of the Priesthood, according as the Spirit made manifest unto us. <Revelation> As may reasonably <be> expected, such scenes as these were calculated, to inspire our hearts with Joy unspeakable, at the same time that we felt ourselves almost over whelmed, with awe and reverence for that Almighty Being, by whose grace we had been called to be instrumental in bringing about for the Children of men, the enjoyment of such glorious blessings, as were now at this time poured out upon us. . . .

The Prophet concluded his concise recitation of the events occurring at the organizational meeting by stating:

After a considerable time spent in such <a> happy manner, we dismissed, with the pleasing knowledge, that we now individually were members of—and had been acknowledged of God, The organized Church of Jesus Christ, organized in accordance with commandments and revelations given by him to ourselves, in these last days; as well as according to the order of the Church of Christ, as found recorded in the New Testament.37
David Whitmer underscored the effort to incorporate their religious society according to the order of law, explaining additional developments necessitating that they do so:

The reason why we met on that day was this; the world had been telling us that we were not a regularly organized church, and we had no right to officiate in the ordinances of marriage, hold church property, etc., and that we should organize according to the laws of the land. On that account we met at my father’s house in Fayette, N.Y., on April 6, 1830, to attend to the matter of organizing according to the laws of the land.38

I believe that the particular “laws of the land” referred to by David Whitmer and prescribed organization “agreeable to the laws of our country” found in Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 have reference to an attempt on the part of the Prophet and the other organizers to meet the legal requirements enumerated by the New York State Legislature titled “An Act to provide for the Incorporation of Religious Societies,” and passed on April 5, 1813. The writer’s efforts to find the elusive document which may have been executed by the brethren on that occasion and references to the applicable sections of that law are summated herein.39

It would also be important for the reader to be aware and examine the legalities and merits of an alternative option to this 1813 act that was likewise available to the Church at that time. David Keith Stott has recently developed a thesis in which he proposes that Church leaders pursue the legalities of “an unincorporated religious society” at that time rather than later burdening themselves with certain encumbrances of an incorporated society.40

**Site of Missionary Activity and Conferences**

The Whitmer home became the immediate nerve center of an expanded missionary thrust following the organization. From there, Oliver Cowdery preached the first sermon of the new church just five days after April 6 and with marked success. Baptisms on that occasion include Hiram Page, Katharine Page, Christian Whitmer, Anne Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, & Elizabeth Whitmer. One week later, April 18, Joseph Smith asserted that the following persons were also baptized: Peter Whitmer Sr., Mary Whitmer, William Jolly, Elizabeth Jolly, Vincent Jolly, Richard B. [Ziba] Peterson, and Elizabeth Ann Whitmer—all by Oliver Cowdery.41 Numbers of the Jolly family lived just a matter of a few hundred yards southeast from the Whitmers at the crossroads of the Aunkst and Miller Roads. That corner cluster was called “Jolly
Town.” In the latter part of April 1830, Joseph, David, and Oliver journeyed to Colesville, New York, where the extended family of Joseph Knight Sr. was very successfully proselytized. Samuel Smith, brother of the Prophet, was directed to go down the Livonia turnpike with a knapsack filled with copies of the Book of Mormon. In this effort he performed a succession of three missions, which took him into Ontario, Monroe, and Livingston Counties.42

The first conference of the new organization took place at the Whitmer home on June 9, 1830. The Articles and Covenants (D&C 20) were read and received “by unanimous voice of the whole congregation.” Ordinations were performed and licenses received.

Peter Whitmer’s Fayette log home again became a place of refuge for the Prophet Joseph and Emma in August 1830. Nathaniel Lewis, “a man of the Methodist persuasion, who professed to be a minister of God,” once again created a climate of persecution. The mob at Harmony stepped up their threats and imprecations against the Smith household. Joseph reported, “Mr Whitmer having heard of the persecutions which had been got up against us at Harmony, Penn, had invited <us> to go and live with him.” Newel Knight brought his wagon from Colesville and drove them to Fayette.43

The second conference of the Church was also held at the farm on September 26, 1830. In the order of business, there was “singing and prayer
in behalf of Br. Oliver Cowdery & Peter Whitmer Jr., who were previously appointed to go to the Lamanites." Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson, in an October revelation, were also called to accompany Oliver and Peter (D&C 32).

As a direct result of the labors of those missionaries, while passing through the greater Kirtland, Ohio area, Sidney Rigdon of Mentor and Edward Partridge of Painesville determined to travel to western New York to meet the Prophet. Sidney had already been baptized, but Edward came as an investigator. They arrived at the home of Joseph Smith Sr. in Seneca Falls Township at a small unincorporated settlement known as “The Kingdom,” December 10, 1830. The Prophet was there at his parent’s home on the Seneca River, addressing an assembly of family members and friends. After hearing Joseph’s discourse, Partridge was touched by the Spirit and asked for immediate baptism. As it was late, the Prophet suggested they wait until the next day. On December 11, they waded into the freezing waters of the Seneca River, and Joseph immersed the future bishop of the Church.

By revelation the Lord called Sidney Rigdon as scribe for Joseph in making a translation of the Bible (see D&C 35:20–21). A revelation commanded the members of the New York church to assemble in Ohio (D&C 37). Then a revelation instructed Joseph and Sidney to preach the gospel and strengthen the Church before their departure. They preached to the Saints of Broome and Chenango Counties. Emily Coburn said that Rigdon’s sermons were “acknowledged by all to be the best ever preached in that vicinity.” Rigdon preached in the Young Men’s Association room in Thayer and Grandin’s Exchange Row on East Main Street Palmyra. He also sermonized at the courthouse in Canandaigua and at the home of Ezra Thayer just outside of Canandaigua. Addresses were given to the public and Saints alike at Fayette, and Rigdon preached at the courthouse in Waterloo just before his departure for Ohio on January 24, 1831. They actively carried out the revelation to the letter.

The third and last conference of the Church at the Whitmer farm took place on January 2, 1831. There the Saints collectively heard the first call to gather in this dispensation: “Go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:32). In keeping with the commandments received, Joseph and Emma left the Whitmer log home in the latter part of January and proceeded to Kirtland in a sleigh driven by Joseph Knight Sr., arriving at the Newel K. Whitney store about February 1 [on February 4], 1831.
**Departure from the Home**

Whitmer family members bade good-bye to their Fayette log homestead on May 3–4, 1831. They congregated with others of the Fayette Branch near the Joseph Smith Sr. home on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal (Seneca River) in Seneca Falls Township. Some eighty in number, under the direction of Lucy Mack Smith, boarded a canal boat for a series of water passages to Kirtland, Ohio. Traveling east to Cayuga Bridge on the Cayuga-Seneca Canal, they sailed north by that same canal through the Montezuma Swamp, where they connected with the Erie Canal. Journeying west to Buffalo on “Clinton's Big Ditch,” the company was momentarily delayed by ice in Buffalo Harbor. While waiting for clearance, they boarded the steamboat *Niagara* commanded by a Captain Blake. In what is described as a miracle, they were suddenly able to clear the harbor on May 8, 1831.50 Sailing on Lake Erie, the company unexpectedly encountered a severe storm and had to put in at a Canadian port. When the waters settled, they sailed across Erie to the American side and made their way west to Fairport Harbor, Ohio. It was then just ten miles to Kirtland by wagon. The waterways had served them well.

**Modern-Day Site Location and Reconstruction of House**

In 1969, Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve and Elder Marion D. Hanks, Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, were working closely with the Church Information Service to direct an extensive examination of the buildings on the Peter Whitmer Sr. farm. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying the precise location of the Whitmer log home and the architectural dimensions of its construction as far as they could be determined. The project was assisted by persons with expertise in the fields of history, archaeology, and architecture.51

Richard Lloyd Anderson, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, was asked by Elder Hanks to make a thorough historical survey, paying special attention to the exact placement of the Whitmer home in the critical period of the Restoration, 1829–30. This knowledge was pertinent to a reliable historical account being delivered by the missionaries to visitors at the John Deshler home, which served as the visitors’ center at that time. Likewise, it was important for the projected development of physical facilities at the site in the future. The Brethren held a perceptive view of the years ahead and the preservation for future generations of the place where all
the elements of the organization of the restored Church came together on April 6, 1830.

Dr. Anderson had amassed extensive files on the Whitmer family, and had written and lectured on their experience. His collective works were an indispensable resource for the project. Being familiar with my graduate program and forthcoming study of Mormon origins on site in New York, Richard Anderson suggested to Elder Hanks that I be added to the team as a field representative on the ground in Seneca County. Elder Hanks was most agreeable and went out of his way to secure the use of the existing cobblestone home on the Martin Harris farm in Palmyra for the use of the Porter family, 1969–70.

Before I went east, Dr. Anderson and I conducted interviews of persons who had spent significant time on the Whitmer farm, either as tenant farmers or missionaries. We interviewed Mildred Hall and her husband, Wilford A. Hall, who were missionaries at the farm in 1958 and 1959. They had taken a particular interest in its history. I also interviewed Owen T. Howard, caretaker from 1941 to 1946, and William Lee Powell, tenant farmer from 1946 to 1952. Dr. Anderson and I likewise interviewed historian Carter E. Grant, who had previously made a personal examination of the site of the Whitmer log home.52

When my family and I arrived in Palmyra, we occupied the 1849 washed lakeshore cobblestone home of William Chapman. The one-and-one-half-story white frame home built by Martin Harris had burned down in 1849, and the two-story cobblestone was raised by Chapman during 1849–50. The Chapmans stayed in an adjacent corncrib while their home was being built.53 This later home had often been mistakenly cast as the actual home of Martin Harris.

The basic plan of Elder Hanks and Dr. Anderson was to secure the needed documentation on the exact site of the Whitmer home and then bring in an archaeological crew from Brigham Young University to verify the historical findings. A man by the name of John Deshler occupied the farm as shown in a May 16, 1831, indenture. Years later there were those who strongly advocated that the existing Deshler home—an L-shaped, Greek Revival structure—was merely the old Whitmer log home, sided over and expanded from the story and one-half core. In 1969, the Church decided to extend a new wing that would run east from the center of the old Deshler home. It was to contain a diorama depicting the day of organization of the Church, complete with six mannequins surrounding a table. At the farm Clyde Larsen, the Church contractor who built the extension, said that he began the expansion of the east
wing by cutting out two windows from the east wall of the central structure and making them into doors. Brother Larsen affirmed that there were no logs inside the walls. Instead, they were constructed of sawed lumber with a lath and plaster facing. The building was all frame construction. Further investigation showed that the home was actually built between 1845 and 1850.

