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Teaching with Tech:
ENGAGING YOUTH IN A DIGITAL WORLD

*How can technology be an ally rather than
an enemy in the classroom?*

As I visit wards and stakes across the Church, teachers and leaders of youth often ask, "How do we keep digital devices from being a distraction in class?" At the same time, many of the best youth teachers I have observed begin their classes with the phrase "Pull out your phone and look up . . ." Consequently, I'd like to share a few things that I have learned about helping youth use technology in righteous and productive ways in the gospel classroom.

Prophecies about Technology

Prophets and apostles have spoken to us about the blessings of technology, telling us how Heavenly Father has given us technology to help us move His work forward at an increasingly rapid rate. In 1862, President Brigham Young (1801–77) taught: "Every discovery in science and art, that is really true and useful to mankind has been given by direct revelation from God. . . . It has been given with a view to prepare the way for the ultimate triumph of truth, and the redemption of the earth from the power of sin and Satan. We should take advantage of all these great discoveries . . . an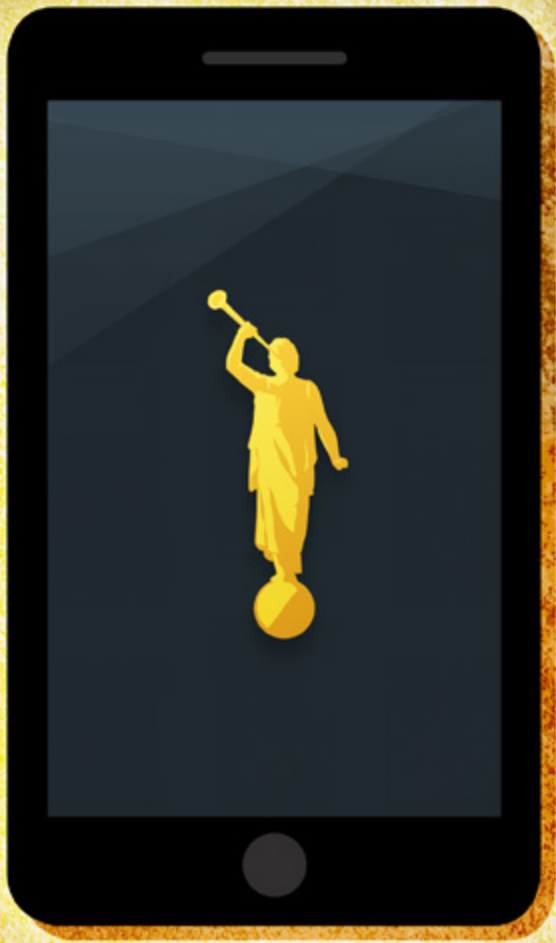d give to our children the benefit of every branch of useful knowledge, to prepare them to step forward and efficiently do their part in the great work."[1]
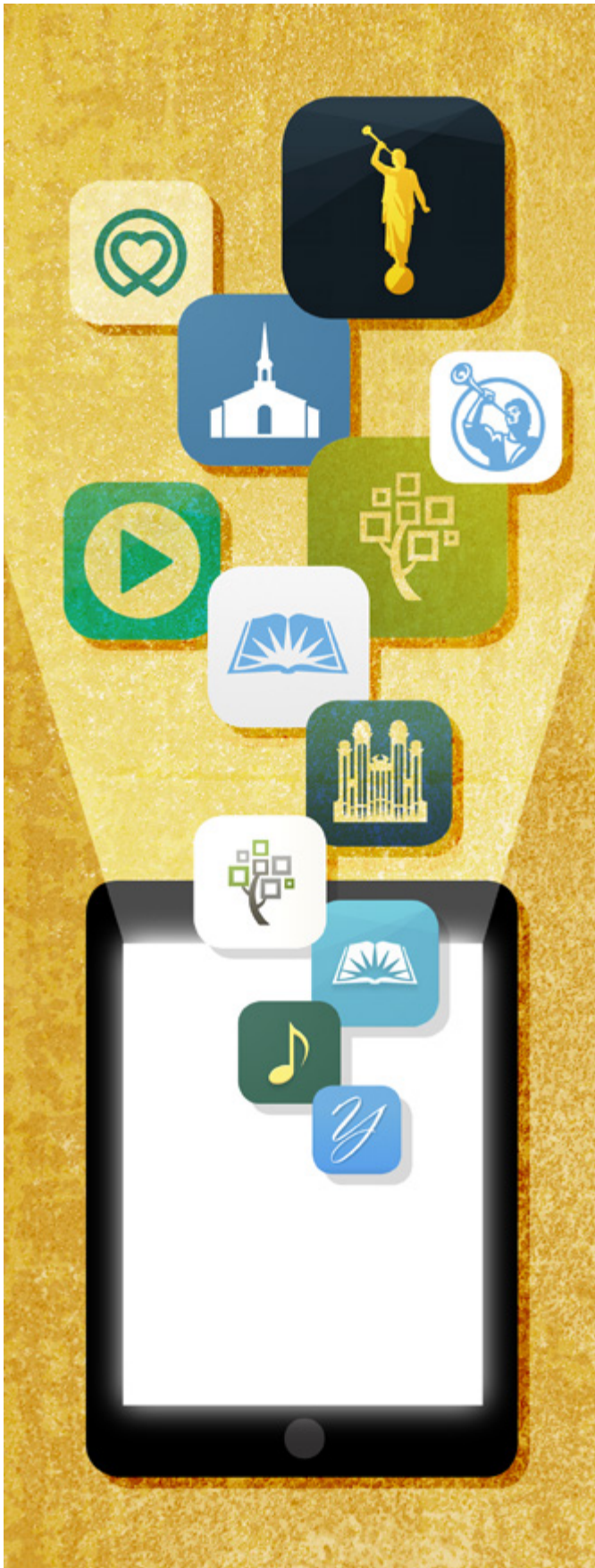
Using Digital Devices in Righteous Activities

In my own life, my study of the gospel has been greatly enhanced by using the scriptures and other resources in the Gospel Library mobile app.

