

THE LESSON IS INSIDE THE LEARNER

When we acknowledge the magnificent potential of each learner, we begin to see as God sees.



By Russell T. Osguthorpe
Sunday School
General President

While on a Church assignment in Cusco, Peru, my wife and I attended a combined Relief Society and Melchizedek Priesthood class. The teacher that day was the adult Gospel Doctrine teacher. Because of scheduling issues during the first two meetings, only about 20 minutes remained for him to teach what he had prepared.

He began by asking all members to stand who had joined the Church during the past two years. Five members stood. He wrote the number 5 on the board and then said, “Brothers and sisters, it is wonderful that we have these 5 members with us who have recently joined the Church. The only problem is that during the past two years, we baptized 16 new converts in this ward.”

He then wrote the number 16 next to the number 5 and with great earnestness asked, “So, brothers and sisters, what are we going to do?”

A sister raised her hand and said, “We need to go find them and bring them back.”

The teacher agreed and then wrote the word *rescue* on the board. “We’ve got 11 new members to bring back,” he responded.

He then read a quote from President Thomas S. Monson about the importance of rescuing. He also read from the New Testament about how the Savior went after lost sheep (see Luke 15:6). Then he asked, “So how will we bring them back?”

Hands went up, and he called on one member after another. Class members had suggestions about how they as a ward family or as individuals could work together to help recent converts return to church. Then the teacher asked, “So if you were walking down the street and saw a man you recognized as one of these recent converts on the other side of the street, what would you

do?” One member said, “I would cross over and greet him. I would tell him how much we need him to come back and how eager we are to have him join with us again.”

Others in the class agreed and offered additional specific suggestions about how to help these members. There was an enthusiasm in the room, a determination to do what needed to be done to help these recently baptized members find their way back to full activity.

My wife and I left this lesson with a renewed desire to do something ourselves to help someone return to activity in the Church. I believe that everyone in the class left with such a feeling. Following this experience, I asked myself: What made this short lesson so effective? Why did everyone leave the class feeling so motivated to live the gospel more fully?

While reflecting on these two questions, I identified four principles that



made this class an effective learning and teaching experience:

1. Conversion is the aim.
2. Love is the motive.
3. Doctrine is the key.
4. The Spirit is the teacher.

Conversion Is the Aim

Rather than trying to “‘pour information’ into the minds of class members,” as President Monson has cautioned us *not* to do, this teacher was trying “*to inspire the individual to think about, feel about, and then do something about living gospel principles.*”¹

In short, this teacher’s aim was to help class members *do* something they might not have done had they not attended the class. And that *doing*

was intended to help each individual *become* a true disciple of the Savior.

The aim of this type of teaching is *conversion*. The word *conversion* means simply to turn in a new direction, to embrace new conduct. Conversion—becoming a true disciple—is not a single event but a lifelong process.² In this class the *doing* by class members was intended to help not only the class members but also the recent converts they would be trying to activate. Anytime we live a principle of the gospel more fully, someone else is blessed either directly or indirectly. For this reason, gospel learning and teaching are unique. Rather than leading only to the acquisition of knowledge, gospel learning leads to personal conversion.



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Love Is the Motive

While participating in the class in Peru, I could feel the love the teacher had for those present as well as for the recent converts he was inviting class members to activate. Love seemed to permeate the room—from teacher to learner, from learner to teacher, from one learner to another, and from learners to the recent converts.

Love helps us as teachers to teach as the Savior would teach if He were in our classroom. Indeed, “love prompts us to prepare and teach differently.”³

When a teacher’s motive is to cover the lesson material, the teacher focuses on content rather than on the needs of each individual learner. The Peruvian teacher seemed to feel no need to *cover* anything. He simply wanted to inspire class members to reach out to their brothers and sisters in love. Love for the Lord and love for each other constituted the driving force. Love was the motive. When love is our motive, the Lord will strengthen us to accomplish His purposes to help His children. He will inspire us with *what* we as teachers need to say and *how* we should say it.

Doctrine Is the Key

The teacher in Peru did not read from the lesson manual as he taught. I am convinced he used the manual or conference talks to prepare for the class, but when he taught, he taught from the scriptures. He recounted the story of the lost sheep and recited

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the following verse: “And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32). He shared President Monson’s invitation to all Church members to rescue those who have lost their way. The doctrines at the center of his lesson were faith and charity. Class members needed enough faith to act, and they needed to act out of love.

When the doctrines of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ are taught with clarity and conviction, the Lord strengthens both learner and teacher. The more class members offered their suggestions for reaching out to their brothers and sisters who were less active, the closer everyone felt to the Savior, who constantly reached out to others during His earthly ministry.

Doctrine is the key to effective gospel learning and teaching. It unlocks hearts. It unlocks minds. It opens the way for the Spirit of God to inspire and edify everyone present.

The Spirit Is the Teacher

Great gospel teachers recognize that they are not actually the teachers at all. The gospel is taught and learned through the Spirit. Without the Spirit, the teaching of gospel truths cannot lead to learning (see D&C 42:14). The more the teacher gives inspired invitations to act, the more the Spirit will be present during the lesson. The Peruvian teacher gave an inspired invitation. Then, as class members responded with suggestions, the feeling of the Spirit grew and strengthened everyone.

The teacher was not trying to *cover* the lesson. Rather, he was trying to *uncover* the lesson that was already inside the learner. By inviting class members through the power of the Spirit, the teacher helped members discover their own desire to act—to reach out to their brothers and sisters in love. As class members shared their ideas, they inspired each other because they were jointly drawing upon the Spirit.

When we are trying to live the gospel by helping those around us, the Lord will inspire us in what we should do. So if as teachers we want the Spirit to be more evident in our classroom, we simply need to invite class members to live a principle



of the gospel more fully. When we commit to live a gospel principle more fully, we draw nearer to God and God draws nearer to us (see D&C 88:63).

The Potential of Each Learner

We do not learn and teach the gospel for the sole purpose of gaining knowledge. We learn and teach the gospel to gain exaltation. Gospel learning and teaching are not about mastering facts; they're about mastering discipleship. Whether we are teaching our own children in the home or teaching ward or branch members in the classroom, we need to remember that the lesson we are teaching is already inside the learner. Our role as parents or

teachers is to help learners discover the lesson inside their own hearts and minds.

When we acknowledge the magnificent potential of each learner, we begin to see as God sees. Then we can say what He would have us say and do what He would have us do. As we pursue this path of learning and teaching, conversion is our aim, love is our motive, doctrine is the key, and the Spirit is the teacher. As we learn and teach in this way, the Lord will bless both learner and teacher “that all may be edified of all” (D&C 88:122). ■

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 107.
2. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Challenge to Become,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32–34.
3. *Teaching, No Greater Call* (1999), 32.

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