

healed. (See 2 Kings 5.)” (“Fourteen Fundamentals,” 28).

And President Benson continued giving other principles about obedience to the prophet. I will read the last six and invite you in your next family home evening to find these principles in the words and teachings of our living prophets, seers, and revelators during this general conference.

“Ninth: *The prophet can receive revelation on any matter—temporal or spiritual.* . . .

“Tenth: *The prophet may be involved in civic matters.* . . .

“Eleventh: *The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.* . . .

“Twelfth: *The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.* . . .

“Thirteenth: *The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency—the highest quorum in the Church.* . . .

“Fourteenth: *The prophet and the presidency—the living prophet and the first presidency—follow them and be blessed; reject them and suffer*” (“Fourteen Fundamentals,” 29).

We are privileged to have the words of our living prophets, seers, and revelators during this wonderful general conference. They will speak the will of the Lord for us, His people. They will transmit the word of God and His counsel to us. Pay attention and follow their instruction and suggestions, and I testify to you that your life will be completely blessed.

Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. Thomas S. Monson is the living prophet of God, and the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are prophets, seers, and revelators. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■



By David M. McConkie

First Counselor in the Sunday School General Presidency

Gospel Learning and Teaching

What matters most is the attitude or spirit by which the teacher teaches.

As a member of the Sunday School general presidency, I feel I should begin my remarks this morning by saying, “Good morning, class.”

My message today is to all those who have been called to teach, in whatever organization you are serving and whether you are a recent convert to the Church or a teacher with years of experience.

I am not going to talk about the “how” of teaching but rather about the “how” of learning. There can be a significant difference between what a teacher says and what those in the class hear or learn.

Think for a moment of a teacher who really made a difference in your life. What was it about him or her that caused you to remember what was taught, to want to discover the truth for yourself, to exercise your agency and act and not just to be acted upon—in other words, to learn? What was it about this teacher that set him or her apart from the rest?

A successful teacher and author said: “What matters most in learning is attitude. The attitude of the teacher.”¹

Note that what matters most in learning is not the number of years a teacher has been a member of the Church or how much teaching





can teach the gospel, we must know the gospel.

President Thomas S. Monson still treasures the memory of his boyhood Sunday School teacher. He said: “It was my experience as a small boy to come under the influence of a most effective and inspired teacher who listened to us and who loved us. Her name was Lucy Gertsch. In our Sunday School class, she taught us concerning the Creation of the world, the Fall of Adam, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. She brought to her classroom as honored guests Moses, Joshua, Peter, Thomas, Paul, and, of course, Christ. Though we did not see them, we learned to love, honor, and emulate them.”⁴

Lucy Gertsch was able to invite these honored guests into her classroom because she knew them. They were her cherished friends. Because of that, her class also learned to “love, honor, and emulate them.”

The Lord said to Hyrum Smith, “Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word.”⁵ This admonition applies to each of us.

The Lord has commanded us to search the scriptures,⁶ to feast upon them,⁷ and to treasure them up.⁸ As we earnestly search and ponder the word of the Lord, we will have His Spirit with us. We will become acquainted with His voice.⁹

Soon after I was called to be a stake president, our stake presidency received training from an Area Seventy. During the training, I asked a question to which he responded, “That is a good question. Let’s turn to the *Church Handbook of Instructions* for the answer.” We then went to the handbook, and there was the answer to my question. A little later in our training, I asked another question. Once again he responded, “Good question. Let’s turn to the handbook.” I did not venture to

experience a person has or even the teacher’s knowledge of the gospel or teaching techniques. What matters most is the attitude or spirit by which the teacher teaches.

In a worldwide leadership training meeting, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland told this story: “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. . . . 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 Berrett used to say—and this is the part President Packer quotes—that this man somehow taught them; 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.’”²

Successful gospel teachers love the gospel. They are excited about it. And because they love their students, they want them to feel as they feel and to experience what they have experienced. To teach the gospel is to share your love of the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, a teacher’s attitude is not taught; it’s caught.³

How, then, do we develop the attitude necessary to be a successful teacher? I would like to discuss four basic principles of gospel teaching.

