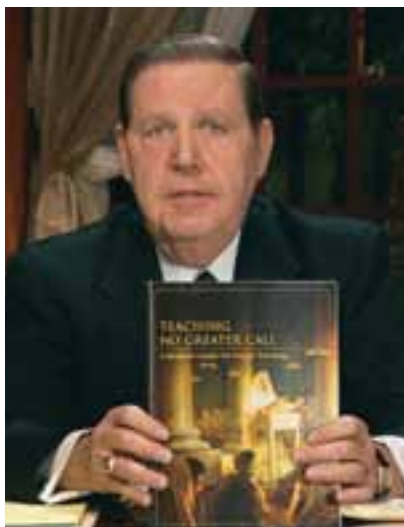




Teaching and Learning in the Church

ELDER JEFFREY R. HOLLAND
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



A High Priority

We thank President Packer and Elder Perry for that inspiring foundation for our subject today, and we look forward to the capstone message that will come from President Monson at the close of our meeting.

It's indicative of the high priority the presiding Brethren give to the subject of teaching and learning that we are devoting all of our worldwide leadership training broadcast this year to this subject. Perhaps the reason for

that is obvious. We all understand that the success of the gospel message depends upon its being taught and then understood and then lived in such a way that its promise of happiness and salvation can be realized.

For that reason, Jesus's great final charge to His disciples just prior to His Ascension into heaven was:

"Go ye therefore, and *teach all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19–20; emphasis added).

What the Savior stresses in that passage is that however much there is to do in living the gospel—and there is much we are to do to live it—none of that can be accomplished until we have been taught those truths and have learned the way of the gospel. For several years now, President Hinckley has been counseling us

to hold our people close to the Church, especially the youth and the new converts. He said we all need a friend, a responsibility, and nourishing "by the good word of God" (Moroni 6:4; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 66; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 47).

Inspired instruction in the home and in the Church helps provide this crucial element of nourishing by the good word of God. And the opportunity to magnify that call exists everywhere—fathers, mothers, siblings, friends, missionaries, priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers, classroom instructors, including our wonderful seminary and institute teachers, who join us today. Well, the list goes on and on. In fact, in this Church, it is virtually impossible to find anyone who is not a teacher.

Select some ideas from Elder Holland's presentation that you can apply as a learner or as a teacher.

Elder Holland's class discussion focuses on five principles. Consider them; then make a plan of how you would teach these principles to someone else.

What did Elder Holland *demonstrate* about learning and teaching in addition to what he talked about?

President Packer made that point in his exchange with Elder Perry. He said, “Everybody is a teacher”—the leader, the follower, the parent, the counselor. Little wonder that the Apostle Paul would say in his writings, “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers.” After that would come the broad blessing of miracles, spiritual gifts, and heavenly manifestations (see 1 Corinthians 12:28).

Underscoring the divine nature of those who were called as instructors, a young Apostle by the name of David O. McKay said in general conference in 1916, “No greater responsibility can rest upon any man [or woman], than to be a teacher of God’s children”

(in Conference Report, Oct. 1916, 57). That’s still true. We picked from that quote the title for our wonderful teacher’s help and manual in the Church, *Teaching, No Greater Call*. That wonderfully revered Primary hymn “I Am a Child of God” has the children singing this request to parents and teachers:

*Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday.
(Hymns, no. 301)*

That is our common task in this Church. That is our shared responsibility. We are all children of God, and we must teach each other; we must help each other “find the way.” That is what we are going to try to do today.

Preparing to Teach

You can see from these materials spread out on this table that I am trying to prepare a lesson. Does it look familiar? It’s today’s lesson—a lesson for all of you. Preparing for any class is hard work, and it takes time. In that regard, may I encourage you to start thinking about and planning early for any lesson that you are to give.

For example, if I were going to teach a class on Sunday, I would read through and begin praying about that lesson the Sunday before. That gives me a full week to pray, to seek inspiration, to think, to read and watch for real-life applications that will give vitality to my message. You won’t finalize the lesson that early, but you will be surprised to find how many things come to you during the week, how much God gives you—things that you will feel to use when you do finalize your preparation.



Inspired instruction in the home and in the Church helps provide the crucial element of nourishing by the good word of God.



Top: Elder Jeffrey R. Holland prepares for a teaching demonstration, presented as part of the worldwide leadership training meeting. Above: Some members of the Church in the Salt Lake City area were invited to form a class for this teaching demonstration. Some of their additional comments are included in boxes on the following pages.

In discussing preparation, may I also encourage you to avoid a temptation that faces almost every teacher in the Church; at least it has certainly been my experience. That is the temptation to cover too much material, the temptation to stuff more into the hour—or more into the students—than they can possibly hold! Remember two things in this regard: first of all, we are teaching

people, not subject matter per se; and second, every lesson outline that I have ever seen will inevitably have more in it than we can possibly cover in the allotted time.

So stop worrying about that. It's better to take just a few good ideas and get good discussion—and good learning—than to be frenzied, trying to teach every word in the manual. In these materials lying before me,

I already have three or four times the content that I can possibly say or share with you today in the allotted time period of a classroom hour. So, like you, I have had to choose and select; I'm holding some material over for another day.

An unrushed atmosphere is absolutely essential if you are to have the Spirit of the Lord present in your class. Please don't ever forget that. Too many of us rush. We rush right past the Spirit of the Lord trying to beat the clock in some absolutely unnecessary footrace.