To assist us in our search for the exact location of the Whitmer log home, we were materially aided by onsite interviews with persons familiar with the farm. Elder Hanks and Dr. Anderson arranged for William Lee Powell of Roy, Utah, to fly into the airport at Rochester. He had been the tenant farmer on the Whitmer acreage from May 1, 1946, to November 1, 1952. On September 2, 1969, Dr. Dale L. Berge of the BYU Anthropology Department (who had just come from a dig at Nauvoo for Nauvoo Restoration, Inc.), along with Robert Stevens, president of the Cumorah Mission, and I met Brother Powell at the Whitmer farm. Brother Powell explained that as he and his sons were harvesting their hay and pushing it with bull rakes down a south lane from the north field, they would then swing east through the double doors of the barn and deposit their load. After a couple of seasons of haying, they began to uncover a rectangular trough in the earth that had once been used to hold a laid-rock foundation for a dwelling on the west side of the barn. Brother Powell got his tape measure and found the rectangle to be twenty feet by thirty feet. He realized the implications of their discovery as John D. Giles, editor of the *Improvement Era*, had visited the farm and pointed out to him the same site. Giles thought it to be the spot where the Whitmer home stood. He in turn had received his information from Elder Rulon S. Wells of the Seventy, who took Brother Giles to the Whitmer farm and explained to him that in 1907 he, Wells, had visited the site and that some of the logs from the Whitmer home were still visible at that same place. Brother Powell told visiting authorities and others of his find and even wrote Salt Lake, but nothing came of it.

Since the foundation stones were in the way of their farming operation, Powell finally gathered up those that were visible and deposited them in a pile to the north. As time went by, other farmers plowed over the remaining site and the stones were largely lost to view, as were the stones piled to the north. Fortunately, however, Brother Powell had taken a careful measurement from the barn doors to the foundation at that time. Though the large barn had since been torn down, Powell was able to reconstruct the location of the double doors from the base of the old silo, which still remained where
the northwest corner of the barn had been. Ascertaining the placement of
the doors further south, he then measured out thirty-two feet to the west and
said to Dale, President Stevens, and me, “This is the spot where the founda-
tion was found.” The corners of the twenty-by-thirty-foot log home were then
roughly calculated, leaving their exact location to be defined by the dig itself.

Dr. Berge had brought his digging crew with him from Nauvoo—John
Call, BYU archaeology student, and William K. Johnson, a volunteer from
Weber State College, Ogden, Utah. On September 3, 1969, they dug a test
trench that looked promising. Then they established their base point, staked
out plots, and began their excavating. The artifacts were right there. The
results of their dig have been meticulously recorded by Dr. Berge. This time
when the remaining stones from the foundation troughs were removed, each
was placed in a pile. When the excavating was completed, a hole was dug by
a backhoe operated by Clyde Larsen. The stones were then buried so they
would not get away again. Ten years later someone from the church called
me and asked, “Where did you bury those stones?” It was 1979 or 1980, and
the Church was reconstructing the Whitmer log home in 1979–80. I told
the caller, “Dig four feet ESE of the SE corner post of the archaeological dig.”
Some few of the stones were then cemented into the foundation of the new
The Peter Whitmer Log Home: Cradle of Mormonism

home. So there is a touch of the old in the construction. As a last gesture, Clyde Larsen was invited to put in four metal posts, painted red, to mark the defined corners of the log home.

The project directors had determined the importance of having an architect visit Seneca County with an eye toward producing plans for the construction of a log home from the 1820s. In the latter part of September 1969, Steven Baird, a historical architect for Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., was directed to join Dale Berge and me in New York. John Genung, historian for the Waterloo Library and Historical Society, was familiar with the existence of the oldest log house still standing in Seneca County—the 1836 Tillinghast log home in Romulus Township. Mr. Genung made arrangements with Mrs. Tillinghast to see the place, and on September 22, 1969, we all accompanied him to the site. Providentially the building was still intact (winter snows would soon cave the roof in, however). This was a beautiful, split-garret log house with all the right features intact. Steve Baird was in his element as he took innumerable measurements and photographs from top to bottom of the one-and-one-half story structure. His calculations would prove invaluable down the line as a prototype of a reconstructed log home.

Another important follow-up interview was arranged by Dr. Anderson in April 1970. He invited Samuel L. Ferguson of Shiprock, New Mexico, to meet with me at the Whitmer farm. Brother Ferguson had been the Palmyra Branch president in 1928. Our connecting at the farm now put in motion

Samuel Ferguson identifies the original homesite.
a most valuable oral history link in identifying the precise location of the log home. Standing on site, Brother Ferguson explained to me a unique sequence of events. He said that on February 12, 1928, Andrew Jenson, assistant Church historian, had come out from Utah to visit the Whitmer farm. Brother Jenson had invited both Willard W. Bean and himself to accompany him to Fayette.

At the farm Brother Jenson explained to Brothers Ferguson and Bean that on October 2, 1888, he had previously been at that site with Edward Stevenson and Joseph S. Black of Utah. There they met Chester Reed, who had leased the farm. Chester had been born in Fayette in 1836. His father, John Reed, was a resident of Fayette for seventy-five years. Chester grew up with a tradition of “the Mormon farm.” His father had shown him the location of the Whitmer home, still marked by the vestige of the old log house. The exact location of the home was distinctly pointed out by Chester Reed to Jenson and his companions on that occasion in 1888. Brother Jenson in turn pointed out the spot to Brothers Ferguson and Bean in February 1928. Now, to complete the link, on April 20, 1970, the oral affirmation of past years was again reiterated for the writer’s benefit as Brother Ferguson repeated Andrew Jenson’s declaration of 1928 to me.

In April 1970, Dale Berge notified me that he had been directed to dig the old well that was situated between the site of the log house and the Deshler home at the Whitmer farm. He was bringing with him Dr. Ray T. Matheny of the Anthropology Department at BYU. He requested that I make inquiries concerning a rental of a pickup truck, a water pump, and the availability of a steel conduit to put down the well for safety’s sake. At the farm they pumped the groundwater out of the well and lowered the metal conduit to secure the laid-rock curbing. They then placed a ladder through the middle of the cylinder and were able to descend to the bottom. Sadly their screening did not produce the artifacts that they had hoped. The well was comparatively clean.

Ten years later, 1980, some of the preliminaries respecting the Whitmer log home were therefore already in place for the sesquicentennial celebration—the 150th anniversary of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ on April 6. In anticipation of that day, the Brethren caused some major changes to be made at the farm during 1979–80. The Deshler home was moved over against the east property line for missionary quarters. A beautiful colonial style meeting house and visitors center was constructed where the Deshler home had stood. And to the west, on the designated site of the old
Whitmer house, a carefully crafted log home was reconstructed by historical architects. Materials from three old log homes, retrieved from Seneca County farms, were used as the primary base for the structure.

On April 6, 1980, President N. Eldon Tanner opened the 150th annual conference of the Church in the Mormon Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. Then, by satellite transmission, the conference audience joined President Spencer W. Kimball as he stood at a pulpit in the reconstructed Whitmer log home in Fayette, New York. Interestingly, the pulpit’s crown had been carried out to the site by Elder Eldred G. Smith, patriarch emeritus. It was Alvin Smith’s lap box (later inherited by Hyrum Smith) in which the golden plates had once been placed. In President Kimball’s opening remarks, he stated:

We are here, this lovely Easter morning, in the reconstructed farmhouse of Peter Whitmer, Sr. It has been faithfully restored for this occasion to bring to us anew the recollection of the all-important and significant event which occurred here a century and a half ago. In the years to come, it will be visited by good people from over the earth who will wish to stand where I stand today. . . . Standing here today we review in our minds the mighty faith and works of those who, from this humble beginning, gave so much to help move the Church to its present wondrous stature; and more importantly, we behold through the eye of faith a vision of its sure and glorious future.
President Kimball and his company then left the Whitmer log home and moved to the beautiful colonial-style Fayette Branch chapel adjoining it. There President Kimball dedicated the log home, the chapel and attached visitors’ center, and the Deshler home, which had been renovated as a missionary residence.

In conclusion, may I share an interesting dichotomy of aspirations relative to the future of the restored Church as pronounced by two contemporary figures familiar with the 1830 organization. The first, Reverend Diedrich Willers, penned his wishes for the early demise of Mormonism to his “Reverend Brethren” of York, Pennsylvania, as he waxed philosophical in June 1830: “By itself this new sect may not astound the Christian Church. The past centuries have also had their religious monstrosities, but where are they now? Where are the sects of Nicolaites, Ebionites, Nasoreans, Montanites, Paulicians, and such others, which the Christian churches call fables. They have dissolved into the ocean of the past and have been given the stamp of oblivion. The Mormonites, and hopefully soon, will also share that fate.”

