

WHAT MANNER OF Teachers OUGHT WE TO BE?

If we truly want to become like the Savior, we must learn to teach in the way He taught.

By the Sunday School
General Presidency



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The resurrected Lord was nearly finished with His ministry in the Americas. Not long before, He had descended from heaven, bringing light to dispel the darkness that had engulfed the lands of the Nephites and Lamanites following His death. He had taught and testified and prayed. He had blessed, settled questions, and established His Church. Now, as He prepared to leave His disciples, He presented them with a charge that must have filled them with confidence:

“Ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do . . .

“ . . . Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:21, 27).

Jesus invited us to become like Him, and one of His great attributes is His ability to teach. He is the Master Teacher. To become like Him, we too need to become more loving and life-changing teachers, not only

at church but also in our homes. To become like Him, we ought to have a burning desire in our hearts to teach as He taught.

Questions and Invitations

Jesus often taught through questions and invitations. Consider an example from the time He spent with His disciples on the American continent. Once while they were praying, the Savior appeared to them and asked an inviting opening question: “What will ye that I shall give unto you?” (3 Nephi 27:2). How would you respond if the Savior asked you this question?

The disciples responded: “Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter” (3 Nephi 27:3).

Christ answered their question with one of His own: “Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name?” (3 Nephi 27:5).



This question reminded His learners that they should put some effort into answering their own questions and that answers to many questions could be found in the scriptures.

He then concluded by reminding the disciples of the significance of His name. His words invited them to act and promised them a blessing: “And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:6).

A Teaching Model

In these few short verses, Jesus Christ gave us a divine teaching model. He began with a thought-provoking question designed to discern the needs of His learners. He then waited for and listened to their response.

After His learners replied, He helped them find what they were looking for by directing them to the scriptures.

Finally, He extended two invitations and promised a wonderful blessing to those willing to act on His invitations. Christ’s teaching method on this occasion might be summarized in these five principles:

1. Ask effective questions.

The Savior asked, “What will ye that I shall give unto you?” This question invites a variety of responses. As we ask such questions, we help learners articulate what they want to learn, and we help them focus on those things of greatest importance; we engage them in active learning.

2. Listen to your learners.

Jesus Christ listened as they said, “Lord, we will that thou wouldst tell us

the name whereby we shall call this church.” By listening intently, we are better prepared to focus on the needs of our learners.

3. Use the scriptures.

Christ reminded His disciples, “Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name?” Both teacher and learner should spend time in the scriptures to prepare for lessons. Scripture study is a key part of spiritual preparation for both teachers and learners.

4. Invite your learners to act.

The Lord invited His disciples to (1) take His name upon them and (2) endure to the end. *Preach My Gospel* says, “Rarely, if ever, should you talk to people or teach them without extending an invitation to do something that will strengthen their faith in Christ.”¹ This is good counsel not just for missionaries but for all gospel teachers.

5. Remind your learners of the promised blessings of obedience.

Finally, Jesus Christ promised His learners that those who act upon His invitations “shall be saved at the last day.” Christ frequently promises us His choicest blessings for our obedience (see D&C 14:7). We can do the same, as teachers of His gospel.

The example above illustrates several important teaching methods used by the Savior. In addition, sometimes He taught by parable or analogy. Occasionally He challenged and even

chastised His detractors. But always He taught with love, even for those chastened (see Revelation 3:19).

Love Your Learners

We too must always teach with love and charity if we would teach in the Savior’s way. Love opens the heart of teacher and learner alike, so “both [can be] edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).

A vivid example of the Savior’s love for His learners can be found in 3 Nephi where He prays for, weeps with, and blesses the people. As He prayed to His Father for them, the Nephites felt His love: “No one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:17).

He joyfully wept for them and blessed them for their faith, so great was His love:

“Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.

“And when he had said these words, he wept” (3 Nephi 17:20–21).

Great love enables great learning. The scripture records that “his countenance did smile upon them” and “their hearts were open and they did understand in their hearts” (3 Nephi 19:25, 33).

Encourage Your Learners to Testify

The Savior also gave His learners opportunity to share their testimonies. For example, “when Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

“And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?



“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13–16).

After Peter shared his testimony, Christ pronounced marvelous blessings on him:

“Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:17–19).

In trying to become master teachers, we too will frequently ask questions that prompt learners to share their testimonies, both verbally and in their hearts. We will invite our learners to seek personal testimony-building experiences in their daily lives. Then, if the atmosphere in the classroom or home is conducive to the Spirit, our learners will feel comfortable in sharing spiritual experiences and testimonies with each other.

Live What You Teach

Jesus Christ exhorted others to do the things He did (see 3 Nephi

27:21)—to follow Him (see Matthew 4:19). He lived what He taught, and thereby He taught by example.

He taught about service by serving. What a lesson it must have been for His disciples as He washed their feet! “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14–15).

He taught about love by loving. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34).

He taught about prayer by praying. After offering prayers so intimate and so sublime that they cannot be recorded, He said, “And as I have prayed among you even so shall ye pray in my church . . . Behold I am the light; I have set an example for you” (3 Nephi 18:16).

Jesus Christ has provided a pattern for all gospel teachers who desire to teach in His way. While not perfect as was He, we can strive diligently to live what we teach. In the words of a children’s song, teachers should be able to say, “Do as I’m doing; follow, follow me!”²

Teach in the Savior’s Way

All gospel teachers are invited to adopt the following six core principles, which reflect the way the Savior taught:

1. Love those you teach.

- Seek after the one.
- Focus on the needs of your learners.

2. Prepare yourself spiritually.

- Live what you teach.
- Know available resources.

3. Teach by the Spirit.

- Help your learners recognize the Spirit.
- Be a teachable teacher.
- Create a learning atmosphere.

4. Discover the gospel together.

- Set high expectations.
- Encourage your learners to testify.
- Ask effective questions.
- Listen to your learners.

5. Teach the doctrine.

- Use the scriptures.
- Use stories and examples.
- Promise blessings and testify.

6. Invite learners to act.

- Help your learners practice.
- Follow up on invitations.

As we apply these principles, we will become better teachers, better learners, better parents, and better disciples of Jesus Christ. For He has commanded us to “teach one another” “diligently,” in a way “that all may be edified of all” (D&C 88:77, 78, 122). May those we teach glimpse in us something of the Master Teacher and come away from the experience not merely informed, but transformed. ■

NOTES

1. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 196.
2. “Do As I’m Doing,” *Children’s Songbook*, 276.