Teaching Demonstration

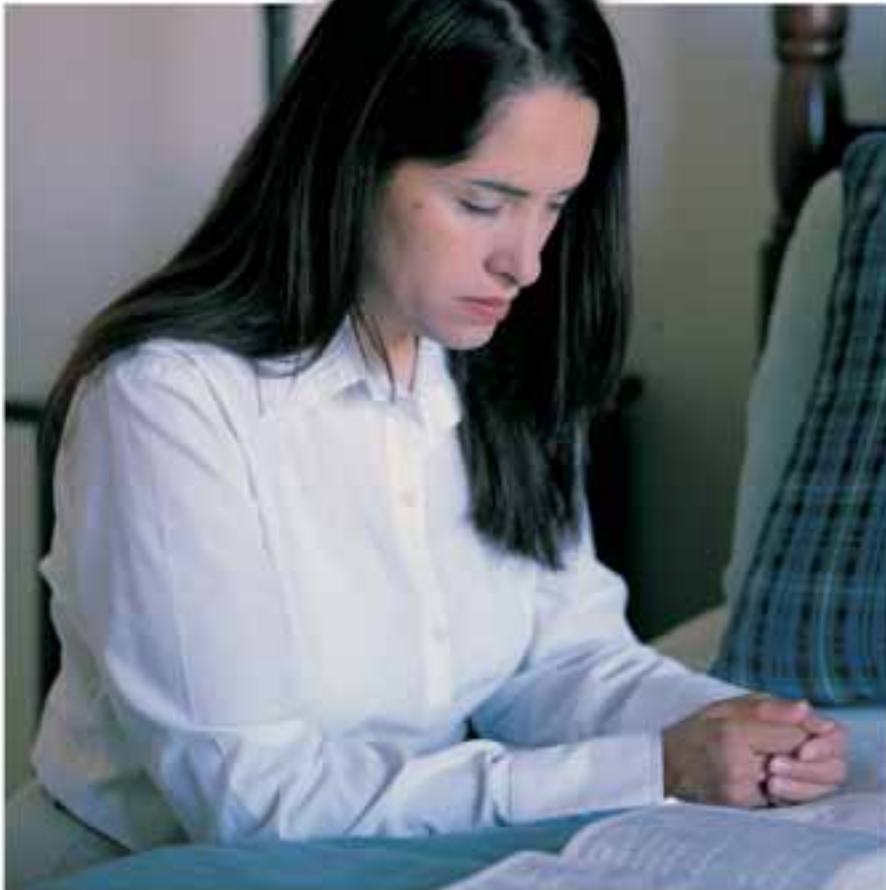
Well, let's return now to that wonderful discussion between President Packer and Elder Perry to find some of the key points for success in this great task of teaching and learning. To do that we are going to enter a classroom here at Church headquarters where we are going to interact in something of the same way we hope you will do in your classroom, wherever that may be in the world. This is unrehearsed and spontaneous, just the way your classes are. The teacher has done his best to prepare and pray—I reassure you that I have done that—and so have the students. Now, having had an opening prayer for our class, we are going to trust in the Spirit of the Lord to guide us in our teaching experience.

Welcome to class. This is intended to be something of an average class size, *más o menos*. Some of you will

have more, and some of you will have less, but the principles for teaching will be essentially the same whatever the size of the class. Here we have 15 absolutely perfect and beautiful people in our audience and a 16th that includes you, out in that worldwide audience we're reaching to.

Listen for new ideas, things that may come to only you. They may not have anything to do with what we are saying. But that is how the Spirit works. Be open to promptings about

If we ask, we will receive, and if we knock, it will be opened. We can do this.



how you can teach. And remember, you can teach! You can do this!

Everybody Can Teach

Elder Perry posed a question for President Packer midway in their conversation: “What would you say to a new teacher?” If someone were newly called, what would you advise him or her to do? What would you say to help this teacher take courage and be able to accept the call and fulfill it and enjoy it?

Brother Charles W. Dahlquist II:

You can do it.

Elder Holland: You can do it. Everybody can teach.

And that is what President Packer said when he answered that question from Brother Perry.

He referred to scriptures that promise you that you can do it. The scriptures always provide an extra reassurance. Do any scriptures come to mind?

Elder Jay E. Jensen: Moroni 10:17.

Elder Holland: Moroni 10, the last chapter in the Book of Mormon, is a great summary statement about gifts. Do you want to read that, Brother Jensen?

Elder Jensen: “And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally.”

Elder Holland: That’s wonderful.

Elder Jensen: It excludes no one.

Elder Holland: No one is left out of that. Sometimes we think it means, “Everybody but me, everybody can teach but me, or everybody can lead but me.” Well, that’s not the case. These are gifts to everyone. Note a little warning on that, as long as we are in the subject. Brother Jensen, read the first couple of lines of verse eight.

Elder Jensen: “And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God” (Moroni 10:8).

Elder Holland: I think there is a little temptation for us to “deny.” We kind of hang back. When a call comes, or we’re to face a classroom—and that is a pretty intimidating experience for any of us—I think there is something in us that says, “I can’t do this, and I’m



“When I was a member of the branch in Colonia Suiza, Uruguay, my first calling was as a Primary president

when I was 13 years old. I was the president, and I was the teacher also. I remember being set apart and given a manual, and the assignment was to teach to the children the lessons and the gospel. I opened the manual, and I didn’t know what to do, how to teach a lesson. So I prayed. I said, ‘Heavenly Father, I need to teach the lesson to the children next Saturday. Wilt Thou help me?’ And I received the influence of the Spirit, and I learned to teach because the Spirit taught me.”

Sister Delia Rochon

going to deny. I’m going to deny that the gift can come; I’m going to deny that the gift is mine. I’m going to, in a sense, deny the authenticity of the call.” In a way, that is what we’re saying. And what Moroni says here is “Don’t deny”: “Deny not the gifts of God, for they are many.”

“Ask and Ye Shall Receive”

I’m thinking of something the Savior Himself said directly to His disciples in the New Testament, and I am told that it is the scriptural promise and declaration repeated more than almost any other in all of scripture. Someone said that some variation of this appears

a hundred times in the scriptures. Now, if it appeared only once or twice, I guess we could embrace it once or twice, but something repeated 20, 40, 60, or 80 times obviously has great significance for the Lord.

Does anybody have any idea what this promise is?