Conversely, the second figure, Sidney Rigdon, reflected back on his December 1830 visit to the Whitmer farm with a positive prediction of the future expansion of Mormonism during an anniversary sermon to the Saints assembled in Nauvoo, April 6, 1844: “I recollect in the year 1830, I met the
whole church of Christ in a little old log house about 20 feet square, near Waterloo, N. Y. and we began to talk about the Kingdom of God as if we had the world at our command; we talked with great confidence, and talked big things, although we were not many people, we had big feelings; we knew fourteen years ago that the church would become as large as it is today . . . we saw in vision, the church of God, a thousand times larger.” 57 Both Reverend Willers and President Rigdon would be astounded at how the Church of Christ has grown and will continue to grow, for “the God of heaven [has] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people . . . it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:32). RE

Notes
1. Orson Pratt, in Journal of Discourses (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 1:288; Orson remembered that the Prophet’s revelation to him, D&C 34, was given in the “chamber of old Father Whitmer,” and that John Whitmer was the scribe. See Journal of Discourses 17 (February 7, 1875): 290.
2. For a detailed examination of the dating of these priesthoods, see Larry C. Porter, “The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods,” Ensign, December 1996, 30–47.
4. Susquehanna Register, May 1, 1834, 1.
5. Lucy Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 135.
7. Autobiographical and Historical Writings, 234.
8. Autobiographical and Historical Writings, 234–35; see D&C 14, 15, 16. These three revelations became the first of some twenty which were received at the Whitmer farm and later recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants.
9. Saints’ Herald, March 1, 1882, 68.
10. Chicago Tribune, December 17, 1885, 3.
11. Saints’ Herald, March 1, 1882, 68; Kansas City Daily Journal (June 5, 1881): 1; It should be noted that Martin Harris had withdrawn himself from the others previous to the initial appearance of Moroni and was later joined by the Prophet for a separate experience with the angel; see History of the Church, 1:54–55.
12. Smith, Biographical Sketches, 139–41.
not to have included the event in his writings. However, David Whitmer does recite in detail Joseph’s reactions at the time of the encounter with the “Messenger who had the plates” while en route from Harmony to Fayette, and also recounts Joseph Smith’s confirmation to him that the plates born by the messenger had been concealed in the barn. See “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” Deseret Evening News, November 16, 1878, 1.


18. Autobiographical and Historical Writings, 238–39.


20. Orson Pratt in Journal of Discourse, 16:294–95; Brigham Young also recognized the necessity of the bestowal of the higher priesthood by these ancient apostles prior to the organization when he declared, “I know that Joseph received his Apostleship from Peter, James, and John, before a revelation on the subject was printed, and he never had a right to organize a Church before he was an Apostle,” in Journal of Discourse, 1:137. For further substantiation of the sequence followed in the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the Apostleship to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery before the organization of the Church, see Larry C. Porter, “The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods,” Ensign, December 1996, 30–47.


24. Joseph Smith, Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Oliver Cowdery, Palmyra, New York, October 22, 1839, Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, 9, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

25. Smith, Biographical Sketches, 150.


29. Quinn, “First Months of Mormonism,” 331–32.


32. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 241–42.

33. Joseph Knight [Jr.] Papers, Church History Library. These are the generally accepted names; however, there are various listings, as discussed by Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Who are the six who organized the Church on April 6, 1830?,” *Ensign*, June 1980, 44–45.

34. “Journal of Edward Stevenson,” January 2, 1887, microfilm copy, Church History Library; some fourteen persons who were in attendance can readily be documented by name. The writer once pieced together a pool of seventy-three names of persons who had demonstrated a developing interest in Mormonism and might have chosen to be present for the proceedings of that day; however, they need to be proved out. See Larry C. Porter, “Organizational Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ, 6 April 1830,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: New York*, ed. Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman Jr., and Susan Easton Black (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1992), 154–55.

35. Care needs to be exercised in identifying known or potential participants. At least one person was a spurious claimant to having been there on the day of organization. A man by the name of David Lewis reported that he was present on that day as an eleven-year-old boy from a neighboring farm. He gave a deposition to Andrew Jenson, assistant Church historian, and others on September 10, 1908, in which he described in detail that signal moment right down to the Prophet’s white shirt with a two-inch ruffle in front and his declaration to those assembled, “Come let us organize the Church.” His recollection of whole conversations and experiences which he had with Joseph over a period of time was exciting. Then I read a marginal note penned later and signed by Andrew Jenson. It read, “This statement was afterwards proven to be untrue. [Signed] Andrew Jenson.” See *Testimony of David Lewis*, Historian’s Office, September 10, 1908, dictated to Andrew Jenson and others, in Church History Library. The reader should be warned that the Lewis account was printed as being factual in a Church publication, “Challenge to Greatness: The Nineteenth-Century Saints in New York,” *Ensign*, September 1978, 26. I looked up the genealogy of David Lewis and found that he had not been born on May 5, 1818, as claimed, but rather on May 5, 1831.


37. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 242–44.

38. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 32–33.

39. Recognizing that there had apparently been a concerted effort on the part of the Prophet and the brethren to meet the requirements of incorporation according to the laws of the state of New York as specified in the 1813 act, I decided to make a serious attempt to find the document if it could be found. Truman G. Madsen, director of the Institute of Mormon Studies, introduced me to the work of George H. Mortimer. President Mortimer was a regional representative of the Twelve for a region covering western New York and Portions of Pennsylvania and Canada. He was an attorney in New York City and among the host of researchers who have unsuccessfully attempted to locate the missing incorporation document across the years. He informed Truman of his having spent considerable time, particularly in the summer of 1959 searching for that document. President Mortimer graciously shared his data and explained the law under which the Church would have been legalized, “An Act to provide for the Incorporation of Religious Societies,” passed by the New York State Legislature on April 5, 1813. This act stipulated that certificates of incorporation be recorded within the county and entered at that level by the clerk of said county.
President Mortimer had carefully examined the legal statutes bearing on the subject from 1813 to 1830 to see if there were any intervening amendments bearing on the original law which would have affected the 1830 incorporation and had found none. He provided a copy of his survey of the “New York Laws on Religious Corporations” from the earliest general law to the time of the organization of the Church. He also digested the cardinal points of the law as they pertain specifically to section III. Of immediate interest was the required number of trustees. The law provided that there should be no less than three or more than nine trustees elected. It appears that the Prophet Joseph Smith arbitrarily selected six individuals to assist in meeting the requirements of the law though he could have varied the number. Under the law, those involved in the voting were to be male members of the church or congregation of full age, that is, twenty-one years old. After retracing the steps of his search, President Mortimer wished me well.

My friend John S. Genung, a local businessman and a trustee and historian of the Waterloo Library and Historical Society, introduced me to Thomas B. Masten Jr., Seneca County clerk at Waterloo. Mr. Masten gave me unlimited access to the materials deposited in his office—“Miscellaneous Record Books A and B”—containing church incorporation records for this early period, and also allowed me to examine the court records in his underground vault item by item. Because Seneca County is a two-shire county (this occurs when the county court is held in two towns in the same county on an alternating basis, i.e., Waterloo and Ovid), John Genung also made arrangements for me to go to Ovid, New York, and meet with undersheriff Gerald B. Brewer at the courthouse in that southern community. There Mr. Brewer allowed me to check the records in his keeping—without success. Just on an outside chance, Mr. Genung also took me to meet Thelma I. Sission, Fayette town clerk, who permitted me to carefully scrutinize every item in the Fayette town vault, but to no avail. Under the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Church remained in New York for some nine months before the exodus to Kirtland, Ohio. To date, the incorporation document, if ever filed, has not been found. There are a range of explanations and possibilities extant under the extenuating circumstances of that day. For further discussion of the day of organization and applicable sections of the 1813 act, see Larry C. Porter, “A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816–1831” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1971), 243–253, 374–86.


41. Autobiographical and Historical Writings, 244.


43. Autobiographical and Historical Writings, 322.


45. Mother Lucy Smith identifies their Seneca County home as being in “Waterloo” but in reality the home was situated in Seneca Falls Township at an unincorporated community called “The Kingdom,” about midway between Waterloo and Seneca Falls. The home was situated on the north side of the Seneca River. Lucy mentions her landlord was a “Mr. Kellog”
and neighbors, “Mr. Osgood and Mr. Hooper, a tavern keeper,” all heads of families at the
Kingdom. Lucy arrived from Palmyra with her family during the period of incarceration of
her husband, Joseph Smith Sr., at the Canandaigua Jail, for indebtedness. This was apparently
between October 7 and November 5, 1830. See Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 167–68; Porter,

46. B. H. Roberts sets the date of the Partridge baptism as December 11, 1830. See
*History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 1st ed. (Salt Lake
City: Deseret News, 1902), 129n.; however, the circumstances and dating of the event may
require an additional assessment. What is now the present day revelation designated as
D&C 35 to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon has recently been dated as December 7, 1830,
and D&C 36 to Edward Partridge now dated December 9, 1830. See Joseph Smith, *The Joseph
Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books*, Facsimile Edition,
Ed. Robert Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper (Salt Lake City: Church
Historian’s Press, 2009), 63–69. The dating of these two documents indicates the arrival of
Rigdon and Partridge in Seneca County in advance of that previously supposed and the need
for further investigation into the occasion of their visit to the Smith home on the Seneca River.

47. Emily M. Austin, *Mormonism; or Life Among the Mormons* (Madison, WI: M. J.
Cantwell Book and Job Printer, 1882), 37.


49. *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, 346–47. The specific date of the Prophet’s
arrival in Kirtland has been identified as February 4, 1831 in Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken,
O Ye People: The Historical Setting for Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg
Kofford Books, 2009), 96–97; Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon
History,” 38.

50. Porter, “Study of the Origins,” 311–21; The actual date of departure from Buffalo
was May 8, 1831, see “Opening of Navigation,” *Buffalo Journal & General Advertiser*, May 11,
1831, p. 2, col. 3; the crossing of Lake Erie to Fairport, Ohio, is described by Katharine Smith,
see “Fountain Green, Ill., May 16th,” in *Saints’ Herald*, Lamoni, Iowa, July 3, 1886, 404–5.


52. Carter E. Grant, “Peter Whitmer’s Log House,” *Improvement Era*, May 1959, 349,

1930), 206–7.

54. Personal interview with Clyde Larsen, Peter Whitmer Sr. farm, Fayette, New York,


56. Quinn, “First Months of Mormonism,” 331.

57. *Times and Seasons*, May 1, 1844, 522.
Nephi was shown the Savior's birth in response to his admission that he “[did] not know the meaning of all things.”
This is an exciting time to be an educator. Innovations in visual media technology give us instructional options completely unknown to our predecessors of even a generation ago. With little effort we can easily find professional, high-quality media addressing practically any subject we desire to teach. This is true not only for traditional media forms such as images and video but also for more immersive media, such as digital simulations or interactive exhibits. Additionally, the costs of cameras, computers, and other media development technology have dramatically decreased, while the quality those tools provide has consistently increased. This means that many teachers have started to produce visual media themselves, allowing them to better tailor learning experiences to their students’ needs.