First, immerse yourself in the scriptures. We cannot love what we do not know. Develop a habit of daily scripture study, separate and apart from your lesson preparation. Before we

ask any more questions. I thought it best to read the handbook.

I have thought since that the Lord could give a similar response to each of us as we go to Him with concerns or questions. He could say, “That’s a good question. If you will review Alma chapter 5 or Doctrine and Covenants section 76, you’ll remember that I have already spoken to you about this.”

Brothers and sisters, it is contrary to the economy of heaven for the Lord to repeat to each of us individually what He has already revealed to us collectively. The scriptures contain the words of Christ. They are the voice of the Lord. Studying the scriptures trains us to hear the Lord’s voice.

Second, apply in your life the things that you learn. When Hyrum Smith desired to be a part of this great latter-day work, the Lord said to him, “Behold, this is your work, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength.”¹⁰ Our work, first and foremost as teachers, is to keep the commandments with all of our might, mind, and strength.

Third, seek heaven’s help. Appeal unto the Lord for His Spirit with all of the energy of your heart. The scriptures state, “If ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach.”¹¹ This means that even if you use all the right teaching techniques and what you are teaching is true, without the Spirit real learning is not going to take place.

The role of the teacher is “to help individuals take responsibility for learning the gospel—to awaken in them the desire to study, understand, and live the gospel.”¹² This means that as teachers we should not focus so much on our performance as on how we help others learn and live the gospel.¹³

When was the last time you knelt in prayer and asked the Lord to help you not just with your lesson but also

to help you to know and to meet the needs of each student in your class? No class is so large that we cannot pray for inspiration regarding how to reach each student.

It is natural for teachers to have feelings of inadequacy. You must understand that “age and maturity and intellectual training are not in any way or to any degree necessary to communion with the Lord and His Spirit.”¹⁴

The promises of the Lord are certain. If you earnestly search the scriptures and treasure up in your minds the words of life, if you keep the commandments with all of your heart and pray for each student, you will enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost and you will receive revelation.¹⁵

Fourth, brothers and sisters, it is of utmost importance that we exercise our agency and act, without delay, in accordance with the spiritual promptings we receive.

President Thomas S. Monson taught: “We watch. We wait. We listen for that still, small voice. When it speaks, wise men and women obey. Promptings of the Spirit are not to be postponed.”¹⁶

You must not be afraid to exercise your agency and act upon the

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thoughts and impressions that the Spirit of the Lord puts into your heart. You may feel awkward at first, but I promise you that the sweetest and most gratifying experiences you will have as a teacher will be when you submit to the will of the Lord and follow the promptings you receive from the Holy Ghost. Your experiences will strengthen your faith and give you greater courage to act in the future.

Dear teachers, you are one of the great miracles of this Church. You have a sacred trust. We love you and have confidence in you. I know that if we will search the scriptures and live so that we are worthy to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost, the Lord will magnify us in our callings and responsibilities so that we may accomplish our errand from the Lord. That we may all do so is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. David McCullough, “Teach Them What You Love” (address given in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, May 9, 2009).
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” *Liahona*, June 2007, 72; *Ensign*, June 2007, 104.
3. See McCullough, “Teach Them What You Love.”
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Examples of Great Teachers,” *Liahona*, June 2007, 76; *Ensign*, June 2007, 108.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 11:21.
6. See John 5:39.
7. See 2 Nephi 32:3.
8. See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 18:36; 84:52.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 11:20.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 42:14.
12. *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching* (1999), 61.
13. See *Teaching, No Greater Call*, 60–62.
14. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *The Charted Course of the Church in Education* (address given to seminary and institute leaders at Aspen Grove, Utah, Aug. 8, 1938), 6.
15. See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 132.
16. Thomas S. Monson, “The Spirit Giveth Life,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, June 1997, 4.