

TEACHING GOSPEL PRINCIPLES TO CHILDREN

14

PART 2

IDEAS FOR APPLICATION

According to your own needs and circumstances, follow one or more of these suggestions.

- As a family, plan an activity in which you will give service together.
- Do a household job with one of your children or with a grandchild, a niece or nephew, or another child in your family. Talk with the child while you work. Take advantage of teaching opportunities without being critical of the child's efforts to help.
- Read the following sections in the pamphlet *For the Strength of Youth* (34285): "Media: Movies, Television, Radio, Videocassettes, Books, and Magazines" (pages 11–12), "Music and Dancing" (pages 13–14), and "Sexual Purity" (pages 14–16). After you have reviewed the material, determine which of your children would benefit from reading and discussing this material with you.

READING ASSIGNMENT

Study the following article. If you are married, read and discuss the article with your spouse.

TEACH THE CHILDREN

President Boyd K. Packer
Acting President of the Quorum
of the Twelve Apostles

The number of people assembled here and at other locations attests to the unquenchable thirst for truth that accompanies membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

As I prayed over what would be of most worth to you, it occurred to me that in three weeks I will reach my 75th birthday and move into what I choose to call *upper middle age*.

I have been a teacher for more than 50 years. Surely something I have learned will be helpful to you.

I have learned this from experience: Life will teach us some things we didn't think we wanted to know. These hard lessons can be the most valuable ones.

I learned something else about learning on my way to *upper middle age*. Consider this conversation between a doctor and a patient:

Doctor: "How can I help you? What seems to be your problem?"

Patient: "It is my memory, doctor. I read something, and I can't remember it. I can't remember why I came into a room. I can't remember where I put things."

Doctor: "Well, tell me, how long has this condition been bothering you?"

Patient: "How long has what condition been bothering me?"

Now, if that amused you, you are either under 60 or you are laughing at yourselves.

Teaching Children While They're Young

When you grow older, you cannot learn or memorize or study like you could when you were young. Could that be why the prophet Alma counseled, "Learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God"?¹

It is increasingly difficult for me to memorize scriptures and lines of poetry. In my youth I could repeat something a time or two and remember it. If I said it over many times, particularly if I wrote it down, it was quite permanently recorded in my mind.

Youth is the time for easy learning. That is why the teachers of children and youth have been such a concern for the leaders of the Church from the very beginning.

It is consummately important to teach the gospel and life's lessons to children and youth.

The Lord places the first responsibility upon parents and warns them:

“Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, . . . that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.”²

It is the basic purpose of this Church to teach the youth: first in the home and then in church.

Storing Up Knowledge

Another thing I have learned has to do with remembering what we learned when we were young. Knowledge stored in young minds may wait many years for the moment when it might be needed.

Let me illustrate. I am very concerned about the tendency of members to disregard the counsel of the bishop or, at the other extreme, to become overdependent upon him.

I decided to speak in general conference about the bishop.

I prayerfully prepared, and there came to mind a conversation from 50 years past. It served my need as a teacher—served it perfectly. I quote now that conversation just as I did in general conference:

“Years ago I served on a stake high council with Emery Wight. For 10 years Emery had served as bishop of rural Harper Ward. His wife, Lucille, became our stake Relief Society president.

“Lucille told me that one spring morning a neighbor called at her door and asked for Emery. She told him that he was out plowing. The neighbor then spoke with great concern. Earlier that morning he had passed the field and noticed Emery’s team of horses standing in a half-finished furrow with the reins draped over the plow. Emery was nowhere in sight. The neighbor thought nothing of it until much later when he passed the field again, and the team had not moved. He climbed the fence and crossed the field to the horses. Emery was nowhere to be found. He hurried to the house to check with Lucille.

“Lucille calmly replied, ‘Oh, don’t be alarmed. No doubt someone is in trouble and came to get the bishop.’

“The image of that team of horses standing for hours in the field symbolizes the dedication of the bishops in the Church and of the counselors who stand by their side. Every bishop and every counselor, figuratively speaking, leaves his team standing in an unfinished furrow when someone needs help.”³

I had never before used that experience in a talk—never thought of it.

I wanted to fix it in my mind before speaking of it in conference, so I located a daughter of Emery Wight. She agreed to meet me at their old home and show me the field her father would have been plowing that day.

One of my sons took me there early one Sunday morning. He took a number of pictures.

It was a beautiful spring morning. The field was newly plowed, just as it had been those many years before. Seagulls were feeding in the newly turned soil.

That quickened memory, remembering that conversation, is not uncommon to me. It reaffirms the truth of the scripture—one, incidentally, I memorized in my youth—

“Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man.”⁴

There follows a promise to those who treasure up knowledge:

“Whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.”⁵

It was a good lesson for me, but my lesson did not end there.

I had done some painting and wood carving in my youth. I was largely self-taught. While the children were growing up, my time was devoted to teaching them things I had learned about life and about carving and painting when I was a boy.

After they were grown, I took up wood carving as a means of relaxation. I carved birds and spent many hours on a carving. When asked, “How many hours did it take you to carve this?” I always answered, “I don’t know. If I found out, I would quit.”