However, some religious educators have questioned how much value media actually has in the educational environment. Many are aware of President Boyd K. Packer’s caution, “Visual aids in a class can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how they are used.”¹ A particular worry might be that teachers cannot give their instruction a warm, personal touch if they rely too much on media supplements. And, as secular media has become more

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**Scriptural Principles for Visual Media**

JASON K. MCDONALD AND DAVID C. NIELSON

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degrading, others have genuinely wondered if any media use is even worth the effort.

But assuming the Lord inspires technological progress for his purposes, it seems there should be legitimate ways to use visual media during religious instruction. Further, we can have faith that the Lord is willing to teach us how. As Elder L. Tom Perry reminded us, “We should not underestimate the Lord’s power and his willingness to bless our lives if we ask with a sincere heart and real intent. He has instructional designs and learning theories that the world’s educational psychologists haven’t even imagined yet.” In this spirit, then, we ask, what would be the Lord’s designs for visual media, including media used to teach the gospel? How can we take advantage of new media techniques and technologies while still remaining in close harmony with the Lord’s will?

We propose that insights can be found in the scriptures: for example, the Lord often teaches through visions, dreams, and other heavenly manifestations. Visionary encounters are sensory experiences—as is watching or interacting with visual media. While there are certainly differences between visionary phenomena and visual media, our investigation has also identified intriguing similarities. Understanding these parallels might help us apply scriptural patterns when designing or using our own media for instructional purposes. By so suggesting, we are mindful of Elder Richard G. Scott’s advice, which we believe applies to using the scriptures for professional guidance as much as it does to learning gospel truths: “As you seek spiritual knowledge, search for principles. Carefully separate them from the detail used to explain them. Principles are concentrated truth, packaged for application to a wide variety of circumstances. A true principle makes decisions clear even under the most confusing and compelling circumstances.”

So what principles can we learn from the Lord’s use of visionary manifestations? And can we apply those principles to infuse media with the same spiritual energy that visions contain? In this paper we present two purposes and four characteristics we have learned from the scriptures addressing why and how the Lord teaches through visionary experiences. We also describe practical ways educators can select, use, or create visual media that are compatible with these purposes and characteristics. Our discussion is based on our close reading of the visions, dreams, and other divine manifestations recorded in the scriptures, as well as a few selected accounts of latter-day visionary experiences. We looked for similarities and differences between various accounts that help separate the principles applied from the context and circumstances...
of individual events. Throughout our discussion, we reference many of the examples we studied and encourage readers to decide for themselves how valuable these principles might be to their own work. We additionally hope readers will find value in the recommendations and conclusions that follow.

**Purposes**

The scriptures establish clear purposes for why the Lord teaches through visions and similar experiences. Two purposes we discovered in our study were, first, that visionary experiences prepare “the hearts of the children of men to receive [the Lord’s] word” (Alma 13:24), and second, that visionary experiences make the invisible visible, both to assist recipients in personal understanding and to aid them in teaching others. Understanding these purposes can help us determine under what circumstances we might choose visual media for instructional use, as well as help us choose what media forms (such as pictorial, photographic, motion picture, or interactive) are most appropriate for those circumstances.

*Preparing hearts.* When Alma taught the people of Ammonihah the purpose of angelic visions, he stated that they “[prepare] the hearts of the children of men to receive [the Lord’s] word” (Alma 13:24). It is significant that the term *heart* is used in this verse. The Lord wants us to be converted to his gospel, which implies such a transformation in our entire being that no other term—whether it describes gaining knowledge or improving attitudes and behavior—fully encompasses the magnitude of the change. To be converted, not only must we learn new information, but we must also be motivated, challenged, softened, comforted, persuaded, corrected, and strengthened. Visions and similar experiences, by their nature, prepare hearts in this inclusive way. Certainly the Lord is interested in using visions to explicitly teach people specific doctrines and principles. But it also appears that he uses their sensory character to show people aspects of his nature that transcend words alone, as well as to illustrate patterns of discipleship so recipients will better understand how to seek after, recognize, and rely on the more frequent inspiration received through the Holy Ghost. This is reminiscent of what Mormon taught Moroni, that angelic visits help people develop “faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts . . . ; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men” (Moroni 7:32).
An example may illustrate. While much of our common experience teaches us that seeing is believing, we know the Lord's way is often that believing leads to seeing, or, in other words, “spiritual belief precedes spiritual knowledge.” One classic scriptural passage teaching this pattern is Ether 12:6, where Moroni concluded that we “receive no witness until after the trial of [our] faith.” Yet Moroni did not simply assert this reality without support. In the next verse he recalled the Savior’s visit to the Nephites as illustration of the truth just taught: “It was by faith that Christ showed himself unto our fathers, after he had risen from the dead; and he showed not himself unto them until after they had faith in him” (Ether 12:7). The same pattern is also illustrated early in the Book of Mormon, where after Nephi asserted his faith in what his father had seen in dream, “the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: . . . blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired” (1 Nephi 11:6). Readers pondering these examples can draw on the noticeable, clear, and tangible nature of the scriptural accounts as inspiration for applying the same pattern in the quiet, more intangible forms of spiritual knowledge gained through other, more common situations.

Visual media, as do visionary experiences, also create powerful conditions to help prepare peoples’ hearts. Conversion is more than only acquiring new knowledge; consequently, we recommend that educators use visual media for more than simply communicating facts and information. Even more conventional instructional goals (such as for students to recognize or explain a gospel doctrine) can be transformed when educators see these outcomes first as tools that promote conversion and use media consistent with that broader purpose. For example, we can use media to demonstrate patterns of discipleship by featuring people who have faith in a variety of realistic circumstances or who patiently endure suffering and hardship. Similarly, the careful use of media can prepare hearts for conversion when it shows the force that gospel doctrines have in people’s lives. Media can also help prepare people’s hearts to trust the Lord by revealing his nature through examples of how he is involved in real people’s lives. When teaching this way, educators take advantage of the full-sensory possibilities media bring to reach students beyond the intellect alone.

Additionally, educators ought not to feel they are wasting time if a media activity encourages the emotional elements of spiritual growth but is not necessarily associated with an informational objective. Preparing hearts implies
that we will spend instructional time pursuing affective outcomes that are meaningful for their own sake and not just when they support more familiar educational outcomes. It should be equally legitimate to use visual media when its primary purpose is to motivate, comfort, or persuade, since these forms of inspiration are so important to the conversion process. We also recommend that educators recognize that all characteristics of a media piece can contribute to preparing someone’s heart. For example, while a strong aesthetic quality (such as high production values in a film or appealing graphic design in interactive media) may seem superfluous in educational settings, we believe it is often these intangible characteristics that lead us to feel what we need to feel so that we may be fully converted. The memorable imagery, emotional resonance, and spiritual depth often found in great media might be better than other instructional methods (such as lecture or even discussion) at encouraging students to ponder and internalize a doctrinal message. We believe this is consistent with President Henry B. Eyring’s direction that “the pure gospel of Jesus Christ must go down into the hearts of students by the power of the Holy Ghost. . . . Our aim must be for them to become truly converted to the restored gospel.”

Making the invisible visible. The second purpose of visionary experiences is to make the invisible visible. In this way, visionary experiences function much the same as do other approaches to teaching gospel principles. As President Packer advised, “In teaching the gospel, we do not recreate the material world around us; we deal with the intangible world within us, and there is a big difference. None of the ordinary tools are available.” President Packer then reviewed time-honored techniques of teaching this “intangible world,” including stories, comparisons, and parables, concluding that “[such] illustrations . . . make the meaning of the lessons clear to people of all ages” because they act as “a stepping-stone to relate and interrelate [our] past experience . . . into larger, more meaningful, more inclusive learning patterns.”

All three of these techniques have analogues in visionary experiences. We see stories in examples such as the Spirit showing Nephi events from the Savior’s life to teach him about God’s love, reinforcing its reality as more than only abstract doctrine (see 1 Nephi 11:26–33). Comparisons can be seen in many symbolic visions, such as the Lord teaching Jeremiah about Judah’s coming destruction through the symbol of a seething pot (see Jeremiah 1:13–14) or teaching Amos about the judgment of Israel through the symbol of a plumb line (see Amos 7:7–9). We can imagine people encountering
objects seen in a vision during their everyday lives and remembering the truths underneath the symbols, both reinforcing the former instruction as well as encouraging further reflection. Even parables seem to have a visionary equivalent through more extended, symbolic manifestations such as Lehi’s vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8) or John’s visions throughout the book of Revelation. These encounters, combining features of both stories and comparisons, seem in part to help recipients interpret real-life events from the perspective of invisible gospel patterns. For example, while Lehi was certainly aware of Laman’s and Lemuel’s wayward natures before his vision, he began to fear more for their eternal destiny after seeing them fail to partake of the tree of life’s fruit (see 1 Nephi 8:35–37). And Nephí’s vision of the same symbolic imagery helped him make sense of the eventual destruction of his descendants (see 1 Nephi 12).

In similar fashion, visual media can also be used to make the invisible visible. This is perhaps one of the greatest strengths media brings to instruction, and we can find media-based examples of all three of the visualization approaches cited earlier (stories, comparisons, and parables). Stories told through visual media can illustrate the gospel in action, making real for students the applications of potentially abstract spiritual teachings. Media-based comparisons could include pictorial graphics or photographs that serve as observable analogies of divine principles. Even diagrams and simple drawings can be used to create visible representations of otherwise intangible gospel patterns. Finally, visual parables could combine features of both stories and comparisons, helping students interpret their own lives in context of gospel doctrines. For example, a film telling a parable-like story could illustrate a choice and its consequences in a figurative way, giving students strong visual imagery to reflect on, understand, and remember in time of need if they ever face a similar choice in their own lives.

Additionally, scriptural visions are often given for the express purpose of calling recipients to teach the gospel, in which cases the very forms of their visionary encounters become an important foundation for their visualizing intangible doctrines for others. As two examples, Ezekiel was told to “declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 40:4), and the Lord said to Abraham, “I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words” (Abraham 3:15). Perhaps after their visions, these prophets held before an audience the same objects they saw, teaching doctrine through a tangible representation. Or they might have brought the
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gospel to life for their listeners by retelling an event or story they witnessed in a dream. Or it could even be that the prophets used their visionary encounters as a memory aid while preaching, to help them recall doctrinal details the Lord would have them teach. While these illustrations are conjecture, they are easy to imagine when considering accounts such as Nephi’s using knowledge gained through his visions to teach Laman and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 15), Peter’s teaching the universality of the gospel message after being taught the same symbolically through vision (see Acts 10), or Joseph’s relying on the details of Pharaoh’s dream to warn Pharaoh about the upcoming seven years of famine (see Genesis 41).

