

Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Teaching and Learning

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Examples of Great Teachers

President Thomas S. Monson

First Counselor in the First Presidency

We have heard from some of the greatest teachers in the Church, who have given us wonderful insights into many of the elements and principles of good teaching.

As has been mentioned, we are all teachers in some respect, and we have a duty to teach to the best of our ability.

I should like to share with you some examples of individuals I have known who have touched my life and have taught me important and never-to-be-forgotten lessons.

Everyone Has a Story

I have been thinking of one of our emeritus General Authorities, even Elder Marion D. Hanks, who has excelled in teaching seminary, institute, and the Church generally. He has utilized many different teaching methods.

On one occasion, Elder Hanks toured a mission, interviewing each of the missionaries laboring in that particular area. I had been on an assignment in an adjoining area and was given a ride to the airport with Elder Hanks and the mission president.

Elder Hanks told the mission president what a privilege it had been to visit with and interview each of the missionaries. He said he had felt prompted to ask one sister missionary, "Please tell me about your mission and how you felt about being called as a sister missionary."

She told him that her humble father, a farmer, had willingly sacrificed much for the Lord and His kingdom. He was already sustaining two sons on missions when he talked with her one day about her unexpressed desires to be a missionary and explained to her how the Lord had helped him to prepare to help her.

He had gone to the fields to talk with the Lord, to tell Him that he had no more material possessions to sell or sacrifice or to use as collateral for borrowing. He needed to know how he could help his daughter go on a mission. He felt the inspiration to plant onions. He thought he had misunderstood. Onions would not likely grow well in this climate; others were not growing onions; he had no experience growing onions.

After wrestling with the Lord for a time, he was again impressed to plant onions. So he borrowed money from the bank, purchased seeds, planted and nurtured, and prayed.

The elements were tempered; the onion crop prospered. He sold the crop; paid his debts to the bank, the government, and the Lord; and put the remainder in an account under his daughter's name—enough to support her during her mission.

Elder Hanks then told the mission president, “I will not forget the story or the moment or the tears in her eyes or the sound of her voice or the feeling I had as she said, ‘Brother Hanks, I don’t have any trouble believing in a loving Heavenly Father who knows my needs and will help me according to His wisdom if I am humble enough.’ “

Elder Hanks was teaching a most important lesson: each child in each classroom, each young man or young woman, each student in seminary or institute, each adult in Gospel Doctrine classes, each missionary—yes, every one of us—has a story waiting to be told. Listening is an essential element as we teach and as we learn.

“It Is More Blessed to Give Than to Receive”

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.

Never was her teaching so dynamic nor its impact more everlasting as one Sunday morning when she sadly announced to us the passing of a classmate's mother. We had missed Billy that morning but did not know the reason for his absence.

The lesson featured the theme “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Midway through the lesson, our teacher closed the manual and opened our eyes and our ears and our hearts to the glory of God. She asked, “How much money do we have in our class party fund?”

Depression days prompted a proud answer: “Four dollars and seventy-five cents.”

Then ever so gently she suggested, “Billy's family is hard pressed and grief stricken. What would you think of the possibility of visiting the family members this morning and giving to them your fund?”

Ever shall I remember the tiny band walking those three city blocks, entering Billy's home, greeting him, his brother, sisters, and father. Noticeably absent was his mother. Always I shall treasure the tears which glistened in the eyes of all as the white envelope containing our precious party fund passed from the delicate hand of our teacher to the needy hand of a grief-stricken father.

We fairly skipped our way back to the chapel. Our hearts were lighter than they had ever been, our joy more full, our understanding more profound. A God-inspired teacher had taught her boys and girls an eternal lesson of divine truth: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Well could we have paraphrased the words of the disciples on the way to Emmaus: “Did not our heart burn within us . . . while [she] opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32).

Lucy Gertsch knew each of her students. 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.

Many, many years later, when Lucy was nearing the end of her life, I visited with her. We reminisced concerning those days so long before when she had been our teacher. We spoke of each member of our class and discussed what each one was now doing. Her love and caring spanned a lifetime.

The Articles of Faith

Another inspired teacher in my life was Erma Bollwinkel, a member of our stake Primary board. She constantly stressed the importance of learning the Articles of Faith. In fact, we could not graduate from Primary until we successfully recited each article of faith to her—something of a challenge for rambunctious young boys, but we persevered and succeeded. I have, throughout my life, as a result, been able to recite the Articles of Faith.