Sister Vicki F. Matsumori: I would think it is the scripture that says something about ask and knock and you shall receive.

Elder Holland: That’s it. Sister Matsumori, as long as you’ve led us into that, would you read Matthew 7:7? This is from the Sermon on the Mount and one of many places where this promise is expressed.

Sister Matsumori: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

Elder Holland: Thank you. I love the crisp, clear, declarative spirit of that promise. If we ask, we will receive, and if we knock, it will be opened. We can do this.

Now at this point we are starting to accumulate some ideas. I am going to ask Sister Kathy Hughes of our general Relief Society presidency to be our scribe. We have a theme developing, given to us by President Packer in his exchange with Elder Perry. And that would be “The Gift of Teaching.” Would you write that up on the board as a heading for us, Sister Hughes?

We are going to list some of the things we want to remember about how to pursue the gift of teaching.

The one that Sister Matsumori just gave us would be number 1: “Ask, seek, and knock spiritually”—perhaps the most fundamental requirement for a teacher in seeking this gift that God has promised us.

Elder W. Rolfe Kerr: It seems to me that it’s very important to put the concluding piece to this and even maybe have it in front of us. What comes from asking is that we receive. What comes from seeking is that we find. We knock, and it is opened.

Elder Holland: Let’s write that on the board, Sister Hughes, that we are going to receive. There is a promise in this.

Brother Orin Howell: Along with that, I like Luke 12:12, where it says, “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

Elder Holland: That starts to open up a wider world, because we are always talking that way to the missionaries. We are forever talking to the missionaries about opening their mouths, telling them that if they have prepared and done the best they can, God will give them what to say in the hour of their need. That is a wonderful, broad, whole new idea about asking and receiving at the appointed hour. That’s a terrific verse, Orin.

Sister Tamu Smith: I think that sometimes when I am in situations where I feel overwhelmed, being a convert to the Church and being asked to teach a class where people come from pioneer heritage, the Spirit does touch you to say something

that you don't feel inclined to say. In Exodus 4:12, it says, "Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say." I think that if we are willing to allow the Spirit to move us to say those things, even though we may not feel like we have all the answers, we let Heavenly Father do His job in speaking through us.

Elder Holland: What a wonderful verse. In all of my years of discussing this subject, I don't know that I have ever heard that one used, so thank you, Sister Smith. And the context there, of course, is this overwhelming task that Moses had to help the children of Israel extricate themselves from life's problems. That's what all of us face. That's a terrific verse to say, "Just don't worry; it will be given to you." Thanks for that reference.

Well, keep these citations in mind if you are going to teach such a subject. You can use these or many, many more.

Teach from the Scriptures

Elder Steven E. Snow: Many of us when we are called to teach are just overwhelmed with the enormity of the assignment and feel inadequate and unprepared. But you know, if we will do our best to study the resources we are given and get into the scriptures and then just trust in the Spirit, we will be helped through the process. I think sometimes we just are overwhelmed because we don't know enough.

Elder Holland: Absolutely. We all

feel that way; every teacher who has ever taught has felt that way. I think it's fair to say that all of us here represent the collective effort of the Church to put good material in people's hands. We really do have good curricular materials. We have good lesson manuals. They don't teach themselves, but there is a great reassurance there that we are not in this alone, and we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We have wonderful resources, and we are going to talk about those throughout the day. That helps us not feel quite so overwhelmed.

When President Packer was talking with Elder Perry, he said, "I always relied on [blank]," whether at the pulpit or standing in the front of the class. He said he never wanted to go anywhere without them. To what was he referring?

Sister Julie B. Beck: The scriptures.

Elder Holland: The scriptures, absolutely. Would you write number 2, Sister Hughes: "Teach from the scriptures."

I don't think that we can overstate this or overestimate this in our role of teaching in the Church. Obviously, the very substance of the gospel, the scriptures themselves are the things that we are being called to teach, whether it's Primary or our adult groups or our teenage groups, at home or in the Church. I am reminded of a powerful thing said in Alma 31—a favorite verse that I think says this about as well as any verse that I know of in the scriptures.

Alma had taken on a very serious mission, a very difficult mission—the mission to the Zoramites—and he had just had his exchange with Korihor. He finds what works for him, and he finds what doesn't work in this challenge to teach and to testify.

Brother Wada, would you read Alma 31:5?

Brother Takashi Wada: "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



"I will never forget one Sunday morning. We were in Athi River, Kenya, and there was a young man who stood and gave a sacrament meeting talk using only the scriptures. It was so powerful. He must have been only about 15—he couldn't have been more than that. I just kept smiling, and I thought, 'Oh, my goodness, I wish we could all hear this young man bear testimony and talk of Christ and preach of Christ.'"

Sister Kathleen H. Hughes



The very substance of the gospel, the scriptures themselves are the things that we are being called to teach.

it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.”

Elder Holland: Thank you very much. Somehow over the years, this has become a favorite scripture for me. We all have verses we return to time and again, and I have returned again and again to this one. “The preaching of the word”—the power of the word—“had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just,” it had a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword,” and they have had plenty of sword in this book and in life, “or anything else,” all the other battlegrounds, conflicts, and challenges. “Therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God.”

Another word for *virtue* is *power*. When the woman came to touch the

hem of Christ’s garment, in the scene in the New Testament, He said, “Virtue [has] gone out of me” (Luke 8:46). The original Greek New Testament language for that is *power*.

So Alma is saying we should try the power of the word of God, since it has such a powerful effect.

Brother Wada: I think that everybody comes to church to learn something and wants to be nurtured. One phrase from the book of Jacob, Jacob 2:8, says, “It supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word [of God] healeth the wounded soul.” It is satisfying when just after I teach a class somebody says to me, “This is exactly what I wanted to hear. I needed it.”

