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WHAT CAN I DO TO TEACH MORE LIKE THE SAVIOR?

While I was serving as a mission president in Toronto, Canada, one of my assistants approached me and said, “President, how can I be a better missionary?” My first response was, “You are doing great.” And in truth, he was. But he persisted in his question, so I thought for a moment and then offered a suggestion. With a smile, he responded positively.

I shared this simple experience with our other missionaries. Soon other elders and sisters came to their interviews and asked, “President, how can I be a better missionary?” That simple question from one missionary caused a spirit of improvement throughout our entire mission.

In like manner, teachers will receive constructive counsel if they will sincerely ask this simple question of the Lord and their leaders: “What can I do to teach more like the Savior?” The Lord promised, “Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers” (D&C 112:10).

Caring Like Blazes

J. B. Priestley, an English novelist, was once asked how he became such an accomplished writer since none of his gifted peers had so excelled. He responded, “The difference between us was not in ability, but in the fact that while . . . they . . . merely toyed with the fascinating idea of [writing], I cared like blazes!”¹

As teachers, we might ask, “Are we content with our current teaching abilities, or do we care like blazes about teaching like the Savior?” If so, are we willing to put aside all pride and not only wait for instruction but also actively seek it?

Humility Is the Key

We have many excellent teachers in this Church, but the truth is, no matter how many years of experience we have, or how many degrees we hold, or how well we are loved by class members, we can all improve and become more like the Master Teacher, provided that we are humble. Perhaps the defining quality of a Christlike

teacher is being teachable. Humility is a quality that both invites the Spirit and nurtures our appetite to improve.

On occasion, I meet Sunday School presidents who are disappointed because one or more of the teachers in their ward or branch feel they are so experienced or accomplished that they do not need further instruction or to attend teacher council meetings. This saddens me because I have never yet met a teacher who could not improve in some way.

I know that if even the most experienced teacher will come to teacher council meetings with a humble heart and a blazing desire to learn, such a teacher *will* receive divine insights and impressions as to how he or she can improve. I have been to dozens of teacher council meetings and I always leave with some new insight or a desire to improve upon a skill or attribute that needs refining and perfecting.

The Need to Develop Teaching Skills

Some may occasionally think of teaching skills or techniques as simply

mechanical or secular tools. When developed, however, these skills allow the Spirit to choose from a variety of options that can best meet the needs of individual learners. Who is more productive, the man who attempts to cut down a tree with his pocketknife, or the same man who utilizes a chain saw? In both cases, the same man has the same strength and character, but the latter is so much more productive because he has a more effective tool at his disposal. Teaching skills become divine tools in the hands of the Spirit.

Training and practice, role-playing,

study, and observation can help a teacher of any skill level to develop skills that the Spirit can draw on—helping us teach more like the Master. Many of these skills can be developed in teacher council meetings.

The Lord Can Mold and Shape Us

Some may feel that they just can't teach like the Savior—that such a quest is beyond their capabilities. Peter may have thought he was nothing more than a simple fisherman; Matthew, but a despised tax collector. Yet with the help of the Savior, each

became a powerful leader and teacher of the gospel.

This ability of the Lord to mold and shape us is not unlike the experience Michelangelo had in sculpting what is considered by many the finest work ever fashioned by the hand of man—*David*.

Before Michelangelo took on the project, two other sculptors, Agostino di Duccio and Antonio Rossellino, had been commissioned to complete the statues. Both ran into the same problem: the 2,000-pound (907 kg) column was the right height and width, but the marble was severely



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flawed. Di Duccio and then Rossellino had tried their artistic touch on this column, but to no avail. There were just too many imperfections.² Finally, each gave up. Michelangelo saw these same imperfections, but he also saw beyond them. He saw a living, breathing, majestic form of David that today often causes onlookers to gasp in awe at first sight.

In a similar manner, God declared that the fulness of His gospel will “be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world” (D&C 1:23). God sees our imperfections and shortcomings, but He also sees beyond them. He has the ability not only to help us overcome our weaknesses but also to convert those weaknesses into strengths (see Ether 12:26–27). He can help refine and

perfect our teaching skills and attributes so that we can teach more like the Savior.

Ways We Can Teach More Like the Savior

Following are some of the core elements for which we might all be striving in order to teach more like the Savior:

- **Teach by the Spirit**, knowing that it is the Spirit who gives life and breath and substance to our lessons (see D&C 43:15).
- **Focus on the doctrine**, recognizing that the doctrine as taught in the scriptures and by the living prophets has the inherent power to change lives (see Alma 31:5).
- **Become an avid learner**, knowing that the ideal teacher is

also an ideal learner (see D&C 88:118).

- **Seek revelation**, knowing that with every call to teach comes the right to receive revelation to magnify one’s calling (see D&C 42:61).
- **Demonstrate love** by learning each class member’s name, praying for him or her individually, taking a personal interest in each (particularly those with special needs), and reaching out in a meaningful way to those who don’t attend (see Moroni 7:47–48).

A Personal Evaluation

The Apostle Paul gave this counsel: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). This might be paraphrased for teachers to read, “Examine yourselves, whether you are teaching in the Savior’s way or your way.” The beginning of the year is an appropriate time to conduct such an examination. Accordingly, you are invited to answer the personal evaluation questions accompanying this article. As you do so, the Spirit will help you know what your focus should be in order to become a more Christlike teacher, and how you can acquire and develop the necessary attributes and skills to do so. ■

NOTES

1. J. B. Priestley, *Rain upon Godshill* (1939), 176.
2. See “Michelangelo’s David,” accademia.org/explore-museum/artworks/michelangelos-david.

