

Nourished by the Good Word of God

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It is vital that we nourish those we teach and lead by focusing on the fundamental doctrines, principles, and applications emphasized in the scriptures and the words of our latter-day prophets.



As a young man I worked with my father and brothers raising cattle and horses on our ranch in southern Utah and northern Arizona. My father taught us that when we wanted to catch one of our horses to ride, all we had to do was to put a handful of grain into a bucket and shake it for several seconds. It didn't matter if the horses were in a corral or a large field; they would come on the run to eat the grain. We could then gently slip a bridle over their heads while they were eating. I was always amazed that such a simple process worked so well.

On some occasions, when we didn't want to take the time to get the grain from the barn, we would put dirt in the bucket and shake it, attempting to trick the horses into thinking that we had grain for them to eat. When they discovered our deception, some of the horses stayed, but others would run away and be nearly impossible to catch. It often took several days to regain their trust. We learned that taking the time to consistently feed our horses grain made them much easier to work with and provided them with increased nourishment and greater strength.

Even though many years have passed since my days on the ranch, the experience I have just described has helped me as I have considered the following question: What can we as teachers and leaders in the Church do to provide increased doctrinal and spiritual nourishment for those we serve?

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught: "Most people don't come to church looking merely for a few new gospel facts or to see old friends, though all of that is important. They come seeking a spiritual experience. They want peace. They want their faith fortified and their hope

renewed. They want, in short, to be nourished by the good word of God, to be strengthened by the powers of heaven. Those of us who are called upon to speak or teach or lead have an obligation to help provide that, as best we possibly can."¹

The Savior and His servants have not only taught us the importance of helping others be "nourished by the good word of God" (Moroni 6:4); they have also provided inspired direction concerning how teaching and leading can best be accomplished. Section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants is one of many references that provide such valuable counsel. After acknowledging the concerns that existed in some of the early branches of the Church, the Savior instructed a group of leaders concerning the solution to the problems they were facing. His instructions began by asking a vital question: "Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?" (D&C 50:13). The Lord's familiar answer follows in verse 14: "To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth."

The answers to the problems the Saints were facing in 1831 are the same for the challenges we are facing today—we are to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Section 50 includes several vital keys to providing nourishment for those we teach and those we lead. The first key is found in the Savior's admonition to "preach *my* gospel" (D&C 50:14, emphasis added). The scriptures clearly teach that the gospel we are to preach isn't the "wisdom of the world" (Mosiah 24:7) but the "doctrine of Christ" (2 Nephi 31:21). While the gospel of Jesus Christ embraces all truth, not all truths are of equal value.² The Savior clearly taught that *His* gospel, first and foremost, is His atoning sacrifice. His



gospel is also an invitation to receive the blessings of the Atonement through faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Ghost, and enduring faithfully to the end.³

Just as I learned as a young man that grain was more appealing to our horses than a dirt-filled bucket, I also learned that grain was more nourishing than hay, that hay was more nourishing than straw, and that it was possible to *feed* a horse without *nourishing* him. As teachers and leaders, it is vital that we nourish those we teach and lead by focusing on the fundamental doctrines, principles, and applications emphasized in the scriptures and the words of our latter-day prophets instead of spending precious time on subjects and sources of lesser importance.

As a teacher I have learned that a class discussion focused on the Atonement of Jesus Christ is infinitely more important than discussing topics such as the precise location of the

ancient city of Zarahemla in today's geography. As a leader I have learned that leadership meetings are more meaningful if our highest priority is an *integrated* effort to build faith in Christ and strengthen families, and not simply a *correlated* calendar.

The Lord's words in section 50 contain a warning that if we teach "by some other way" than the way the Lord has directed, "it is not of God" (D&C 50:18). The Lord has taught those of us who serve in the Church to teach "none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith" (D&C 52:9). Does this mean that following the Savior's admonition to "preach my gospel" requires that every class we teach or meeting we lead be limited to teaching faith and repentance?

President Henry B. Eyring responded to a similar question by answering: "Of course not. But it does

mean that the teacher and those who participate must always desire to bring the Spirit of the Lord into the hearts of the members in the room to produce faith and a determination to repent and to be clean."⁴

A second key to ensuring those we teach and lead are "nourished by the good word of God" (Moroni 6:4) is also found in the Savior's direction "to preach my gospel *by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth*" (D&C 50:14; emphasis added). Not only are the Savior's words directing us to follow the guidance of the Spirit as we prepare and as we teach; He is also teaching that *it is the Spirit that is the most effective teacher in any given situation*.

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: "The Spirit of God speaking to the spirit of man has power to impart truth with greater effect and understanding than the truth can be imparted by personal contact even with heavenly beings."⁵

Several months ago I attended a training meeting where a number of General Authorities had spoken. After commenting on the excellent instruction that had been given, Elder David A. Bednar asked the following question: “What are we learning that has not been said?” He then explained that in addition to receiving the counsel that had been given by those who had *spoken* or who would yet speak, we should also carefully listen for and record the *unspoken* impressions given by the Holy Ghost.

The following statement from our beloved prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, provides additional counsel concerning teaching by the Spirit: “We must . . . 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.”⁶

The Lord’s words in section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants also provide an inspired standard by which each of us can evaluate the effectiveness of our teaching, leading, and learning. In verse 22 we read, “Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.”

My dear brothers and sisters, with all of my heart I pray that each of us will take great care to nourish those we teach and those we lead by fortifying them with the bread of life and the living water found within the restored gospel, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. “A Teacher Come from God,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 26.
2. See Ezra Taft Benson, “A New Witness for Christ,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 6.
3. See 3 Nephi 27:13–22; D&C 33:11–12; 39:6; 76:40–42.
4. “A Priesthood Quorum,” *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 43–44.
5. *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:47–48.
6. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 619–20.