Elder Holland: A profound point—thank you, Brother Wada—because people come to church for a spiritual

experience. That’s why they come. We come to church and gather in these settings to hear the word of God, to hear declaration, Spirit, testimony, and conviction. When tough times come, when we need to be healed, what the world offers is not going to be enough. We come to be healed by the word of God.

Sister Matsumori: For most Primary teachers, teaching from the word of God with children is a real challenge. They don’t read; they don’t have their own scriptures; they are not familiar with it if their family hasn’t taught them. It can be challenging.

Elder Holland: Good point. Here’s an experienced Primary teacher giving us just a little caution that we are going to get children at all stages of development and that we should bring them along gradually—as



“Once I was sitting with a six-year-old granddaughter, and she said, ‘I want to learn

how to study in my scriptures.’ And I thought, ‘Well, she’s only six. Can she really get anything powerful out of the scriptures?’ So I said, ‘Let’s turn to 1 Nephi, chapter 1, and if you read anything you understand or if it means anything to you, you can underline it. And if you want to say something about it, you can write about it.’ So we started with that verse: ‘I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents’ (1 Nephi 1:1), and she stopped and said, ‘I have goodly parents.’ She was getting it from the first line. She marked her scriptures, and she said, ‘I’m going to finish the Book of Mormon before I’m baptized.’ ‘Some days,’ she said, ‘I don’t understand anything.’ But it was powerful for her to read the first verse of the Book of Mormon, the first time she tried it.”

Sister Julie B. Beck

children need to be brought along. Good reminder, Sister Matsumori.

Brother Dahlquist: It’s even the same with young men and young women. If they are going to understand it, they have to, as Nephi said, be able to apply it. They need to relate to it.

Elder Holland: They need to liken it unto themselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23).

Brother Dahlquist: They need to have the scriptures come alive.

Elder Holland: Yes, and we are talking about lots of experience here—some experiences in the home, some in seminary and institute. We are talking about something that has to grow over time in our young men and our young women. We won’t be impatient if it takes a while for this to develop.

Elder Jensen: So far our discussion has concentrated on the four standard works. We do have other scripture.

Elder Holland: Yes. Do you want to say a word about the living prophets?

Elder Jensen: We do have good manuals, and we do have magazines and stories. Aren’t they powerful?

Elder Holland: We do have great material, to say nothing of the whole world of the living prophets and semi-annual general conference broadcasts and publications that go to the Church. We have a wealth of the word of God available to us, and we ought to use it.

Sister Kathleen H. Hughes: This raises in my mind a question. We frequently see, as Elder Oaks pointed

out in another talk that he gave, that there is just cursory acknowledgement that the manual is even there, and then we go off on our own. Why do we do that? How can we help our brothers and sisters understand that the handbooks and the manuals are for our edification?

Elder Holland: Yes, that’s a good reminder. It fits with Elder Jensen’s comment. In the spirit of the wonderful comments you’ve made and the insights you’ve given me—new insights about the power of the word and the healing, the help, and the light that comes from it—I am reminded of a story President Packer told the Quorum of the Twelve some years ago. He talked about a severe winter in Utah when the snow was excessive and had driven the deer herds down very low into some of the valleys. Some of them were trapped by fences and circumstances as they were taken out of their natural habitat, and well-meaning, perfectly responsive, capable agencies tried to respond by feeding those deer to get them through the crisis of the winter. They brought in hay and dumped it everywhere; it was about as good as they could do under the circumstances. Later an immense number of those deer were found dead. The people who handled those animals afterward said that their stomachs were full of hay, but they had starved to death. They had been fed, but they had not been nourished.

