



Teaching True Doctrine

BY PRESIDENT HENRY B. EYRING
First Counselor in the First Presidency

There has been a war between light and darkness, between good and evil, since before the world was created. The battle still rages, and the casualties seem to be increasing. All of us have family members we love who are being buffeted by the forces of the destroyer, who would make all of God's children miserable. For many of us, there have been sleepless nights. We have tried to add every force for good we can to the powers swirling around the people who are at risk. We have loved them. We have set the best example we could. We have pled in prayer for them. A wise prophet long ago gave us counsel about another force which we may at times underestimate and thus use too little.

Alma was the leader of a people faced with destruction by ferocious enemies. In the face of that danger, he could not do everything, so he had to choose. He could have built fortifications or trained armies or created armaments. But his only hope of victory was to get God's help, and for that he knew the people must repent. And so he chose to try one spiritual thing first: "And now, as the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword,

or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God" (Alma 31:5).

Opening Minds and Hearts

The word of God is the doctrine taught by Jesus Christ and by His prophets. Alma knew that words of doctrine have great power. They can open the minds of people to see spiritual things not visible to the natural eye. And they can open hearts to feelings of the love of God and a love for truth. The Savior drew on both of those sources of power, to open our eyes and open hearts, in the 18th section of the Doctrine and Covenants as He taught His doctrine to those whom He wanted to serve Him as missionaries. As you listen, think of that young man in your family now wavering in preparing himself for a mission. Here is how the Master taught two of His servants and how you might teach His doctrine to the young man you love:

"And now, Oliver Cowdery, I speak unto you, and also unto David Whitmer, by the way of commandment; for, behold, I command all men everywhere to repent, and I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called.

"Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (D&C 18:9–10).



In the face of great danger, Alma chose to try one spiritual thing first to strengthen his people: "As the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just— . . . therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God."

He begins by saying how much He trusts them. Then He draws their hearts to Him by saying how much His Father and He love every soul. He next goes to the foundation of His doctrine. He describes how much we have cause to love Him:

“For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.

“And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance.

“And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!” (D&C 18:11–13).

Having given the doctrine of His mission to open their hearts, He gives them His command: “Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people” (D&C 18:14).

Finally, He opens their eyes to see beyond the veil. He takes them and us to a future existence, described in the great plan of salvation, where we may yet be. He tells us of wonderful associations, worth giving our all to enjoy:

“And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!

“And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!” (D&C 18:15–16).

In those few passages, He teaches doctrine to open our hearts to His love. And He teaches doctrine to open our eyes to see spiritual realities, invisible to any mind not illuminated by the Spirit of Truth.

How We Must Teach

The need to open eyes and hearts tells us how we must teach doctrine. Doctrine gains its power as the Holy Ghost confirms that it is true. We prepare those we teach, as best we can, to receive the quiet promptings of the still, small voice. That takes at least some faith in Jesus Christ. It takes at least some humility, some willingness to surrender to the Savior’s will for us. The person you would help may have little of either, but you can urge that he or she desire

to believe. More than that, you can take confidence from another of the powers of doctrine. Truth can prepare its own way. Simply hearing the words of doctrine can plant the seed of faith in the heart. And even a tiny seed of faith in Jesus Christ invites the Spirit.

We have more control over our own preparation. We feast on the word of God in the scriptures and study the words of the living prophets. We fast and pray to invite the Spirit for ourselves and the person we would teach.

Because we need the Holy Ghost, we must be cautious and careful not to go beyond teaching true doctrine. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Truth. His confirmation is invited by our avoiding speculation or personal interpretation. That can be hard to do. You love the person you are trying to influence. He or she may have ignored the doctrine previously heard. It is tempting to try something new or sensational. But we invite the Holy Ghost as our companion when we are careful to teach only true doctrine.

One of the surest ways to avoid even getting near false doctrine is to choose to be simple in our teaching. Safety is gained by that simplicity, and little is lost. We know that because the Savior has told us to teach the most important doctrine to little children. Listen to His command: “And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, 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” (D&C 68:25).

We can teach even a child to understand the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It is therefore possible, with God’s help, to teach the saving doctrine simply.

Begin Early

We have the greatest opportunity with the young. The best time to teach is early, while children are still immune to the temptations of their mortal enemy and long before the words of truth may be harder for them to hear in the noise of their personal struggles.

A wise parent would never miss a chance to gather children together to learn of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.



Such moments are so rare in comparison with the efforts of the enemy. For every hour the power of doctrine is introduced into a child's life, there may be hundreds of hours of messages and images denying or ignoring the saving truths.

The question should not be whether we are too tired to prepare to teach doctrine or whether it would be better to draw a child closer by just having fun or whether the child is beginning to think that we preach too much. The question must be, "With so little time and so few opportunities, what words of doctrine from me will fortify them against the attacks on their faith which are sure to come?" The words you speak today may be the ones they remember. And today will soon be gone.

The years pass, we teach the doctrine the best we can, and yet some still do not respond. There is sorrow in that. But there is hope in the scriptural record of families. Think of Alma the Younger and Enos. In their moments of crisis, they remembered the words of their fathers, words of the doctrine of

Jesus Christ (see Enos 1:1–4; Alma 36:16–19). It saved them. Your teaching of that sacred doctrine will be remembered.