For many years as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, I had responsibility for East Germany, also known as the German Democratic Republic. In this assignment, my knowledge of the Articles of Faith was most helpful. On each of my visits throughout the 20 years I supervised this area, I always reminded our members in that area of the twelfth article of faith: “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”

Our meetings behind what was known as the Iron Curtain were always monitored by the communist government there. In the early 1980s, when we sought approval from the government officials to build a temple there, and later when we asked permission for young men and women from that area to serve missions throughout the world and for others to come into their country to serve missions, they listened and then said, “Elder Monson, we've watched you for 20 years, and we've learned we can trust you and your Church because you and your Church teach your members to obey the laws of the land.”

I share another example of the value of learning the Articles of Faith. Forty-five years ago I worked with a man named Sharman Hummel in the printing business in Salt Lake City. I once gave him a ride home from work and asked him how he came to receive his testimony of the gospel.

He responded, “It's interesting, Tom, that you asked me that question, for this very week my wife, my children, and I are going to the Manti Temple, there to be sealed for all eternity.”

He continued his account: “We lived in the East. I was journeying by bus to San Francisco to establish myself in a new printing company, and then I was going to send for my wife and children. All the way from New York City to Salt Lake City the bus trip was uneventful. But in Salt Lake City a young girl entered the bus—a Primary girl—who sat next to me. She was going to Reno, Nevada, there to have a visit with her aunt. As we journeyed westward, I noticed a billboard: ‘Visit the Mormon Sunday School this week.’

“I said to the little girl, ‘I guess there are a lot of Mormons in Utah, aren't there?’

“She replied, ‘Yes, sir.’

“Then I said to her, ‘Are you a Mormon?’

“Again her reply: ‘Yes, sir.’ “

Sharman Hummell then asked, “What do Mormons believe?” And that little girl recited the first article of faith; then she talked about it. Continuing, she gave him the second article of faith and talked about it. Then she gave him the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and all of the Articles of Faith and talked about all of them. She knew them consecutively.

Sharman Hummel said, “When we got to Reno, and we let that little girl off into the arms of her aunt, I was profoundly impressed.”

He said, “All the way to San Francisco I thought, ‘What is it that prompts that little girl to know her doctrine so well?’ When I arrived in San Francisco, the very first thing I did,” said Sharman, “was to look through the yellow pages for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I called the mission president, and he sent two missionaries to where I was staying. I became a member of the Church, my wife became a member, all of our children became members, in part because a Primary girl knew her Articles of Faith.”

I think of the words of the Apostle Paul: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16).

Just three months ago, the Hummel family came to Salt Lake City for the wedding of their daughter Marianne. They stopped by the office; we had a wonderful visit. All 6 daughters came, along with 4 sons-in-law and 12 grandchildren. The entire family had remained active in the Church. Each of the daughters has been to the temple. Countless are those who have been brought to a knowledge of the gospel by the members of this family—all because a young child had been taught the Articles of Faith and had the ability and the courage to proclaim the truth to one who was seeking the light of the gospel.

“Be Ready Always”

I love the Lord’s injunction found in the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you” (D&C 88:77–78).

Many years ago, as I was traveling by air to an assignment in southern California, a lovely young lady sat down in the empty seat next to me. She began reading a book. As one is inclined to do, I glanced at the title: *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*.

I said to her, “Oh, you must be a Mormon.”

She responded, “Oh, no. Why would you ask?”

I replied, “Well, you’re reading a book written by a very prominent member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

She said, “Is that right? A friend gave this to me, but I don’t know much about it. However, it has

aroused my curiosity.”

Then I wondered, “Should I be forward and say more about the Church?” And the words of the Apostle Peter came to mind: “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). I decided that this was the time when I should bear my testimony.

I told her that it was my privilege years before to have assisted Elder Richards in printing *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. I told her something about that great man. I told her of the many thousands of people who had embraced the truth after reading that which he had prepared.

Then it was my privilege, all the way to Los Angeles, to answer her questions relative to the Church—intelligent questions that came from a heart which was seeking the truth. I asked if I might make arrangements for two sister missionaries to call upon her. I asked if she would like to attend our branch in San Francisco, where she lived. Her answers were affirmative.

Upon returning home, I wrote to President Irven G. Derrick of the San Francisco stake and passed along to him this information. Can you imagine my delight when, a few months later, I received a call from President Derrick in which he said, “Elder Monson, I’m calling about Yvonne Ramirez, an off-duty flight attendant, a young lady who sat next to you on a flight to Los Angeles, a young lady to whom you said that it was not coincidence that you sat next to her and that she was reading *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* on that trip. Brother Monson, she has just become the newest member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She’d like to speak to you and express her gratitude.” Of course I was overjoyed. It was a wonderful call.