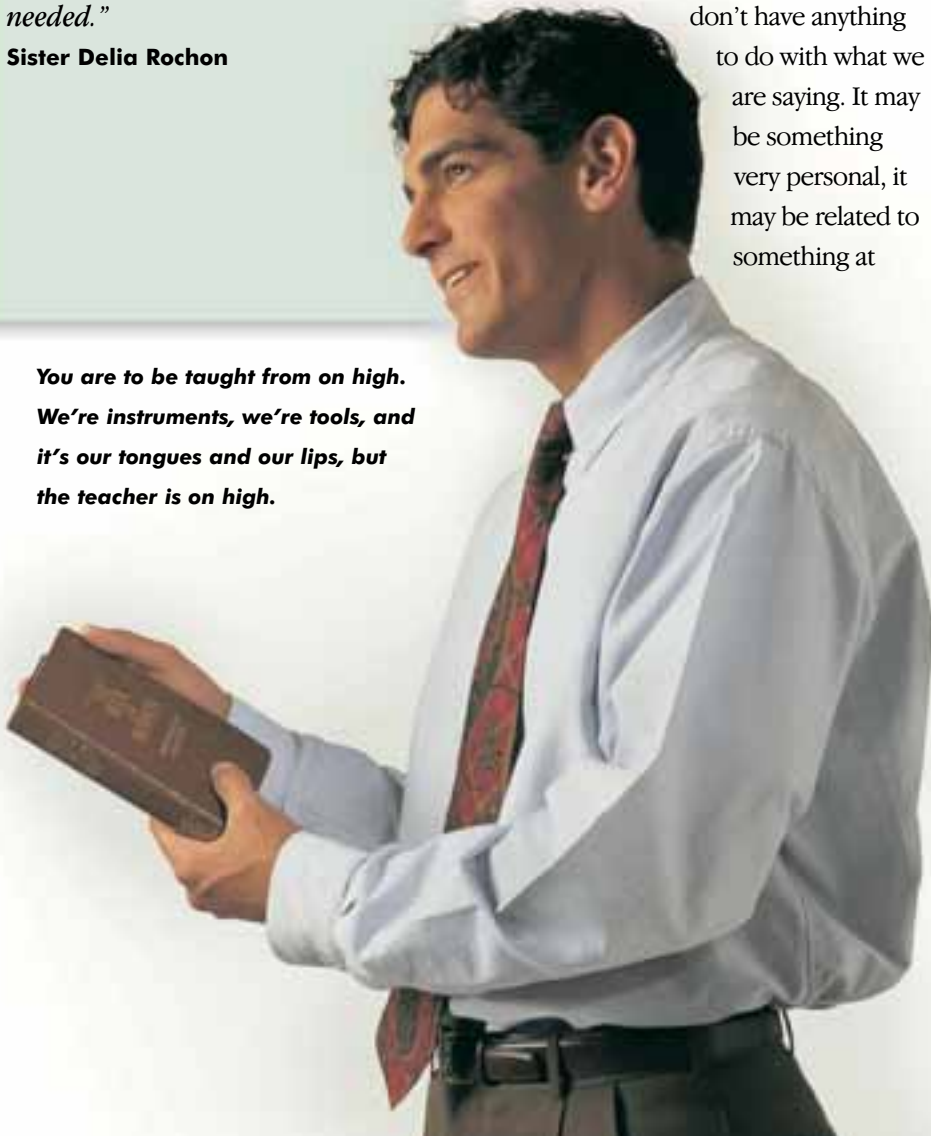
Every teacher needs to remember



“Sometimes when you’re teaching, you try to work with the Spirit, teach with the Spirit, use the scriptures. But it seems to me, in my experience, that the one who makes the connection in what we are teaching with the need of the student is the Spirit. And for that reason, sometimes I have had a student come and tell me, ‘Oh, thank you, when you said so and so,’ and I was thinking, ‘Did I say that? When?’ I wonder if that person really heard the voice of the Lord, and all that I did was create through the scriptures, through the Spirit, the environment that the learner got the message that was needed.”

Sister Delia Rochon

You are to be taught from on high. We’re instruments, we’re tools, and it’s our tongues and our lips, but the teacher is on high.



that we have to “nourish by the good word of God.” We can be fed too—that can be part of the fun of it—but the significance of teaching is nourishment anchored in the word of God.

Teach by the Spirit

Sister Hughes, would you write point number 3: “Teach by and with the Spirit.”

The Spirit of the Lord is the real teacher, and that’s why I said earlier, “Listen.” Listen with your heart. Listen with your soul, and you may have

feelings or promptings that don’t have anything to do with what we are saying. It may be something very personal, it may be related to something at

home, something in a marriage or with a child, but that’s the Spirit, and He’s the real teacher.

There’s a line from Doctrine and Covenants 43:16 that says you are to be taught from on high. We’re instruments, we’re tools, and it’s our tongues and our lips, but the teacher is on high.

Now, it’s a good teaching practice to have the class get to know each other and become a little better acquainted, so we’re going to do that for a minute with Orin Howell.

Orin, when did you join the Church?

Brother Howell: I joined the Church in June 1996.

Elder Holland: Where did you join the Church, Brother Howell?

Brother Howell: In Bosnia.

Elder Holland: What were you doing in Bosnia, Brother Howell?

Brother Howell: I was in the military at the time.

Elder Holland: Where and in what in Bosnia were you baptized?

Brother Howell: I was baptized in Tuzla, in a Russian bar that had been converted to a chapel. We got a used cover of a tank, turned it upside down, brought it into the chapel, and used that as a font.

Elder Holland: This is a wonderful young man in the military, who is touched by the lives of other Latter-day Saints in the military, and he receives a testimony of the gospel and wants to be baptized. So in the converted chapel in wartime conditions, the engine cover of a tank was tipped



“Our ultimate reassurance is in the honest prompting of the Lord—the prompting that you are

the Lord’s instrument, this is His class, this is His Church, these are His people. Then honestly respond to that Spirit. Generally speaking, the curriculum is going to give us our framework, our course and direction during the months of the year. But at any given moment, we are less than we are supposed to be as a teacher in the Lord’s hands if we aren’t willing to set aside some special thing we had prepared and respond to something the Lord prompts us to do. We have to say, ‘Right now is the moment. This is the teaching moment.’

“Parents face this situation all the time. Parents have to seize the teaching moment because it may not come again. We must prepare the best we can, then trust that the Lord will take us into some unexpected opportunities in a given class. We need to be prepared to go where He leads us.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

upside down to form a basin-like structure and filled with water, and Orin filled the basin. He was baptized. Orin, who confirmed you a member of the Church in that setting?

Brother Howell: You did, Elder Holland.

Elder Holland: I had the wonderful privilege in the summer of 1996 to confirm Orin Howell a member of the Church in Tuzla, Bosnia, under wartime conditions, where we were scrambling for our lives. This wonderful young man is now a high priest serving the Church faithfully here in the Salt Lake Valley. He’s a very distinguished member of our class today. Thank you, Orin, for that little bio. It lets the class get to know each other a little better.

I am going to have Brother Howell develop the theme “Teaching by the Spirit” with us. Turn to section 50, part of a series of verses that we regularly and urgently use with the missionaries. But we should use it equally with everyone. Brother Howell, would you read Doctrine and Covenants 50:13?

Brother Howell: “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?”

Elder Holland: To shift the emphasis a little for broader purposes here, let’s substitute the word *called* for *ordained*. *Ordained* would be priesthood language, and we are going to talk about the general call to teach. So, “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye [called]?”

Now, Brother Howell, read the Lord’s answer in verse 14.

Brother Howell: “To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.”

Elder Holland: That is a scriptural assertion to underscore what we are trying to develop and have already



Elder Richard G. Scott told seminary and institute instructors that the “use of agency by a student authorizes the Holy Ghost to instruct. It helps the student to retain your message.”

said—that the real teacher is the Spirit. I am not the teacher, and you are not the teachers. We all need to be receptive to the Holy Spirit, to the guidance of heaven, which is the teacher. We are “to preach [the] gospel by the Spirit, even the

Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.”

Now, a caution: What if we try to do it in some other way? What if we try to teach without the Spirit or are unmindful of or unreceptive to the Spirit? What is the Lord’s verdict on that kind of teaching?