Students can also be encouraged to use visual media as tools for making the invisible visible when sharing the gospel with others. Just like prophets can use imagery from their visions and dreams as a form of instructional aid when preaching, students can draw on media representations when discussing doctrines and principles in both formal and informal settings. Not only might students accurately remember important points to share by using media but they are likely to be more confident when they have powerful illustrations to augment their own explanations and testimonies. (Parenthetically, this could also help students better learn themselves what was originally taught.) When using media in their instruction, teachers can expressly discuss the possibility of students’ sharing the same piece with others. Individual media items can also encourage viewers to go forth and share what they have learned. For example, a film could conclude with a trusted character summarizing major themes and inviting further action. Or less formally, invitations to share could be built into the media more naturally, such as through enthusiastic stories of people sharing spiritual truths with others or examples of wise mentors who pass along what they have learned about the gospel to those they love.

Characteristics

The scriptures also contain characteristics that demonstrate how the Lord teaches through visions and similar experiences. We discovered four characteristics in our study: first, these visionary experiences are intimate, not distant; second, they are participatory, not passive; third, they create a sense of sacred awe; and fourth, they are spiritually demanding. Understanding these characteristics can help us determine how to design our own visual media, select already-created media suitable for our circumstances, or decide
whether a specific media form (such as pictorial, photographic, motion picture, or interactive) will be appropriate for an anticipated use.

**Intimate, not distant.** The first characteristic of visionary experiences is that they are intimate, not distant. By this we mean that heavenly messages seem to radiate warmth, concern, and compassion, not leading to informality but rather lifting recipients up to the divine position from which the vision originates. Unnecessary psychological or spiritual barriers, which could create a sense of detachment or separation, do not seem to be placed between heavenly manifestations and their recipients. Instead, even when a vision includes more than one participant, every element seems designed to emphasize that the Lord is personally aware of each person involved, that he reaches out to them with heartfelt care, and that he equally wants them to draw nearer to him. In this sense, visions seem to be a remarkable example of President Howard W. Hunter’s observation: “I have always been impressed that the Lord deals with us personally, individually. We do many things in groups in the Church, . . . but so many of the important things—the most important things—are done individually . . . as one person developing a relationship with our Father in Heaven.”

We can observe this in many reports of heavenly visitations. Notice the intimacy in the brother of Jared’s vision, in which, after asking the Lord to “prepare [the sixteen stones] that they may shine forth in darkness,” he saw “the Lord [stretch] forth his hand and [touch] the stones one by one with his finger” (Ether 3:4, 6). Or, while not the canonical version, another account of the First Vision increases our sense of that event’s intimacy by recording, “God touched [Joseph’s] eyes with his finger and said, ‘Joseph this is my beloved Son hear him.’ As soon as the Lord had touched his eyes with his finger he immediately saw the Savior.” Additionally, when the Savior visited the Nephites he invited them “one by one” to “feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet” (3 Nephi 11:15). And finally, in one of the most remarkable visions reported in scripture, we find an emotional tenderness and spiritual intimacy in Enoch’s account of the Lord’s grief and even tears over the sins of his children (see Moses 7:28).

We can similarly create this kind of intimacy in visual media, helping to replicate the one-on-one character that visionary experiences seem to have so even people in large groups feel that a message is meant “just for them.” We can remove elements that act as visual barriers or that create remote and distant points of view. For example, while speaking behind podiums and wearing
formal clothing may be appropriate in some circumstances, such as in filmed presentations of General Authorities, we should carefully consider this style before using it in other media since it can unintentionally lead people to disengage with the message. Additionally, our choice of language can make a difference. Specialized jargon, institutional terminology, and passive expressions typically increase emotional distance, while a friendly, conversational style enhances feelings of intimacy. Music can help by creating feelings of warmth and tenderness. And finally, when educators create their own visual media, or even when students create media, the local character of such pieces often has a personal, sincere, and authentic quality even if the production values are lower than what could be obtained through professional means.

Additionally, visions can show us how to increase intimacy in large-scale media presentations. For example, even manifestations of immense scenes and comprehensive detail still have an intimate quality, closing the spiritual distance between the encounter and its recipient. We note epic accounts such as Lehi’s vision of the tree of life, and we often imagine such visions unfolded as if the recipient were watching a film. Yet close readings of many visionary experiences indicate that they are less like watching a movie and more like being immersed in a virtual reality. We see this in telling details from Lehi’s record, such as that he “did go forth and partake of the fruit” (1 Nephi 8:11) directly from the tree, indicating that he was not watching the scene from a distance but was actually part of the action. Other visions include similar details, such as Moses’ vision of “the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold” (Moses 1:27). This verse suggests that Moses was not observing environments from an objective distance but was scrutinizing individual elements up close. And Ezekiel reported that he not only conversed with an angel measuring the dimensions of a visionary temple but also was close enough to what he was observing to document even small measures the angel made (see Ezekiel 40).

Visual media has analogous means of closing physical, emotional, and spiritual distance. The warmth of a video can be increased by showing frequent close-ups, especially shots of peoples’ eyes or smiles. Filmed demonstrations can similarly be given a more personal character by showing objects and events from a close perspective. As another example, interactive media can give students a more immersive, and therefore potentially more intimate, perspective on many gospel-related events, such as what it was like to cross the plains with the pioneers or to work with Christ’s Apostles in ancient
Israel. Yet even when interactive media is not applicable, the underlying principle of creating intimacy by showing an insider’s perspective is still valuable. Intimacy in visual media is less about explaining ideas objectively and unemotionally and more about illustrating gospel doctrines as lived experiences that meaningfully improve our relationships with each other and with the Lord.

*Participatory, not passive.* The second characteristic of visionary experiences is they are participatory, not passive. Heavenly manifestations seem to exemplify the principle expressed by Elder David A. Bednar: “We primarily are to act and not only to be acted upon—especially as we seek to obtain and apply spiritual knowledge. . . . Learning by faith requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception.” In the case of visions, this means we often observe recipients meaningfully engaging with the events in which they are immersed. Or, to use an analogy, the visions recorded in the scriptures do not seem to unfold according to strict lesson plans. A classic example is Nephi’s vision of the tree of life, in which both the Spirit of the Lord and an angel frequently asked Nephi questions, such as, “What beholdest thou?” or, “Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?” (1 Nephi 11:14, 21). Significantly, Nephi’s answers seemed in part to influence what additional events were revealed to him. For instance, Nephi was shown the Savior’s birth in response to his admission that he “[did] not know the meaning of all things” (1 Nephi 11:17). Similarly, Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1), Amos (see Amos 8), Zechariah (see Zechariah 4), and the brother of Jared (see Ether 3) were also questioned about what they saw in visions, with additional revelation being given to them after their replies.

Just as interesting is how often vision recipients are asked to meaningfully contribute to visionary events and not only watch, question, or comment on their experiences. In other words, rather than being idle spectators, vision recipients are often more like actors in a drama, intensely involved and sometimes even necessary to the action their visions portray. Enoch’s visions unfolded only after he obeyed the Lord’s command to “anoint thine eyes with clay, and wash them, and thou shalt see” (Moses 6:35). John the Revelator was given a book in a vision with the command to “eat it up” (Revelation 10:9), symbolically teaching him his mission to gather Israel (see D&C 77:14). Lehi’s vision similarly taught him about Jerusalem’s destruction through his active reading of a book the Savior gave him (see 1 Nephi 1:11–13). The Lord instructed Ezekiel to command the “dry bones [to] hear the word of the Lord . . . [and] live” (Ezekiel 37:4–5), which action on Ezekiel’s part brought about
the manifestation the Lord wanted Ezekiel to receive. And in another vision, Ezekiel was led by an angelic guide to wade in a river flowing out from under Jerusalem’s temple, where Ezekiel learned by his own actions that the water became deeper and stronger as it approached the Dead Sea (see Ezekiel 47).

Visual media can be equally participatory. Again, we cite the example of interactive media, which can both ask people questions as well as engage them in meaningful activities. However, the participation implied by visionary phenomena is more sophisticated than some interactive media that do little more than require people to advance a presentation to the next screen or to answer a multiple-choice question. Rather, the type of interactivity more analogous to visions would invite people to participate in an activity or scenario to the extent that they perform meaningful actions and observe the consequences of their choices. Frequently, this might immerse people in an interactive story, perhaps in the role of one of the main characters. For example, could one develop interactive media that let people take part in Lehi’s escape from Jerusalem, the building of the Nauvoo Temple, or the story of David and Goliath? Would examples such as these help people better learn important spiritual truths because they have invested their own efforts in extracting lessons from the events?

But visual media need not be interactive to be participatory. For example, while watching a film or a video sometimes has the reputation of being a passive experience, it only becomes so when what is being watched is simplistic and trivial. Although we admit this reputation is somewhat deserved, especially when one considers how much mindless programming can be found on television, watching a media production can still lead to great mental and spiritual participation even if it does not require physical participation. Great stories spark the imagination, encouraging viewers to vicariously explore the world through another’s eyes and ponder what they would do if they were faced with the same choices they see being made on the screen. Authentic stories can also prompt discussion among groups both small and large, often more meaningfully than when people are asked more objective, intellectual questions about doctrinal subjects. Finally, when people experience media that encourages this level of reflection and discussion, they often will also want to apply what they observe, patterning their lives after what they see not because the blessings have been explained to them theoretically but because they have felt the desirability of those blessings for themselves.
Sacred awe. The third characteristic of visionary experiences is that they create a sense of sacred awe, meaning visions cause people to feel astonishment, joy, humility, concern, wonder, and in some cases even shock or fear. Far from being dispassionate events, scriptural visions are meant to uplift, strengthen, and inspire people’s whole souls, not just their intellect. Accordingly, the Lord seems to use strong emotion to fully impress a spiritual message into the hearts and minds of vision recipients. For example, after Lehi’s initial visions, “[his] soul did rejoice, and [his] whole heart was filled, because of the things which [he] had seen, yea, which the Lord had shown unto [him]” (1 Nephi 1:15). Ezekiel’s vision of glorious beings and other marvelous phenomena caused him to “[fall] upon [his] face” (Ezekiel 1:28) in amazement. Both Moses’ (see Moses 1:9–10) and Joseph Smith’s (see Joseph Smith—History 1:20) visions were so overwhelming that they lost all strength for a time. The angel who appeared to Alma and the sons of Mosiah spoke “as it were with a voice of thunder, which caused the earth to shake upon which they stood; and so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth, and understood not the words which he spake unto them” (Mosiah 27:11–12). And even Peter, James, and John, overshadowed by the Father’s presence at the Mount of Transfiguration, “fell on their face, and were sore afraid” (Matthew 17:6), as were the shepherds visited by an angel announcing the birth of the Savior (see Luke 2:9).