During those hours working with my hands, I pondered on the marvels of creation, and inspiration would flow. As I carved wood, I carved out talks.

Carving was restful to me. Sometimes when I got a little stressed and cranky, my wife would say, “Well, you had better start another carving.”

I suppose if my *upper middle age* memory sharpened itself a bit, I could point to one of those carvings and tell which talk it represents. I learned that in those quiet moments I could do two things at once.

Reaping a Harvest from Teaching

I am no longer able to do those carvings. That work is too delicate for me with trifocals and finger joints that now stiffen a bit from childhood polio. Besides, the increasing pressure of my calling limits the time I can devote both to carving and to preparing talks.

The ability to carve now is largely lost to me, but not to our children. We taught them when they were young.

The image of that team standing in the field stayed with me. I thought that perhaps I could do a painting of the bishop's team standing in the field with the reins draped over the plow.

I hesitated because it had been nine years since I had painted a picture. Two friends with unusual talent and inspiration offered to help me paint the bishop's team, and July gave a respite from travel, so I began.

I learned much from those two friends, and in a real way they are in my painting. But I received more help from my two sons. One son took those pictures of the plowed field, for I try always to be very accurate when depicting something in *wood* or on *canvas* or with *words*.

That is another lesson. I could draw back from our children something they had learned when they were young.

The other son decided to do a sculpture of the bishop's team to be cast in bronze as a companion to my painting. We spent many rewarding hours helping one another.

He took from our barn a couple of old harnesses which have hung essentially untouched for over 50 years. He dusted them off and took them home. He draped one harness over a very patient riding horse. It stood quietly as he arranged the harness in proper order and made detailed sketches of it.

His neighbor had collected some old plows. Among them was a plow of proper vintage, which he also sketched.

And so there came back that which we had given those sons in their youth. As with our other children, they have improved on that which we as parents taught them when they were very young. And if our days are prolonged upon the earth, there comes a second harvest—our grandchildren—and perhaps a third.

Reawakening Dormant Talents

I relearned something else. Once before I had painted a picture inspired by comments that I

heard when I was a boy. It depicted the Willard Peaks. I had heard the older folks refer to them as *The Presidency*. These three gigantic, solid peaks standing against the sky typified the leaders of the Church.

That was nine years ago. My son had taken me to Willard, Utah, and photographed the peaks. We went back a second time when there would be more shadow and contrast.

After those years I had to awaken that which I had let go dormant. At first it was a terrible struggle. I threatened to quit several times. One of my friends urged me on by saying, "Go ahead! There's always plenty of room at the bottom."

I did not quit, simply because my wife would not give me permission to do so. I am glad I didn't now. Perhaps, now that I am into it again, I'll do another painting sometime—who knows.

I suppose trying to get back into painting is not unlike someone who has been inactive in the Church for many years and decides to return to the fold. There is that period of struggle in getting the feel for what has lain dormant but is not really lost. And it helps to have a friend or two.

That is another principle of learning—drawing lessons from ordinary experience in life.

That painting of *The Bishop's Team* will soon be finished. My son's sculpture is at the foundry being cast in bronze.

His sculpture, incidentally, is much better than my painting. That is as it should be. His young fingers and mind respond more readily than mine do.

As we move to *upper middle age* we learn that old bones don't bend easily, older joints don't move so quickly. It is not easy to tie your shoes once you move past your middle 60s—then they lower the floors.

There comes that lesson again, "Learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God."⁶

"The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth."⁷

"I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth."⁸

The supernal gift of the Holy Ghost is conferred upon our children when they are only eight years of age.

"The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall *teach* you *all* things, and bring *all* things to your *remembrance*, whatsoever I have said unto you."⁹

Notice the words *teach* and *remembrance*.

Teaching children brings its own reward. Have you not yet learned that when you teach you learn more from teaching than do your children from learning?

Drawing on Spiritual Memories

There is a difference between acquiring temporal knowledge and acquiring spiritual knowledge. Students learn that on test day. It is awfully hard to remember something you didn't learn in the first place.

That is true of temporal knowledge, but spiritually we can draw on a memory that goes back beyond birth. We may develop a sensitivity to things that were not understood when we were younger.

The poet Wordsworth felt something about pre-mortal life when he wrote,

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.¹⁰*

I drew those lines from my memory, where I stored them during an English class in my college days.

The most important lessons come from ordinary events in life.

Some wait for compelling spiritual experiences to confirm their testimony. It doesn't work that way. It is the quiet promptings and impressions of ordinary things that give us the assurance of our identity as children of God. We live far below our privileges when we seek after signs and look "beyond the mark"¹¹ for marvelous events.

We are children of God, for we lived with Him in the premortal existence. From time to time that curtain is parted. There comes to us the intimation of who we are and of our place in the eternal scheme of things. Call that memory or spiritual insight, it is one of those testimonies that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. Such revelations come when we are teaching.

I once heard President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) say, "I always know when I am speaking under the influence of the Holy Ghost because I always learn something from what I have said."