Sister McKee, do you want to read verse 18?

Sister Maritza McKee: “And if it be by some other way it is not of God.”

Elder Holland: Say it one more time. That is so powerful.

Sister McKee: “And if it be by some other way it is not of God.”

Sister Beck: So does this mean that if I sit down and study my books and manuals and I write up an outline and have my plan, I can’t teach that? I prepare, but do I have to be ready to set it aside and be directed by the Spirit with the preparation I have?

Elder Holland: Are there any comments on that question before I offer my own response? It’s a legitimate question.

Brother Dahlquist: It’s not that the Spirit whispers just when you are standing up not using your notes. I think the Spirit can whisper beginning with the preparation and when you are putting together the lesson. It’s much like general conference. General conference has a marvelous way of touching our lives, but there’s a lot of preparation.

Elder Holland: OK, let’s have some more comments about this. What is

the role of the teacher, and what is the role of the Spirit?

Sister Beck: I prepared; I worked on it. But then, if someone in my class has had a challenge that week, that changes the dynamic of the lesson. Help me understand how I know where the blend comes of being prepared and being guided and directed to say what comes into my heart at that time or to use a different scripture.

Elder Holland: That’s a terrific question, and every teacher will face it.

Elder Kerr: I think the key—beyond the preparation and treasuring up—is to not be bound by the lesson plan, but let that be just the background and then be open to the prompting.

Elder Holland: It wouldn’t be fair to just walk into a class and say, “I haven’t prepared, but the Spirit is going to guide us.” On the other hand, to be so locked in to preparation that we are not going to entertain any prompting we get along the way would be the other extreme.

I think Sister Beck is steering us toward some combination of these. We have prepared, but we are open to the Spirit, and we have that freedom to move where we should go at that given hour, in the moment of our delivery.

Elder Snow: We have to understand that every member of that class may go home with a slightly different prompting from the Spirit, and it’s just so important that the Spirit be present. But how many of us have been in a class when there has been

a wonderful discussion going on, and the teacher has said, “This is a very good discussion, but I must complete the lesson.”

Elder Holland: Yes, we have all heard that.

Elder Snow: And we miss opportunities sometimes by doing that.



“I saw a wonderful example when I went teaching with two missionaries. They were teaching a fifth discussion.

The one missionary was German, had the language; he had been on his mission for a number of months. The other one was really fairly new, first fifth discussion he had ever taught.

“And I watched. The one was confident; he was a good missionary. He taught with confidence. The other had to rely a little bit on his lesson plan—but, you know, as I sat and watched those two, the Spirit came through on both of them. And so with teachers at different teaching levels, the Spirit can whisper wherever we are if we have done our part. It was wonderful.”

Brother Charles W. Dahlquist II

Elder Holland: Yes, we do. And those are realities we will have to learn to accommodate, and we will have to be sensitive to those impressions so that we do right by the moment and seize that opportunity.

Sister Hughes: You know, this has always been a really interesting and somewhat perplexing issue for me. How do we know, and how can teachers know that they are teaching with the Spirit? I don't know. I'm not sure, when I go to teach, that I'm always confident of that.

Elder Holland: Does anyone have a response to that? What is the teacher's reassurance that she or he is teaching by the Spirit? What would you look to for an indication of that, or do you just do it in faith and hope that it's happening even though you won't always know?

Elder Jensen: I have the same question. And I'm wondering if the answer isn't, at least for me, back in Doctrine and Covenants 50:21–22:

“Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?”

“Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.”

Elder Holland: Maybe a little rejoicing, Kathy—maybe if your heart rejoices, that is at least one indication.

Elder Jensen: Is the teacher up there, the talking head, delivering

and not inviting participation? I have a little quote I carry in my scriptures related to that verse, and I think I have a new appreciation for it today as we've been talking about it. Elder Scott taught this in a CES training meeting: “Ensure that there is abundant participation because that use of agency by a student authorizes the Holy Ghost to instruct. It helps the student to retain your message. As students verbalize truths, they are confirmed in their souls and strengthen their personal testimonies” (Richard G. Scott, *To Understand and Live Truth* [address to CES religious educators, Feb. 4, 2005], 3).

Elder Holland: That's wonderful. That triggers a thought that I remember from President Marion G. Romney, who said once, “I always know when I've spoken under the influence of the Spirit because I learned something I didn't know.” He's the teacher, and suddenly he's either saying things or thinking things that he had not thought before—or if he thought them before, they have come with new delight, new power. Those might be some of the ways to get an indication you are teaching by the Spirit.

In many cases, we won't know. We will do all we can do, and we hope that hundreds of things are happening in people's hearts or will happen because of this experience or other Church experiences, but we may never know.

Maybe part of the teacher's divine



“I think it could be boldly said that we are not successful if at the end of 40 minutes, a student walks out the door and says, ‘My, wasn’t that nice?’ If it ends when the student walks out the door, I think we have failed in the ultimate sense of teaching, the ongoing sense of teaching. Our instruction ought to be so provocative, so spiritually sweet, so new and interesting that the students say to themselves, ‘I felt so much that I will think about it this afternoon and tomorrow and next week and next month.’ In that way, our lesson will take on a life of its own and bring new thoughts.

“There is a real danger of classroom performances that seem to be so self-contained or dazzling that people are entertained for 45 minutes and say, ‘Boy, I can’t wait to get here to be entertained next week’—and never have another thought through the week or through the month about the substance of the doctrine they have been taught.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

calling is to be an instrument and move on, to trust that we have been as spiritual and as devoted as we can, and then let the miracle of personal revelation go on and on and on. I think that is a very gratifying idea about teaching and being a teacher.

The Responsibility for Learning

Item 4: “Help the learner assume responsibility for learning.”

