

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERT

By George C. Robinson

As a surgeon I am often asked how I gained my skills. Some suppose that one takes a class, watches an operation, and then is turned loose. There is even an ironic saying in training: see one, do one, teach one. However, nothing is further from the truth.

I gained my professional skill and knowledge under the guidance of many gifted and patient physicians. I began first by watching over shoulders and then up close. After a year of observing, I was given small assignments, helping the surgeon and his or her “first assistant”—the assistant surgeon.

After another year I was allowed to stand across the table from the surgeon and act as first assistant during simple operations. After another year or two, I was allowed to be first assistant in more complicated operations. Then I began to do the simplest operations, such as fixing a hernia, while the experienced surgeon acted as my first assistant.

In my last year of training—seven years after I had completed medical school—I was allowed to do complicated operations while the surgeon acted as first assistant. I discovered that the greatest teachers could make the operation flow smoother through their assistance because they could show me what needed to be done in clear and simple ways—ways they had learned through this same mentoring process.



*As a student surgeon, I always had someone more skilled at my side.*

*As a child of God, I have the same opportunity.*

I did not fully appreciate the guidance of these amazing and gifted expert surgeons who were my first assistants until I finished training and was on my own. However, even 30 years later, my teachers are in my mind as I daily use the skills they so painstakingly taught, demonstrated, and corrected.

Learning the principles of the gospel is no different. We are taught line upon line through experience—by a very patient Teacher. We look to Him, follow His example, ask for inspiration, and our Heavenly Father blesses us with guidance—often received through the Holy Ghost, the words of living prophets, the scriptures, and others who love and serve. Our Guide stands figuratively at our side as we gain confidence, smoothing our path, giving needed correction, answering questions, and offering more and more trust as we prove worthy of it.

Some student surgeons are eager to act independently, to do things their own way. Likewise, we sometimes try to act without our expert Guide. I have learned, however, during many years as a surgeon that even now I always wish for and cherish a first assistant who knows more than I do—especially when lives and souls hang in the balance!

Our growth in the gospel began in the premortal realm, continues here, and will doubtless continue long after our mortal life is finished. But in all phases of our experience, our Savior has gone before, demonstrating the skills needed to succeed. And He invites all to rely upon Him and His expertise. ■