The Lord told the elders:

"Ye are not sent forth to be taught, but to teach the children of men the things which I have put into your hands by the power of my Spirit;

"And ye are to be taught from on high. Sanctify yourselves and ye shall be endowed with power, that ye may give even as I have spoken."¹²

Even when the harvest of converts is meager for missionaries, a spiritual power comes to them and to the Church because they learn through their teaching.

The president of a quorum of deacons is to sit in council and teach his fellow deacons.¹³ The president of a quorum of elders is to teach the members of his quorum according to the covenants.¹⁴

Paul told Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."¹⁵

He explained in nine words how teaching becomes its own reward:

"Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preacheest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

"Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?"¹⁶

Being a Willing Learner

The other day I received a letter of apology, as I have on many occasions. It came from someone I do not know. This letter told how resentful and angry that member had been for a long period of time toward me because of a talk I had given. It was a request for forgiveness.

I am quick to forgive. I am only an agent both in giving the talk and in extending forgiveness.

The scriptures contain many references revealing how "hard"¹⁷ to bear the teachings of the prophets and apostles were for the Israelites and for the Nephites. It is so easy to resist the teaching and resent the teacher. That has been the lot of the prophets and apostles from the beginning.

One of the Beatitudes teaches that:

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."¹⁸

Typically those letters of apology say, "I could not understand why you felt the need to make me feel so uncomfortable and so guilty." Then, out of their struggle, there emerges an insight, an inspiration, an understanding of causes and effects. Finally they come to see and understand why the gospel is as it is.

I mention one among several subjects. A sister may finally come to see why we stress the importance of mothers staying at home with their children. She understands that no service equals the exalting refinement which comes through unselfish motherhood. Nor does she need to forgo intellectual or cultural or social refinement. Those things are fitted in—in proper time—for they attend the everlasting virtue which comes from teaching children.

No teaching is equal, more spiritually rewarding, or more exalting than that of a mother teaching her children. A mother may feel inadequate in scripture scholarship because she is occupied in teaching her family. She will not receive a lesser reward.

President Grant Bangerter was having a doctrinal conversation with President Joseph Fielding Smith, who was touring his mission in Brazil. Sister Bangerter listened and finally said, “President Smith, I have been raising children and haven’t had time to become a scriptorian like he is. Will I get to the celestial kingdom with Grant?”

President Smith pondered soberly for a moment and then said, “Well, perhaps if you bake him a pie.”

A man will be hard pressed to equal that measure of spiritual refinement that accrues naturally to his wife as she teaches their children. And if he understands the gospel at all, he knows that he cannot be exalted without her.¹⁹ His best hope is to lead out as an attentive, responsible partner in teaching their children.

Blessings to Teachers

Now, consider this promise:

“Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend *you* [the teacher], that you [the teacher, the mother, the father] may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you [the mother, the father] to understand.”²⁰

Notice the promise is to the teacher rather than to the student.

“Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you [who teach your children or Primary, Sunday School, Young Women and Men, priesthood, seminary, Relief Society],” that you may come to know:

“Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the

judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms—

“That ye [who teach] may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you.”²¹

Paul prophesied to young Timothy “that in the last days perilous times shall come.”²² He said, “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”²³

But we can still be safe. Our safety is in teaching the children:

“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”²⁴

Paul counseled Timothy:

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

“And that from a *child* thou hast *known the holy scriptures*, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”²⁵

This is the Church of Jesus Christ. It is His Church. He is our Exemplar, our Redeemer. We are commanded to be “even as he is.”²⁶

He was a teacher of children. He commanded His disciples at Jerusalem to “suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”²⁷

In the account of the Savior’s ministry among the Nephites, we can see deeper into His soul perhaps than at any other place:

“And it came to pass that he commanded that their little children should be brought.

“So they brought their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him, and Jesus stood in the midst; and the multitude gave way till they had all been brought unto him. . . .

“ . . . He wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

“And when he had done this he wept again;

“And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones.

“And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.

“And the multitude did see and hear and bear record; and they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear.”²⁸

I know that record is true. I bear witness of Him and bless all of you who teach children in His name.

From an address given at a Brigham Young University Education Week devotional on 17 August 1999 (see *Ensign*, Feb. 2000, 10–17).

NOTES

1. Alma 37:35.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.
3. “The Bishop and His Counselors,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 57.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 84:85.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.
6. Alma 37:35.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 93:36.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 93:40.
9. John 14:26; italics added.
10. “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” stanza 5.
11. Jacob 4:14.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 43:15–16.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:85.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:89.
15. 2 Timothy 2:2.
16. Romans 2:21–22; italics added.
17. See John 6:60; 1 Nephi 16:2; 2 Nephi 9:40; Helaman 14:10.
18. Matthew 5:11–12; see also Luke 21:12; John 15:20; 3 Nephi 12:12.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4, 132:19–21.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 88:78; italics added.
21. Doctrine and Covenants 88:79–80.
22. 2 Timothy 3:1.
23. 2 Timothy 3:13.
24. Proverbs 22:6.
25. 2 Timothy 3:14–15; italics added.
26. 1 John 3:7.
27. Matthew 19:14.
28. 3 Nephi 17:11–12, 21–25.