Visual media can help inspire this kind of sacred awe. In preface to this discussion we recognize that prophets have rightly warned against using sentimentality and emotionalism if they become substitutes for, instead of supplements to, legitimate spiritual experiences. Many have heard President Howard W. Hunter’s caution, “I get concerned when it appears that strong emotion or free-flowing tears are equated with the presence of the Spirit. Certainly the Spirit of the Lord can bring strong emotional feelings, including tears, but that outward manifestation ought not to be confused with the presence of the Spirit itself.” Often cited in connection is when the Lord spoke to Elijah not in the impressive wind, earthquake, or fire but in the quiet of “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). Consequently, we have sometimes noticed suspicion of any appeal to emotion as it relates to religious instruction. But we believe President Hunter was only warning against emotion replacing spirituality, not the Spirit using emotion as a tool to edify and inspire. And while the Lord did not depend on physical demonstrations to speak to Elijah, for some reason, the wind, earthquake, and fire were still important enough for
him to cause them. Similarly, while the Spirit does not depend on our expressions of emotion, for his own reasons, the Lord may still prompt emotion as a manifestation of his power and grace.

A key to inspiring sacred awe through media is for each media component to be designed in support of a substantial message structure. Just like a vision’s impressive events and stirring emotion are always built on a strong foundation of doctrine and principle, media that has a similarly solid structure can better support affective, emotional elements. In other words, a strong message structure is like a skyscraper that can rise hundreds of feet above the ground due to its strong internal framework. For example, media structure can be built on strong stories that avoid a didactic, “preachy” tone while still demonstrating meaningful choices and consequences. In stories of this quality, the layers of good music, inspiring imagery, or impressive visual effects all reinforce the intended outcome of sacred awe. But if a story is overly simplistic, such as when scenarios and characters are only superficial illustrations meant to prove a point, viewers are more likely to interpret the emotional components as stereotypical and clichéd. The same is true for all of the individual media elements; if they are insubstantial in themselves, such a musical score that is excessively sentimental, they are more likely to result in the emotional manipulation that President Hunter and others have warned about.

Another way heavenly visitors inspire sacred awe is by declaring spiritual messages through expressive, vivid language that stirs the emotion. Even today many of these accounts remain some of the most memorable, loved, and inspiring passages found in the scriptures. Consider the Lord’s assertion to Moses: “The heavens, they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine. . . . And there is no end to my works, neither to my words. For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:37–39). We also note how the Savior introduced himself to the Nephites: “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). And all of Christendom takes comfort in the words of the angel to the shepherds: “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11). The communicative strength of these passages is based only in part on the words that were spoken. Just as important are the style, tone, and other modes of expression that give them elegance and beauty. They, along with many similar passages, are cherished just as much for how they make people feel as they are for the information they contain.

Just as these visionary messages were delivered in stirring and inspiring language, visual media, including filmed versions of lectures or speeches, can encourage sacred awe by taking advantage of equally eloquent styles. A warm, personal tone can be more helpful than institutional jargon or passive terminology. But the underlying media structure remains important—if a presentation is not built on a strong foundation of an authentic and insightful message, expressive language can frequently come across as shallow or manipulative. Educators interested in models of how to accomplish this can study addresses delivered by the Brethren, who often use elegant expressions to communicate a doctrinal point. Their examples demonstrate that when the underlying message is sound, clear statements of principle are not watered down or lost when combined with persuasive language but can help inspire sacred awe of which the Spirit would approve.

_Spiritually demanding._ The fourth characteristic of visionary experiences is that they are spiritually demanding, meaning they can be very challenging to understand. Rather than simplifying doctrinal subjects, visions frequently communicate rich symbolism, intricate detail, or other elements that often make them more difficult to interpret than a straightforward explanation. And even when a vision includes direct answers, those answers are frequently accompanied by figurative imagery, adding a spiritual depth that gives additional meaning to the verbal message. For example, before Isaiah was told his sins were forgiven, he saw in vision a divine being flying towards him, “having a live coal in his hand . . . and he laid it upon [Isaiah’s] mouth” (Isaiah 6:6–7). Or, instead of simply telling Abraham that he would have countless descendants, the Lord’s message was, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be” (Genesis 15:5). We also note the vision to Peter, who was not directly commanded to take the gospel to the Gentiles but was given a symbolic vision of myriad beasts that he was to eat, with the message, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15).
We believe visions are spiritually demanding so that people will reflect again and again on what they experienced, with both the symbolism and underlying message growing in meaning because of the effort required to understand. In this sense, visions are consistent with Elder Bednar’s conviction, “I have observed a common characteristic among the instructors who have had the greatest influence in my life. They have helped me to seek learning by faith. They refused to give me easy answers to hard questions. In fact, they did not give me any answers at all. Rather, they pointed the way and helped me take the steps to find my own answers. I certainly did not always appreciate this approach, but experience has enabled me to understand that an answer given by another person usually is not remembered for very long, if remembered at all. But an answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime.”

So while an easy-to-understand statement may be filed away in the mind, rarely thought of again, the demanding nature of a vision can provide people with enough spiritual substance for them to question and learn long after the experience itself ends. Or, in other words, spiritually demanding visions plant marvelous doctrines in recipients’ hearts that they may not fully grasp at first but that lead them to seek greater comprehension through reflection, prayer, and further study. This was exemplified in the scriptures by both Joseph Smith and Joseph F. Smith, who saw visions they did not initially understand but who were able to receive even greater manifestations through their efforts to make sense of what the Lord was showing to them (see D&C 137:5–9; 138:25–30).

Visual media can be just as spiritually demanding as these visions, encouraging people to ask their own questions so they can better learn by faith. This frequently happens as we select media that is somehow challenging for people to analyze or interpret. Of course, in some cases media might be an appropriate choice when it simplifies written or verbal explanations. Yet we equally believe that more difficult media often helps people better internalize important gospel doctrines, preparing them to apply and live those doctrines outside of a classroom environment. In this case we recommend against selecting media that presents idealized story lines, that smooths out the uncertainty and unpredictability accompanying many real-life choices, or that minimizes how difficult it can be to live the gospel in our fallen world.

In contrast, narratively dense scenarios often support multiple points of view and differing interpretations that can lead to vigorous discussion among
viewers about questions such as “What if . . . ?” “How do we know . . . ?” or “But what about . . . ?” They can also lead to reflective contemplation about the same questions within the privacy of one’s own heart. Similar results can be seen when a message is communicated through rich symbolism, visual metaphor, or figurative analogy—people who experience such media can frequently draw their own conclusions about the gospel’s meaning in their lives, which is a valuable educational outcome even when their conclusions cannot be predicted in advance. Of course, educators are rightly interested in making sure students “get the point” of what is being taught. We believe this does not have to be an either/or decision. There is an important place in religious education for clear, unambiguous explanation of gospel principles, as well as a place for spiritually demanding media that invites people to ask their own questions and seek their own answers about gospel subjects.

**Conclusion**

By applying scriptural purposes and characteristics of visionary experiences, religious educators will be better able to use visual media to strengthen people’s faith and teach them the gospel in a personally valuable way. What we have presented here is only the briefest introduction to how visual media can prepare hearts, make the invisible visible, and increase media’s use of intimacy, viewer participation, generated sacred awe, and spiritually demanding material. Those who do not have the time, interest, or experience to create their own media can still effectively select existing products that conform to scriptural recommendations. And those who are a little more adventurous can use the same guidance to produce visual media that are customized to their individual circumstances and needs.

We conclude with Elder Perry’s encouragement, which we cited earlier: “We should not underestimate the Lord’s power and his willingness to bless our lives if we ask with a sincere heart and real intent. He has instructional designs and learning theories that the world’s educational psychologists haven’t even imagined yet.” We invite readers to take Elder Perry at his word. We can take advantage of new media technique and technology while still remaining in close harmony with the Lord’s will. We can apply scriptural principles to infuse media with the same spiritual energy that visionary manifestations contain. And we are confident that by so doing we will embark on an exciting and rewarding journey, perhaps one in which we will learn as much or more than our students do.
Notes

Institute has a powerful, life-altering influence on the lives of teachers and their families as well as on students.
C. S. Lewis got it right when he described the human condition as a series of peaks and troughs—highs and lows. I think for the most part we succeed in concealing from others in the public sphere the negative side of that mortal mood swing. Consequently we tend to look at others and make assumptions that all is well in their lives. I remember President Henry B. Eyring teaching once that if we will approach every person we meet with the notion that they are having a difficult time, we will be right at least 50 percent of the time.

My purpose is to help readers realize that our teachers too have their ups and downs and desperately need the strength provided by the structure and program of the institute. Many institute students look at their teachers and think that all is well, that their teachers’ lives follow a smooth and ever-ascending path through a pleasant mortal experience that will culminate in eternal bliss. I believe that the lives of our teachers are generally very exemplary and filled with much happiness and joy. However, if students could peek into the homes and hearts of their teachers, they would soon recognize that none are spared the tests of mortality. One difference—and this is crucial—is
how committed teachers respond to their difficulties. That response is simply the daily subject matter of the typical institute class—staying very close to Christ and seeking to be humble and teachable as we battle the natural man and the fallen world that we live in.

