
Gospel Teaching— Our Most Important Calling

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Recently Sister Oswald and I decided to teach our five-year-old twin granddaughters how to jump the rope. Jumping the rope is a children's game in which participants jump over a rope as it passes under their feet and then over their heads. After receiving some simple instructions, both girls tried but failed on several attempts.

Just as we were ready to give up, two older neighbor children walked by, and we enlisted their help. Both of the neighbor girls were experienced rope jumpers and were able to show

our granddaughters how to jump the rope. As they jumped the rope, I noticed that the neighbor girls sang a song that helped them jump to the rhythm of the swinging rope.

Once our granddaughters understood the principles of rope jumping and were shown how to jump the rope, the rest of the lesson was easy. With a little practice, both of the twins were well on their way to mastering the fundamentals of rope jumping.

During the rope-jumping lesson, another granddaughter, only three years old, was sitting quietly on the lawn observing. When someone asked her if she wanted to try to jump the rope, she nodded, came forward, and stood next to the rope. As we turned the rope, to our great surprise she jumped just as she had seen her sisters do. She jumped once, then twice, and then again and again, repeating aloud the same song the older children had sung.

All three granddaughters had observed that there was an art to jumping the rope. It was a simple thing that all of them could do after learning a few basic principles and being shown how. So it is with gospel



Two young men in Kiev, Ukraine, read a conference talk.

teaching. When we learn a few fundamental principles about teaching and are shown how to teach, all of us can do it.

President Boyd K. Packer often reminds us that “all of us—leaders, teachers, missionaries, and parents—have a lifelong challenge from the Lord to both teach and learn the doctrines of the gospel as they have been revealed to us.”¹ As simply stated by Elder L. Tom Perry, “Every position in the Church requires an effective teacher.”²

Since every member is a teacher and “teaching is the center of all that we do,”³ we all have a sacred responsibility to learn some basic principles of teaching. There are many principles of teaching and learning, and it is not enough for us just to read about them. First, we need to *understand*

these basic principles, and second, we need to be *shown* how they are used by successful teachers. This can be done by carefully watching able teachers in our wards and branches and reviewing the worldwide leadership training meeting on teaching and learning found on the Church Web site or in Church magazines.⁴

The basic principles that apply to learning and teaching the gospel are found in the scriptures. They are also discussed in an excellent but often neglected teaching resource entitled *Teaching, No Greater Call*.⁵

When we look for a model of the ideal teacher who can show us how to teach the gospel, we are inescapably drawn to Jesus of Nazareth. His disciples called him “Rabboni; which is to say, Master” or “Teacher.”⁶ He was and is the Master Teacher.

Jesus differed from other teachers of His day in that He taught “as one having authority.”⁷ This authority to teach and minister came from His Heavenly Father, for “God anointed Jesus . . . with the Holy Ghost and with power . . . ; for God was with him.”⁸

Following this pattern, Jesus was taught by His Heavenly Father, as recorded by John. Jesus said, “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me.”⁹ “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. . . . For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth.”¹⁰

Throughout the scriptures we can find additional examples of successful gospel teachers who changed the lives and saved the souls of those they taught. From the Book of Mormon, for example, Nephi,¹¹ Alma,¹² and the sons of Mosiah¹³ readily come to mind. Notice the personal preparation of the sons of Mosiah as they prepared to teach the gospel:

“They had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

“But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God.”¹⁴

Another powerful gospel teacher was Moroni, who was chosen as “a messenger sent from the presence of God”¹⁵ to teach and to tutor the Prophet Joseph Smith. Joseph has given us a brief but detailed description of what Moroni said and did when he taught Joseph.¹⁶

The first time Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith, Joseph was a teenage boy of 17 with little formal education. Joseph described himself as “an obscure boy . . . of no consequence in the world,”¹⁷ and a friend later called

him “untutored” and “untaught.”¹⁸ In the hands of a patient and caring teacher like Moroni—and other heaven-sent messengers who instructed him—this young man would become the central figure in what the Lord referred to as “a marvelous work and a wonder.”¹⁹

What are some of the principles of teaching and learning we might identify by observing the way Moroni taught Joseph Smith? There are a number of important principles we could discuss, but let us focus on three basic principles essential to good teaching.