The Lasting Effects of Teaching

Two doubts may creep into your mind. You may wonder if you know the doctrine well enough to teach it. And if you have already tried to teach it, you may wonder why you can't see much of good effect.

In my own family there is a story of a young woman who had the courage to start to teach doctrine when she was only a new convert with little education. The fact that the effects of her teaching haven't ended gives me patience to wait for the fruits of my own efforts.

Mary Bommeli was my great-grandmother. I never met her. Her granddaughter heard her tell her story and wrote it down.

Mary was born in 1830. The missionaries taught her family in Switzerland when she was 24. She was still living at home, weaving and selling cloth to help support her family on their small farm. When the family heard

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the doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, they knew it was true. They were baptized. Mary's brothers were called on missions, going without purse or scrip. The rest of the family sold their possessions to go to America to gather with the Saints.

There was not enough money for all to go. Mary volunteered to stay behind because she felt she could earn enough from her weaving to support herself and save for her passage. She found her way to Berlin and to the home of a woman who hired her to weave cloth for the family's clothing. She lived in a servant's room and set up her loom in the living area of the home.

It was against the law then to teach the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Berlin. But Mary could not keep the good news to herself. The woman of the house and her friends would gather

around the loom to hear the Swiss girl teach. She talked about the appearance of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith, of the visitation of angels, and of the Book of Mormon. When she came to the accounts of Alma, she taught the doctrine of the Resurrection.

That caused some problems with her weaving. In those days many children died very young. The women around the loom had lost children in death, some of them several children. When Mary taught the truth that little children were heirs of the celestial kingdom and that those women might again be with them and with the Savior and our Heavenly Father, tears rolled down the faces of the women. Mary cried too. All those tears falling got the cloth wet that Mary had woven.

Mary's teaching created a more serious problem. Even though Mary begged the women not to talk about what she told them, they did.



IDEAS FOR HOME TEACHERS

After prayerfully studying this message, share it using a method that encourages the participation of those you teach. Following are some examples:

1. Read the first paragraph of the article. Explain how an open heart and mind can help people move from the dark to the light. Tell the story of President Eyring's great-grandmother Mary Bommeli. Discuss how she helped people discover the light. Invite family members to express ways they might help teach others true doctrine.

2. Bring an object or visual aid that can help you briefly teach a doctrine that is meaningful to you (for example, bring a mustard seed to talk about faith or a piece of bread to discuss the Bread of Life). Explain how this doctrine has influenced your life. Invite family members to share doctrines that are meaningful to them.

3. Help the family understand the principles of teaching from the section "How We Must Teach." Invite them to apply those principles in a future family home evening.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTINA SMITH

They shared the joyous doctrine with their friends. So one night there was a knock at the door. It was the police. They took Mary off to jail. On the way she asked the policeman for the name of the judge she was to appear before the next morning. She asked if he had a family. She asked if he was a good father and a good husband. The policeman smiled as he described the judge as a man of the world.

At the jail Mary asked for a pencil and some paper. She wrote a letter to the judge. She wrote about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as described in the Book of Mormon, about the spirit world, and about how long the judge would have to think and to consider his life before facing the final judgment. She wrote that she knew he had much to repent of which would break his family's heart and bring him great sorrow. She wrote through the night. In the morning she asked the policeman to take her letter to the judge. He did.

Later the policeman was summoned by the judge to his office. The letter Mary had written was irrefutable evidence that she was teaching the gospel and so breaking the law. Nevertheless, it wasn't long until the policeman came back to Mary's cell. He told her that all charges were dismissed

and that she was free to go. Her teaching the doctrine of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ had opened eyes and hearts enough to get her cast into jail. And her declaring the doctrine of repentance to the judge got her cast out of jail.¹

Shaping Your Descendants

The teaching of Mary Bommeli touched more than those women around the loom and the judge. My father, her grandson, talked to me during the nights as he approached death. He spoke of joyous reunions that were coming soon in the spirit world. I could almost see the bright sunlight and the smiles in that place of paradise as he talked about it with such assurance.

At one point I asked him if he had some repenting to do. He smiled. He chuckled softly as he said, "No, Hal, I've been repenting as I went along." The doctrine of paradise that Mary Bommeli taught those women was real to her grandson. And even the doctrine Mary taught the judge had shaped my father's life for good. That will not be the end of Mary Bommeli's teaching. The record of her words will send true doctrine to generations of her family yet unborn. Because she believed that even a new convert knew enough doctrine to teach it, the minds and hearts of her descendants will be opened, and they will be strengthened in the battle.

Your descendants will teach doctrine to each other because you taught it. Doctrine can more than open minds to spiritual things and hearts to the love of God. When that doctrine brings joy and peace, it also has the power to open mouths. Like those women in Berlin, your descendants will not be able to keep the good news to themselves.

I am grateful to live in a time when we and our families have the fulness of the gospel restored. I am grateful for the Savior's mission of love for us and for the words of life which He has given us. I pray that we may share those words with those we love. I testify that God our Father lives and loves all His children. Jesus Christ is His Only Begotten Son in the flesh and our Savior. I know that He is risen, and I know that we can be washed clean through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

NOTE

1. See Theresa Snow Hill, *Life and Times of Henry Eyring and Mary Bommeli* (1997), 15–22.