It might surprise some students to learn that there are occasions when the hard circumstances of life result in their teachers’ slipping into a sort of depression, the blues, or other negative states that will not easily depart. You’ve had those kinds of experiences yourself. When I experience those dark nights of the soul, they alter the way I see everything around me. There seems to be a giant void in my life that the normal activities of my day no longer seem to fill. This is always somewhat startling to me, even though it happens from time to time and I should see it as a normal part of the life cycle. Perhaps that void is an inevitable occurrence in mortality—a blessing in disguise that forces us to seek Christ with renewed vigor and intensity. As I have matured, I have learned to stay steady and look forward with an assurance that this too will pass. But this happens only if I put forth the effort required and return to the basic spiritual disciplines that have shaped my life—praying with greater

The understanding, strength, and vision I received from associating with students enabled me to live an ever-increasing life in the Spirit.
faith and sincerity, pondering deeply the word of God, listening intently to the quiet voice of the Spirit, and giving of myself in service to others.

My work is an unsurpassed blessing in my life. Those of you wrestling with the various occupational options available to you know how important it is to find employment that not only will provide for your temporal needs but also will be personally fulfilling. We often speak of the impact institute has on the lives of students, but I testify that institute also has a powerful, life-altering influence on the lives of teachers and their families.

**Teachers and Their Families**

Probably the majority of life’s most difficult challenges revolve around relationships—especially family relationships. Every teacher that I have known well has faced their share of adversity in the form of childrearing problems, health crises, serious financial pressures, marital stresses and pains, in-law problems, and other circumstances that seem almost insoluble at times. I recall occasions when, in great discouragement, I left my home to drive to the institute, feeling totally incapable of standing before a classroom filled with students who had come to be lifted. I found myself pleading with the Lord as I drove, falling to my knees in my office, and doing whatever else I could do to repent, improve, shake off self-pity, and overcome the darkness or sadness I was experiencing.

When students do not feel good spiritually, some simply choose not to attend class. When I didn’t feel like teaching, I did not have the luxury of skipping class (fortunately). So I came to class, and miracles occurred. The power of the word is very real. The Holy Spirit and the eager faces of young students enabled me to overcome sadness and sin (and even migraine headaches!). Through experiences in and out of class, *I have learned that my agency extends not only to controlling my behavior and my thoughts, but even to my ability to manage my moods and negative emotions. I cannot overstate the importance of this truth.*

Not only has the institute program lifted me from the challenging times but it has also enabled my spirit to soar to heights of understanding and insight that seemed to almost remove the veil between mortality and eternity. The understanding, strength, and vision I received from teaching and associating with students, faculty, and staff enabled me to live an ever-increasing life in the Spirit and bring home a portion of that Spirit to bless my wife, my children, my neighbors, and ward members.
Teachers and Their Students

Notwithstanding its many rewards, teaching the gospel can be a risky endeavor. Hypocrisy, the sin denounced most severely by the Lord during his mortal ministry, is one of our occupational hazards. For this reason I have always felt that I should never ask my students to live in a manner that I was not also sincerely trying to live—personal integrity, scripture study, writing in my journal, fasting, avoiding inappropriate entertainment, and so forth. The Apostle Paul said it well: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not also thyself?” (Romans 2:21).

There is nothing more important in this life than our personal spiritual formation in Jesus Christ. The most important thing happening in our lives at any given moment is the kind of person we are becoming. One of my personal themes is the following statement by George MacDonald: “To be [a] disciple of Christ is the end of being; . . . to persuade men to be his disciples is the end of teaching.”

With these thoughts in mind, you will understand that the daily tutoring I receive in the institute building from the Spirit, the scriptures, the living prophets, my students, and my fellow teachers is a blessing for which I will be eternally indebted to God. While teaching scripture courses, marriage preparation courses, and other classes, I have emphasized several skills and principles to my students that have been life changing for me.

Receiving Personal Revelation

The institute classroom is one of most inspiration-friendly places we can be in—for both students and teachers. Few principles of the gospel engage my spiritual juices more than the opportunity to receive guidance from God. Our loving Father has given each of us two precious gifts to aid us in our mortal journey: personal agency and personal revelation. The personal revelation comes in the form of light and truth to our hearts and minds. In a university setting we understand something about “learning by study,” but a complimentary skill is to learn what the Lord meant when he said we must also “learn by faith” (D&C 88:118). Learning by faith requires two dimensions missing in “learning by study” alone—the influence of the Holy Spirit (personal revelation) and the application of truth into one’s very being. That is what is meant by “understanding with our hearts” (see Mosiah 12:27; 3 Nephi 19:33).
How Institute Affected My Life

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Writing

As a tool to help me hear the voice of the Lord, writing is something I have learned is crucial for me. I not only record my efforts at personal growth, my goals and decisions, but also the struggles I am going through as well. This process of writing opens the door to spiritual impressions that, sooner or later, always come, sometimes at unexpected times. For this reason I am seldom without a small pocket tablet or 3 × 5 cards and a pen. Next to prayer and scripture study, writing the feelings of my mind and heart is the single most helpful spiritual discipline of my life. I testify that God knows, loves, and speaks to me and to all of his children, and I desire to help my students learn to recognize, write down, and seek to apply the guidance of heaven. The discipline of learning to recognize the voice of the Lord, writing it down, and then acting on it is part of every class I teach.
Attributes of a Disciple

Institute helps me become more like Christ. While teaching Religion 333, “Teachings of the Living Prophets,” during the administration of Ezra Taft Benson, I became convinced that one of my major stumbling blocks was pride. The prophet also taught that the great antidote to pride was humility and submissiveness. So began a personal quest to purify my life of the pride that is manifest in multitudinous attitudes and behaviors in all of us. In the process I have sought to overcome the hypocrisy in my life that prevents me from having the sincerity and integrity necessary to fulfill my responsibilities as a teacher—and even more as a husband and father. I have a long way to go, but I feel God’s joy in my efforts, and I know he is pleased with my progress.

In my office is a file drawer with an ever-growing folder of the class rolls containing the names of the students I have been privileged to teach over the past forty-two years. Those students are sacred to me, for they have blessed my life with their encouragement, insights, faith, and application of gospel principles. In my journal are recorded my aches at some of the difficult circumstances they have had to face as well as joy over the goodness of their lives. Many are among the heroes of my life. Occasionally when I found myself feeling less than adequate, a student’s expression of appreciation would literally infuse new hope and light into my life. As I have looked deep into the eyes of my students, I have seen goodness and potential that far surpass my own limited abilities, and I feel renewed confidence that the future of the Church is in good hands.

I do feel bad for institute students who do not live up to their privileges for one reason or another. At one extreme are the discouraged and lonely, those ready to give up on themselves, the Church, and life. On another extreme I see the casual, those Elder Neal A. Maxwell described as “honorable but not valiant.” They are not really aware of the gap between where they are and where they ought to be, nor of the importance of closing it. And I also feel bad for the large number of students and young adults who never walk through the door of an institute building. Their souls are precious.

I love the institute, for it provides me a setting, a sacred space to practice obedience to truth as I prepare myself to help young people going through similar struggles. We are all in this together.

It is my sincere hope and prayer that as you read this article, you will look deep within your heart and consider what kind of a difference teaching seminary or institute might make in your life. As for your students, we want those
who attend sporadically or enroll late and drop out early to consider what impact investing themselves more wholeheartedly in an institute class might have on their happiness and ability to maneuver through the difficulties of mortality. We want them to be strengthened and lifted every time they enter the building. We want them to leave institute fortified with depth of testimony and practical skills for spiritual formation that will serve them today, this year, and for the rest of their earthly journey.

For me, I can say without qualification, institute has helped me to see myself more clearly through the eyes of my Savior, bear the burdens of life, and plant my feet firmly on the gospel path. George MacDonald was right: “To be [a] disciple of Christ is the end of being; . . . to persuade men to be his disciples is the end of teaching.”

Notes

God’s pattern for a successful life applies to college graduates, their teachers, and their families today.
When Nephi saw his life and career as a prophet and a ruler over his people drawing to a close, he invoked a previously unreported revelation in a final exhortation to his people and to his future readers—to help them see how to live lives that would be of most value to themselves and to those around them. As we learn from 2 Nephi 31, Nephi had seen and heard much more than he had previously reported when, as a young man, he had been shown the future baptism of Jesus Christ. Most impressively, we learn that the basic elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ were spelled out for Nephi in that vision—first by the Father, whose voice he heard explaining the necessity of sincere repentance and baptism. The Father further explained how he would send remission of sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost to all repentant persons and that they could enjoy the fullness of eternal life—if they endured in faithful obedience to the end of their mortal lives. At each stage of this
explanation, Nephi reports hearing the voice of the Son echoing and expanding on the Father’s words.

Nephi’s summary explanation of this “doctrine of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:2) became the core teaching presented and expounded repeatedly by the Nephite prophets over the next millennium. It was emphasized especially by Mormon and Moroni—the last prophets of the Nephite dispensation. Nephi recognized that only those who had “unshaken faith” in Christ (2 Nephi 31:19), trusting wholly in his power to save, could repent sincerely, making the covenant of obedience to Christ that they witnessed through baptism.

For those who had entered this strait gate and had received the promised remission of sins sent by the Father with the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, Nephi asks “if all is done.” Answering his own question with a negative, Nephi explains: “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:19–20).

We recognize in Nephi’s words a variation on the familiar formula of faith, hope, and charity—presented to us here as a description of how one can endure to the end. Reading on, we learn that the faith or trust or steadfastness in Christ that enduring to the end requires is a process of “feast[ing] upon the words of Christ,” which Nephi quickly equates with listening to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, which “will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3, 5). So the need for faith or trusting in Christ continues. That is what brings us to repentance and baptism. And trust in Christ is needed as we strive to endure to the end. But because of the marvelous gift of the Holy Ghost that is given to those who have truly repented, the faithful person now has a greatly enhanced ability to obey the Savior because “it will show unto you all things what ye should do.”