Our youth have been prepared to study, teach, and preach the gospel in everyday life and as full-time missionaries using technology in ways that we have only begun to discover. Because the adversary tries to use every good and useful invention for his evil purposes, it is incumbent upon us as parents, leaders, and teachers to help youth learn to use technology in righteous and productive ways from an early age.

The home is the best place for this to happen. (Parents looking for helpful resources might consider using some of the Church materials listed in the accompanying sidebar.) The gospel classroom also offers important opportunities to help youth associate their digital devices with righteous activities and feeling the Holy Ghost. Here are a few ways that teachers and leaders can help make that happen.

Set Principle-based Expectations

Set expectations about the use of technology in the classroom based on principles. One key principle might be "Our purpose in class is to learn the gospel through the Holy Ghost. Our use of digital devices should assist in this effort, not distract from it." This is far more effective than a rule such as "We don't access social media during class." This rule sends the message that social media is bad, where the principle leaves open the possibility of using social media in class in appropriate ways, like reaching out to those who aren't in attendance to let them know that they are missed and to invite them to come next week.

We harm our youth with rules that suggest a behavior is wrong when it's not. It creates confusion about using the technology in other settings and misses the opportunity to teach how to use technology appropriately. The expectations we set with the help of the youth in our classes should be in line with their age and maturity.

Learn about the Technology

Don't let your own fear or lack of understanding about technology get in the way of letting the youth use digital devices in appropriate ways. One ward reported that they held a training for teachers on how to use digital devices to study the gospel. They found that as the teachers became more skilled in using technology, they also became more excited about using digital devices to study the gospel, and the issue of digital devices being a distraction in the classroom largely went away.

Make Lessons Interactive

I have found that the best way to help students use technology righteously is to make the lessons interactive and incorporate digital devices into the lesson plan. I rarely find students using their cell phones inappropriately in classes where teachers ask inspired questions, the students are involved in the lesson and feel that the teacher loves them, and the Holy Ghost is present.

Where this happens, the teacher frequently begins the class by asking an inspired question and then having

the youth, often in small groups, find the answer to the question in the scriptures and words of the prophets. Throughout the lesson, the teacher has the class looking up scriptures, studying general conference talks, watching Church-produced videos, and discussing what they are learning. The more that youth are involved in the learning process, the greater the likelihood that they will use their digital devices appropriately.

Strike a Balance

As we incorporate technology into our lessons, it is important to remember that our use of technology needs to be balanced. We must be careful to ensure that technology does not become the lesson or distract from feeling the Holy Ghost.

In addition, some students do not have digital devices and should not be made to feel left out. With the exception of watching Church-produced videos, the activities that can be done on digital devices in the classroom should also be able to be done with paper scriptures and copies of Church magazines.

What's more, there are times when digital devices may not be appropriate. For example, when students or teachers are bearing testimony, it may make sense for teachers to lovingly invite students to put their cell phones away and just feel what the Spirit is teaching them.

Show Patience

Finally, for some youth, learning to use digital devices appropriately in class may take some time. Christlike teachers in any classroom show patience with and love toward those who are struggling.

Technology: An Enhancement, Not a Threat

Helping youth use technology appropriately will bless them throughout their lives, and it can enhance our classes. As Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared, "Technology, when understood and used for righteous purposes, need not be a threat but rather an enhancement to spiritual communication."[2]

As the Sunday School General Presidency, we invite teachers to embrace technology in their lessons and make every effort to help youth learn to use technology for righteous purposes. If you'll ask Heavenly Father for help in your efforts, He will answer those prayers. ■

NOTES
1. *Discourses of Brigham Young,* sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 18–19.
2. Richard G. Scott, "For Peace at Home," *Ensign* or *Liahona,* May 2013, 30.

USING TECHNOLOGY APPROPRIATELY

Brother Brian K. Ashton tells us that the home is the best place to learn to use technology righteously. The following resources can help individuals, parents, and families decide how to use existing technologies in appropriate ways:

- *Safeguards for Using Technology.* Although written for missionaries, the guidelines in this booklet can be adapted to the home. It is available in 28 languages in the Gospel Library app or in print through distribution centers or the online store.

- A list of family home evening lessons on avoiding pornography, including how to choose good media, can be found at overcomingpornography.org/resources (available in 10 languages).

- Guidelines on family discussions regarding social media are highlighted in "Families Should Discuss How to Use Social Media in Righteous Ways," at lds.org/go/81833a (available in 10 languages), or in an article by Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Flood the Earth through Social Media," in the August 2015 *Liahona* or *New Era*.