Principle 1: Show Love to Those You Teach and Call Them by Name

Joseph Smith said that when the angel Moroni first appeared to him, Joseph “was afraid; but the fear soon left” him. What was it that Moroni did to help dispel this fear? Joseph said, “He called me by name.”²⁰ Teachers who love their students and call them by name are following a heavenly pattern.²¹

In a recent meeting with President Thomas S. Monson, I noticed that he greeted each of us by name. He spoke to us about his boyhood Sunday



School teacher Lucy Gertsch, noting that she was a teacher who knew the names of each student in her class. President Monson has said of her: “She unfailingly called on those who missed a Sunday or who just didn’t come. We knew she cared about us. None of us has ever forgotten her or the lessons she taught.”²²

Principle 2: Teach from the Scriptures

Another teaching principle practiced by Moroni is that he knew and taught from the scriptures. Joseph Smith said that at their very first meeting, Moroni “commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament. . . . He quoted many other passages of scripture, and offered many explanations.”²³ From the many scriptures quoted by Moroni, Joseph learned about his prophetic role in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the Restoration of the true gospel again to the earth.²⁴

Principle 3: Encourage the Pondering of Gospel Truths

A third principle employed by Moroni in teaching Joseph Smith was to cause him to ponder on what he had been taught. Joseph states that after his third meeting with Moroni, he “was again left to ponder on . . . what [he] had just experienced.”²⁵ Effective teachers will want to follow the pattern of the resurrected Christ among the Nephites when He asked the multitude to return to their “homes, and ponder upon the things” He had taught them so that they might “understand.”²⁶

Nephi reminds us that the act of pondering involves using not only our heads but also our hearts. He said, “My heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.”²⁷ The act of pondering on the scriptures and the things we have seen and heard invites personal revelation to come into our lives.

I testify that teaching the gospel



is a sacred and holy calling. When you love your students and call them by name, when you open the scriptures and teach from them, and when you encourage your students to ponder the truths of the restored gospel and apply them, then your influence for good will be magnified and the lives of your students will be blessed more abundantly. In that glorious day, they will say to you as it was said of Jesus of Nazareth, “We know that thou art a teacher come from God.”²⁸ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer and L. Tom Perry, “Principles of Teaching and Learning,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Feb. 2007; in *Liabona*, June 2007, 50; *Ensign*, June 2007, 82.
2. *Liabona*, June 2007, 52; *Ensign*, June 2007, 84; see also 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11–14.
3. Boyd K. Packer, *Liabona*, June 2007, 54; *Ensign*, June 2007, 86.
4. See *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Feb. 2007; in *Liabona*, June 2007, 49–80; *Ensign*, June 2007, 81–112; proceedings of this worldwide leadership training meeting are also available at www.lds.org.
5. *Teaching, No Greater Call* (1999); item number 36123.
6. John 20:16; see footnote *a*.
7. Matthew 7:29; see also Mark 1:22.
8. Acts 10:38.
9. John 8:28.
10. John 5:19–20.
11. See 2 Nephi 33:1–13.
12. See Mosiah 27:32–37; Alma 17:1–12.
13. See Alma 17:1–12.
14. Alma 17:2–3.
15. Joseph Smith—History 1:33.
16. See Joseph Smith—History 1:27–54.
17. Joseph Smith—History 1:22.
18. Orson Pratt, “Discourse,” *Deseret News*, July 21, 1880, 386.
19. Isaiah 29:14; 2 Nephi 25:17; 27:26; see also 3 Nephi 21:9–10.
20. Joseph Smith—History 1:32–33; see also v. 49.
21. See Matthew 3:17; 3 Nephi 11:7; Moroni 2:1–2; Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
22. Thomas S. Monson, “Examples of Great Teachers,” *Liabona*, June 2007, 77; *Ensign*, June 2007, 109.
23. Joseph Smith—History 1:36, 41.
24. See Joseph Smith—History 1:33–54; see also D&C 20:8–9.
25. Joseph Smith—History 1:47.
26. 3 Nephi 17:3; see also D&C 138:1, 6, 11, 29.
27. 2 Nephi 4:16; see also Moroni 10:3.
28. John 3:2.