But what about the “perfect brightness of hope” and the “love of God and of all men,” or charity, that Nephi linked with faith in Jesus Christ as means by which we can and must endure to the end? Like Paul in his letter to Titus, Alma and Moroni each specify that they are not referring to just any human hope—but to the hope for eternal life (see Titus 1:2; Alma 13:29; Moroni 7:41). For just as the promise of a remission of sins to all who will repent and be baptized is fulfilled by the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, sent by the Father, those so blessed can then reasonably hope in the further promise
of eternal life in the presence of the Father and the Son, if they will continue faithful, enduring to the end.

These prophets also saw charity, or “the pure love of Christ,” as a gift given to help the repentant convert endure to the end. As Moroni summarizes, “the remission of sins bringeth . . . the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26). When we are filled with the perfect love that God and Christ feel towards all men, we are not threatened by any circumstances that may develop in our associations with others. Nor can we desire to harm anyone. Nor will we condemn them because of their beliefs or actions. The gift of charity protects us from an enormous range of temptations that might arise from ambition, anger, jealousy, fear, or greed. It is perhaps especially poignant that it is Mormon and Moroni—who have had to endure the final decline of their own people—who emphasize repeatedly that charity “endureth forever” (Moroni 7:47).

And so it is that the Nephite prophets saw the eternal fate of all God’s children turning on their willingness to humble themselves and repent of their sins, calling on the mercy of the Lord, through the power of his Atonement, to forgive their sins. For all who would do this “with full purpose of heart,” the Father would send the Holy Ghost, which would change their hearts, filling them with a hope of eternal life and a love of all men and giving them knowledge of all things what they should do to serve him in righteousness, that they may be preserved from sin and become “holy without spot” (Moroni 10:33).

Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni clearly believed that this pattern for successful life applied not only to them but to college graduates, their teachers, and their families today. The successful life—one that will be filled with peace and joy—will come to those who trust in Christ and learn to obey the direction of the Holy Ghost that he sends them. Not only will it guide them to act righteously in all their dealings, but it will also direct them to work and sacrifice in building the kingdom of God. After seeing our day in a vision, Nephi reported, “Blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:37). It is no secret that a primary reason for the existence of BYU is to help talented and committed
young Latter-day Saints become as effective and productive as possible in their future lives—lives that will be devoted to building their families and Zion—in a world that promotes so many different visions of the good life.

Switching metaphors (and visions) at the same time, everyone who starts out on the straight and narrow path to eternal life will profit from a reading of Lehi’s dream of the tree of life. Lehi saw that men and women on this path would need to grasp the iron rod—or the guidance of the Holy Ghost—firmly, or they would be lost in the mists of life, be drowned in the filthy river of sin, or be lured into the great and spacious building to join those who deny the Holy Ghost and mock the faithful followers of Christ. If we truly hope for eternal life above and beyond any other goals, we must resist the allures of wealth, social acceptance, and any other worldly successes that would require us to compromise our allegiance to Jesus Christ and his commandments or our efforts to help build his kingdom.

We must also resist intellectual fads that would weaken our faith. The Lord created our world in such a way that no one would be compelled to believe in him. This means that as science progresses in its understanding of both the universe and human beings, naturalistic explanations will be proposed for all that we experience. But the divine Creator’s role will never be adequately uncovered. Physicists and astronomers now believe that this universe includes over two hundred billion galaxies, each of which may include hundreds of billions of stars. And they also agree this is less than 5 percent of the matter and energy in the universe. All efforts to see or define the other 95 percent continue to draw a blank, even though scientists can measure its gravitational effect on the visible portion. Similarly, studies of the neural structures and chemistry of the human brain are rapidly expanding scientific understanding of human thought and feelings. As much as these studies might help us understand why so much divine help is needed for humans to rise above normal feelings and behavior to become like God, they will never be able to document or explain the actual processes by which God speaks to us through the Holy Ghost and fills us with joy, love, peace, and knowledge. For each of us who repents and entrusts his life to Jesus Christ, these are personal experiences which we can treasure, protect, and pursue as we seek eternal life. Or, like so many in Lehi’s dream, they can be denied and forgotten. For all of you graduating today, we can earnestly pray that you will choose to continue on that straight and narrow path that does lead to eternal life.
Religious Educator

Articles Related to the Old Testament

TERRY F. CALTON

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The following articles can be found at http://rsc.byu.edu/tre/volumes (all but the most recent three issues).

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New Publications

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Salt Lake City: The Place Which God Prepared
Edited by Scott C. Esplin and Kenneth L. Alford

For more than 150 years, “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” the anthem of the pioneer journey, has praised Salt Lake City as “the place which God for us prepared.” This new book from Brigham Young University’s Religious Studies Center discusses the fulfillment of that poetic longing. The sixteenth in a series of regional studies on Latter-day Saint Church history, it contains a collection of essays by faculty members in the Department of Church History and Doctrine discussing Salt Lake’s place in our sacred story. Topics include histories of significant landmarks, stories from the city’s past, and discussions of Church organizations. The reader will see connections between the revelations of Joseph Smith and Salt Lake City as a modern city of Zion, the place, indeed, where the Saints have been blessed.

New Publications

Under the Gun: West German and Austrian Latter-day Saints in World War II
Roger P. Minert

This volume is filled with fascinating stories of members of the LDS Church in West Germany and Austria during World War II. They did not have access to the many conveniences American Saints took for granted—including local Church leaders, clean places to meet, cars, and temples. Germany was one of the war fronts where homes were destroyed and friends and families were killed. Unlike American soldiers returning to their homes, nearly half of the German Saints had no home to which to return. Hundreds of them served in the German military, while thousands more stayed home and endeavored to keep their families and the Church alive. Readers will be touched by the faith and dedication shown by these Saints—young and old, military and civilian.

Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: Electronic Library
Edited by Scott H. Faulring and Kent P. Jackson

Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: Electronic Library brings together a wealth of information and recent scholarship on Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible. The Electronic Library also includes high-resolution images of every page of the original manuscripts and the entire 851-page book Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts, edited by Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews. This powerful electronic tool, developed at BYU, enables users of the Electronic Library to view the transcriptions, images, and printed texts either individually or side-by-side in any order, with full capacity to search each text. These transcriptions contain all the original manuscripts of Joseph Smith’s Bible translation.
ISBN: 978-0-8425-2792-7, Retail: $19.95
A Firm Foundation: Administrative and Organizational History of the Church
Edited by David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr

How did a church that started with just six official members blossom into a global organization of over fourteen million members? Authors such as Richard L. Bushman, John W. Welch, and Susan Easton Black show how Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other leaders established the foundation upon which the Church was built. According to Welch, the Book of Mormon provides the foundational administrative principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, “not only its doctrines and instructions for personal living but also its many administrative guidelines.” He went on to say, “The administrative character and personality of the Church has indeed grown directly from the genetic material found in the Book of Mormon.” This book teaches how the individuals throughout Church history were inspired to restore and establish Christ’s Church in the latter days.


My Redeemer Lives!
Edited by Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson

This volume brings together talks from two Brigham Young University Easter Conferences. Presentations address the Savior, his life, his mission, the Atonement, and his influence in our lives today. The contributors include Elder John H. Groberg, Elder Gerald N. Lund, Robert L. Millet, and others. The topics range from the infinite sweep of the Atonement to its personal reach in perfecting individuals. “It is always a challenge to talk or write about the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” notes Elder Lund. “First of all, it is infinite in its scope. It is the most profound and pivotal event in all of eternity. And we are so totally and utterly finite. We can but glimpse its importance and come only to a small understanding of its full meaning for us.”

Upcoming Events

For more information about these events, please visit us online at:
http://rsc.byu.edu/conferences-and-symposia

The Fortieth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium
Scheduled for October 28–29, 2011. The keynote speaker will present in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium Friday, October 28, at 6:30 p.m. The theme of the conference will be The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi’s Dream and Nephi’s Vision. For more information, please visit http://rsc.byu.edu/symposia/sperry.

The BYU Church History Symposium
Scheduled for Friday and Saturday, March 2–3, 2012. This year the symposium will be cosponsored by the Church History Library and will be presented at two different venues. The Friday, March 2, session will be in the LDS Conference Center Theater in Salt Lake City. The Saturday, March 3, session will be at the BYU Conference Center on the BYU campus. This year’s conference will highlight the life and teachings of Joseph F. Smith. This symposium has become the premier symposium for scholarship on Church history. Selected papers from each symposium are published in a book by the BYU Religious Studies Center. Hundreds of people attend each year to be enlightened and edified. This symposium is free to attend and registration is not required. For more information, please visit http://rsc.byu.edu/symposia/churchhistory.

The BYU Easter Conference
Scheduled for Saturday, April 7, 2012. Presenters will speak about the Savior, his life, his mission, the Atonement, and his influence in our lives today. The conference will feature notable Church leaders, historians, scholars, educators, and authors. The conference also features special instrumental and vocal presentations. Attending the BYU Easter Conference is an ideal way to celebrate Easter Sunday. This conference is free to attend and registration is not required. For more information, please visit http://easterconference.byu.edu.
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Editorial Intern
Heidi K. Bishop is a senior from St. Helens, Oregon. As a teenager, she developed an interest in reading and writing that led her to pursue a degree in English at BYU. In the English major, Heidi has found herself drawn to gender studies and feminist theory, particularly as they relate to popular contemporary literature. Heidi is also pursuing an editing minor and has edited for the student journals Stance: For the Family and Schwa. She started editing for the Religious Studies Center in April 2011 and hopes to continue until she graduates in December 2012.

Design Intern
Jeff Wade is a native of Mesa, Arizona. He is pursuing an undergraduate degree, double majoring in mathematics and linguistics. Since January 2010, he has worked as a designer for the Religious Studies Center. He enjoys the challenge of creating an engaging design that fits the message of a book well. Jeff’s greatest passion is to learn new things, especially how to make things that are useful and beautiful. A short list of his interests includes woodworking, welding, reading, cooking, longboarding, snowboarding, and playing sports, especially ultimate Frisbee. He lives in Provo with his wife, Tori, and newborn daughter, Alex.
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Complete author guidelines are provided at rsc.byu.edu/RSCStyleGuide.pdf. All manuscripts should be submitted electronically to rsc@byu.edu. Hard-copy submissions are accepted only if an electronic copy is included.

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

Manuscripts will be evaluated by the following questions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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