President McKay’s Example

An example of a master teacher was President David O. McKay, who called me to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He taught with love and with sensitivity. He was the epitome of what he taught. His heart was kind, and his manner was gracious. He was a teacher of truth after the pattern of the Savior.

I observed this trait when, long before I was a General Authority, I entered his office to review some printing proofs of a book that we were printing. On that particular occasion, I noticed a picture on the wall, and I said to him, “President McKay, that’s a lovely painting. Is it a rendition of your childhood home in Huntsville, Utah?”

He sat back in his chair and gave a familiar David O. McKay chuckle and said, “Let me tell you about that picture. A sweet woman came in to see me one autumn day and presented to me that beautiful painting, framed and ready to be placed on the wall. She said, ‘President McKay, I spent much of the summer painting this picture of your ancestral home.’ “ He said he accepted the gift and thanked her profusely.

And then he said to me, “Do you know, Brother Monson, that dear woman painted the wrong house. She painted the house next door! I didn’t have the heart to tell her she painted the wrong house.”

But then he made this comment—and here is a vital lesson for all of us. He said, “In reality, Brother Monson, she painted the right house for me, because when, as a young boy, I would lie on the bed which

was on the front porch of my ancestral home, the view I had through that screened porch was of the very house she painted. She *did* paint the right house for me!”

Lessons about Serving Others

Some of the best lessons learned in life come from our parents. Mine taught me valuable lessons as I was growing up. Frequently those lessons had to do with serving others. I have many memories of my boyhood days. Anticipating Sunday dinner was one of them. Just as we children hovered at our so-called starvation level and sat anxiously at the table with the aroma of roast beef filling the room, Mother would say to me, “Tommy, before we eat, take this plate I’ve prepared down the street to Old Bob, and hurry back.”

I could never understand why we couldn’t first eat and later deliver his plate of food. I never questioned but would run down to his house and then wait anxiously as Bob’s aged feet brought him eventually to the door. Then I would hand him the plate of food. He would present to me the spotlessly clean plate from the previous Sunday and then offer me 10 cents as pay for my services.

My answer was always the same: “I can’t accept the money. My mother would tan my hide.”

He would then run his wrinkled hand through my blond hair and say, “My boy, you have a wonderful mother. Tell her thank you.”

I remember too that Sunday dinner always seemed to taste a bit better after I had returned from my errand.

My mother’s father, Grandfather Thomas Condie, also taught me a powerful lesson which involved this same Old Bob, who came into our lives in an interesting way. He was a widower in his 80s when the house in which he rented a room was to be demolished. I heard him tell my grandfather his plight as the three of us sat on the old front-porch swing of my grandfather. With a plaintive voice, he said to Grandfather, “Mr. Condie, I don’t know what to do. I have no family. I have no place to go. I have little money.” I wondered how Grandfather would answer.

We just kept rocking the swing. Then Grandfather reached into his pocket and took from it an old leather purse from which, in response to my hounding, he had produced many a penny or nickel for a special treat. This time he removed a key and handed it to Old Bob.

Tenderly he said, “Bob, here is the key to that house I own next door. Take it. Move your things in. Stay as long as you like. There will be no rent to pay and nobody will ever put you out again.”

Tears welled up in the eyes of Old Bob, coursed down his cheeks, then disappeared in his long, white beard. Grandfather’s eyes were also moist. I spoke no word, but that day my grandfather stood 10 feet tall. I was proud to bear his given name. Though I was but a boy, that lesson has had a powerful influence on my life.

These are but a few of the lessons I have learned from those who have touched my life and have taught me.

Again, I reiterate that we are all teachers. We should ever remember that we not only teach with words; we teach also by who we are and how we live our lives.

The Perfect Example

As we teach others, may we follow the example of the perfect teacher, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He left His footprints in the sands of the seashore but left His teaching principles in the hearts and in the lives of all whom He taught. He instructed His disciples of that day—and to us He speaks the same words—“Follow thou me” (John 21:22).

May we go forward in the spirit of obedient response, that it may be said of each of us as it was spoken of the Redeemer, “Thou art a teacher come from God” (John 3:2). May this be so, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Points to Consider

- As you read the experiences in President Monson's talk, what impressions come to you about learning and teaching? What experiences have you had as a learner or as a teacher that are similar to the examples in these accounts?
- How does each experience President Monson relates illustrate qualities of the Savior's teaching? Pray and ponder what you can do to follow the Savior's example.