What do you do when you come to a class cold, and there isn’t much going on—where somebody says by body language, “I defy you to teach me. I am going to slump in this chair, and I am going to sit with my head down, and I’m going to look at my shoes. And when I look at you, I’m going to scowl.” It may not always be that bad, but I have had some of those classes. We’ve probably all been in situations where it seemed like people had not come prepared to learn. How do we help people do that?

Sister Beck: Sometimes I work on crafting my questions. But I think this seems to be what we are saying: the more questions we can get from the learners about something, the more they are engaged in the learning.

And the thought that came to mind was that when Joseph Smith read a verse of scripture in James, it created questions in his mind, and he said, “How am I going to know? And will I ever know? And if I don’t figure this out, I’ll never know.” And he was in a learner mode when he asked God. But that to me is a challenge as a teacher—not so much the questions I am asking but what is happening that is helping other people to ask questions so the Holy Ghost can teach them.

Elder Holland: One of my favorite books in the Church, written by a professorial, longtime friend of mine at BYU, Dennis Rasmussen, is called *The*

Lord’s Question. It’s a sample of how the Lord always teaches with a question. As early as Adam, the Lord said, “Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:9). He knows exactly where Adam is. He needs to know whether Adam knows where Adam is. That is why He asks the question: “Adam, where art thou?” And so on—“Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). The Savior’s life was built around teaching by asking questions. Many of the revelations—I don’t know how many; I haven’t counted—but many, many of the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants came in response to a question that the Prophet or the brethren took to the Lord.

Sister Matsumori: I have been struggling just a little bit with this

topic in relation to children, even back when President Packer said he wanted to learn. But to be honest with you, I think it’s an advanced concept to think that the learner is going to assume responsibility for learning, especially little children. And so how does a Primary teacher do that?

Elder Holland: That’s a great point. What do you do if that is what you face and you are still the teacher? You still have to perform. By the way, it’s number 4 because we do realize it is a little more mature and a more advanced concept. But it is one we probably don’t talk about enough, so let’s talk about Sister Matsumori’s question. A child, a seminary student, a 14-year-old teacher or Mia Maid—sometimes they are not very

The more questions we can get from the learners about something, the more they are engaged in the learning.



interested or at least don't act like they are. They are probably more interested than they want you to know, but they don't act like they're interested. How do we deal with that? How do you help them?

Brother Wada: Learning does not happen right in the classroom sometimes. Sometimes it happens outside. When I was learning about the Church, the missionaries would teach me, and a week later I thought about it and said, "This is what it is." So we do not need to assume that the exact learning needs to happen at that moment.

Elder Holland: Great point. I am confident that was the Spirit of the Lord working on you for a week or as long as required.

That's the classic case of investigators in the Church. We want that Spirit working on them for hours and days after the missionaries have gone and before they come back for their next lesson.

Sister Naomi Wada: Sometimes children have so many, many questions, and I have prepared so many examples or experiences or visual aids, and I can't utilize all of them. I'm sometimes busy answering questions. Is it all right? I have tried to simplify the lesson, and if there is just at least one topic I can focus on and just be able to teach them, at least they feel comfortable.

Elder Holland: Good. You said that better than I said it at the start. Don't try to do too much. With a Primary child—well, maybe with any child,

maybe with any of us—if we can get one thing across, one idea, one principle, something sterling and significant that Brother Wada still feels a week later, that is probably worth any good classroom experience. So be reassured. Don't be reluctant about that.

Elder Kerr: What she just said has opened my eyes. What more exciting environment in the classroom is there than the fact that the children or the adults in the class are asking questions?

Elder Holland: Somebody is responding.

Elder Kerr: They're thinking.

Elder Holland: What if you meet a situation where the student is not yet participating, and the burden for a while is on you?

Brother Bruce Miller: Should we forge ahead with the lesson then, or should we stop and do some of the things that invite the Spirit, even though we have had an opening song, a prayer, a scriptural thought? If it's still not there, instead of moving ahead with the lesson, do we stop and say, "OK, how can we get the Spirit here?"

Elder Holland: Does anyone want to respond to that?

Elder Snow: I think it's a long-term process. It doesn't happen the first class. I think sometimes you have to do your best, and then there's going to be a moment when it really works, when the Spirit's there and everyone's contributed to the class. And then you stop and say, "Do you see



"Be patient, and above all do not lose the Spirit. We can't in any way be offended or get angry or disappointed that we've worked so hard on our lesson, and it doesn't seem the students are with us. We just have to be patient and loving. More is happening in their hearts than we think."

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

what's happening right now? Do you see the difference?"

Elder Holland: Earlier Sister Hughes said, "How do we know if we have had the Spirit?" That may be in its own way the question that Brother Miller wants to know—with this unresponsive class in front of me, how do I know how I'm doing? Somehow at the heart of that for them and for you is *how do you feel?* Can you feel that the Lord is with you, that the Lord loves you, that you have done the best you can do, that He loves them? If we can just have some feelings for the gospel, if we just love each other, I suppose that's a place to begin. And if those children are unresponsive, maybe you can't teach them yet, but you can love them. And if you love them today, maybe you can teach them tomorrow.

But I think that is totally within our power. None of that is dependent upon them. We can love them from start to finish, and miracles will happen, the kind of miracles that you're talking about.

If I, the teacher, want questions from you, the student, I may have to prime the pump a little, as we have tried to do here today. I may try to pose a question that will then take on a life of its own, and all I have to do is direct traffic in order to get the students to participate.

Now, may I pause and make an editorial comment? A teacher could know that Brother Merrill talked on a subject in conference and say, “Good. I’ll go to the materials center, and I’ll get that video clip. I can play it, and I can show the class Brother Merrill.”

If you do that, great. We ought to do it from time to time. But audio-visual aids are just that—they are aids. They are not a substitute for a lesson. Use them in the way that you would use spice in cooking—to flavor, to heighten, to accentuate, to enrich. A

My plea to one and all is please do not overdo visual aids. Use them when you need them.

map or a painting or a video clip or a key point written on the board—these can often make the difference between a good lesson and a great lesson. But no one wants a meal of spices only. So my plea to one and all is please do not overdo visual aids. They are not a substitute for the teacher, they are not a substitute for the course material, and they are not a substitute for the Spirit of the Lord. Use them when you need them.

Sister Wada: There is a child who is really, really disruptive sometimes in the Primary class, and I try to imagine that child wearing white and being a spirit of the Lord. The bottom line is we are all children of God, and that intelligence, even though the shape is small, came here to this earth to learn something, and there is a reason for him to be there. It really helps to think that.

Elder Holland: Thank you very much. That’s a sweet comment.



“I went to early-morning seminary, and I feel that my seminary teacher assumed responsibility for teaching us. He assumed that we were receiving the message that he was giving us. There were times that we arrived in seminary in pajamas; there were times where some of us brought pillows and blankets; there were times where girls would be painting their nails while they were listening to him teach, but we were blessed with a seminary teacher who assumed that we were listening to him. We were not engaging him in conversation, but there was never a day in seminary that I was not paying attention and listening with my ears and with my heart to what he said.

“I think that as teachers, if we’ve done everything that we need to do, we’ve done our part, and we have the Spirit there, then we can assume that the students are taking the responsibility to listen.”

Sister Tamu Smith



Brother Howell: What I'm hearing is that sometimes the teacher is the learner and the learner is the teacher.

Elder Holland: Almost always the teacher will be getting more than the class. That is one of the joys of teaching.

Testify

Let's conclude. Number 5, one word: "Testify."

May we conclude here the way that every teacher must conclude his or her class, in the Church and at home—in the spirit of testimony.

For many years, I have loved the story that President Packer has told about William E. Berrett's boyhood Sunday School teacher. An elderly Danish brother was called to teach a class of rowdy boys. It didn't seem like much of a fit. He didn't speak the language very well; he still had a heavy Danish brogue; he was much older, with big farm hands. Yet he was to teach these young, rambunctious 15-year-olds. For all intents and purposes, it would not have seemed like a very good match. But Brother William E. Berrett used to say—and this is the part President Packer quotes—that this man taught them somehow; that across all those barriers, across all those limitations, this man reached into the hearts of those rowdy 15-year-old kids and changed their lives. And Brother Berrett's testimony was "We could have warmed our hands by the fire of his faith."

Every student deserves at least that.

We may not give the fanciest lesson. We may not be skillful with audiovisual aids (though we can use any we know how to use). But we can share with all students the fire of our faith, and they can warm their hands by it.

I have been painfully disappointed over the years at wonderful lessons, given by loyal, gifted teachers who, somehow, at the end of a class, say, "Well, there is the bell. Brother Jones, would you give the prayer?" And it's over. There's no closing of the books, no looking in the eye for just a minute, no settling down to say, in effect, where have we been and where are we going and what does the Lord want us to do? In some cases—I'm being a little unfair and a little extravagant, but to make a point—not a single reference is made to what this lesson was supposed to mean to the student or to the teacher. I'm left to walk away saying, "I wonder how he felt about that. I wonder what she thought about it or what it was supposed to mean to me." There is so much effort to get some doctrine, some principle, some map, some video clip across to the students, but not a hint of personal testimony about what that doctrine or that principle meant to the teacher, the one who was supposed to lead us and guide us and walk beside us.

As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. once said, "Never let your faith be difficult to detect." May I repeat that? "Never let your faith be difficult to detect." Never sow seeds of doubt. Avoid self-serving performance and

vanity. Don't try to dazzle everyone with how brilliant you are. Dazzle them with how brilliant the gospel is. Don't worry about the location of the lost tribes or the Three Nephites. Worry a little more about the location of your student, what's going on in his heart, what's going on in her soul, the hunger, sometimes the near-desperate spiritual needs of our people. Teach them. And, above all, testify to them. Love them. Bear your witness from the depths of your soul. It will be the most important thing you say to them in the entire hour, and it may save someone's spiritual life.

Say that you "speak [out] in the energy of [your] soul" (Alma 5:43). I love that phrase. I want to testify out of the energy of my soul. If we feel inclined, we could ask the congregation what Alma asked his, namely, "Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself?" He continues, "I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. . . . I say unto you, that I know of myself that [they are] true" (Alma 5:45, 48).

I know that God lives and loves us. I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. I know that this is His Church, and I know that teaching matters.

To that end I know that heaven will help us if we will teach as we have here described. And this won't be all; this will be only a beginning. Welcome to the quest for the gift of teaching.



But as we search for that gift and pray for it, if we will ask and seek and knock spiritually, if we will teach from the scriptures, if we will teach by and with the Holy Spirit, if we will help the learner assume responsibility for learning, and if we will testify of the truths that we have taught, God will confirm to our hearts and to the hearts of our students the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, near and far, close at hand and around the world, the gospel of Jesus Christ means everything to me. It means everything to me. It is my whole life. It is my hope and my safety and my quest for salvation. It is everything that I want for my children and my children's children.

And I feel what I feel about the gospel because of you, because people like you taught people like me. Somewhere in those little Primary classes

and in those first family home evenings and in the deacons quorum and on a mission and everywhere else, somebody like you taught somebody like me. And I am not all that I want to be yet. I'm not all that I should be, but whatever I'm going to be, I owe to great teachers, starting with my own beloved parents and every other good person who has touched my life along the way, up to and including the magnificent councils and quorums in which I now sit, where I am able to be taught by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, other General Authorities, and wonderful auxiliary leaders like all of you.

I testify and I bear witness of love. I know God loves us. And I know that in part because I love you, and I love the experience of teaching. I pray that we will be better at it, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

The Gift of Teaching

1. Ask, seek, and knock spiritually.
2. Teach from the scriptures.
3. Teach by and with the Spirit.
4. Help the learner assume responsibility for learning.
5. Testify.