

# Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Teaching and Learning

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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## Principles of Teaching and Learning

President Boyd K. Packer

*Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*

Elder L. Tom Perry

*Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*

### Teaching and Learning

*President Packer:* Our theme is teaching and learning the gospel of Jesus Christ, both in the classroom and at home. 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.

We will begin with a brief conversation between Elder L. Tom Perry and myself on principles that build good teaching. My assignment is to convey a few personal experiences that have taught me much about teaching and learning. If you watch and listen carefully, you will notice that to be a good teacher you must also be a willing learner.

Our conversation will be followed by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who will instruct us on preparing to teach. He will then join a classroom of students to demonstrate an example of classroom teaching.

Any of the Twelve could have effectively given this demonstration. Each would have varied his approach from the others. There is no one method that works for all teachers or situations. The Spirit is essential in guiding us to use our own preparation, experience, personality, knowledge, and testimony in any particular teaching situation.

### Leaders' Responsibilities

Leaders have a responsibility to teach, whether they are in councils or interviews or worship services. They also have a responsibility to ensure that teacher development and effective gospel learning are ongoing in the lives of members.

To that end, the First Presidency issued a letter dated November 17, 2006, discontinuing the positions of ward and stake teacher improvement coordinators. Accompanying the letter was a list of "Leaders' Responsibilities for Teacher Improvement." We trust that with the principles taught in this broadcast, together with the suggestions and resources stated in the letter, priesthood and auxiliary leaders will counsel together to improve gospel teaching and learning. It should not be necessary to hold special meetings for teacher improvement other than in your councils and interviews from time to time as needed.

We pray that this training broadcast may help you become better teachers and students of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## **Willingness to Learn**

*Elder Perry:* President, you wrote a book entitled *Teach Ye Diligently*. Every position in the Church requires an effective teacher. It is our most important calling. Could we visit for a few minutes and talk about teaching diligently as a requirement in our several Church callings?

*President Packer:* I was appointed seminary supervisor, and I didn't know anything. I was assigned then, employed, and paid more or less to go about the Church to tell seminary teachers how to teach and what they did wrong. That was very embarrassing, because I would go into a class and see teachers do something and have to correct them when I knew I did that every time I taught, and I had learned something about it.

Elder Harold B. Lee and Elder Marion G. Romney were always teaching, and they would, in a sense, go out of their way to tell me something or teach me something. I think the reason they did it—I'm not sure they ever saw me in this position or calling—is that I had one virtue: I wanted to learn, and I didn't resent it. And if you don't resent it, and if you want to learn, the Lord will keep teaching you, sometimes things you really didn't think you wanted to know.

Both of those great teachers would teach me. When I would see Brother Romney, sometimes he would say, "Kid, I want to tell you something." I knew it was coming. He was going to tell me I was doing something that I shouldn't do, and I would always thank him.

I learned early on that there is great value in listening to experience in older people. I had a stake president once who said, "I always tried to be in the presence of great people." He was in a little town in Idaho, but he said, "If there was a lecturer coming or something special, I would always try to be there, because I could learn."

I have always been drawn to associate with older people (now I am one). I remember in the Quorum of the Twelve, LeGrand Richards didn't walk as fast as the other Brethren, and I would always wait and open the door for him and walk back to the building with him. One day one of the Brethren said, "Oh, you're so kind to take care of Brother Richards." And I thought, "You don't know my selfish motive"—as we would walk back, I would just listen to him. I knew that he could remember Wilford Woodruff, and he would speak. One-on-one teaching is very powerful. Generally one-on-one teaching is what happens when you are corrected.

Another principle of teaching is to arise from your bed early (see D&C 88:124)—but the easy part of that, or the hard part, is to retire to your bed—and then reflect in the morning when your mind is clear. That's when the ideas come to teach.

I don't know how often I have had an assignment come and I didn't have a clue in my mind what to do. Yesterday I was in a meeting of the General Authorities. I knew I was going to speak first, and I thought, "What will I say?" And I was confident it would come, and it came.

## **Using the Scriptures**

*Elder Perry:* What is the importance of using the scriptures in your teaching?

*President Packer:* I have always relied on the scriptures. The best example of teaching and how to teach, the best model for teaching methods, besides the subject matter, which is the gospel, is the Lord and His teaching. That's why I don't like to go to the pulpit or stand in front of a class without my scriptures in hand. I have got them in hand today.

*Elder Perry:* President, you've carried those scriptures around with you. Every time I've been with you, you've had those scriptures. You told us the story one time of how they were in the water, and that only helped them because you could turn to them faster.

*President Packer:* Well, I was studying outside on the lawn and was called away and left my scriptures open on the little table—I forgot them, as old men will do—and the sprinklers went on. I came out in the morning and thought, “Oh, my scriptures that I've marked up for 50 years are gone.” I found out it just loosened the pages. I think if I had to get new scriptures, I'd put them out in the rain before I started using them.

*Elder Perry:* People always talk to us about the scriptures and, some of them, how difficult it is to get through them. How do you make the scriptures come alive in your teaching?

*President Packer:* Stay at it. I remember when I determined I was going to read the Book of Mormon. I was in my teens. I opened it and read, “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1). And I went on through the chapters, and I was learning things. It was interesting, and I could follow it until I got over to the Isaiah chapters and the Old Testament prophet language. So a few months later I decided to try again to read the Book of Mormon. I read, “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,” but every time I'd hit the barrier of those Isaiah chapters, and I wondered why they were in there. Finally I decided I was even going to read them. So when I was a teenager, I just had to look at the words. I didn't understand it, but I could turn the pages and then go on through. When you get over in Alma, you will sail on through.

So you have to be determined to read them, and not just glean from them, but read them from beginning to end—the Book of Mormon, the New Testament, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price. For years I made it a practice to read the scriptures each summer when we had a little time off, to refresh the store that's there.

## **Pray for the Gift of Teaching**

*Elder Perry:* What counsel would you give recent converts prior to their first calling as a teacher?

*President Packer:* I would tell them they can do it. Everybody can teach. I would counsel them to pray for the gift of teaching. You know, the Book of Mormon speaks of gifts and outlines several gifts, among them to teach the gospel by the Spirit (see Moroni 10:8–10). When I read that years ago, I thought, “That's a gift I want, to be able to teach by the Spirit.” I found out from the scriptures that you have to ask for it—ask and ye shall receive—so I would tell them to keep asking and seeking, “and ye shall find” (see Matthew 7:7; 3 Nephi 27:29) and that the gift has to be earned, but it can come.

## Seeking the Spirit

*Elder Perry:* What should teachers do to ensure that they have the Spirit in their teaching?

*President Packer:* You have to live worthily, and you have to ask for help. You can ask for help if you are parents. And then you have to keep the commandments and pray constantly, unceasingly for the ability and the inspiration to know what to do and when to do it. The Lord won't fail you: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). "Whatsoever . . . ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive," it will be given you (Enos 1:15). Then one of the scriptures adds a little—if it's good for you (see Moroni 7:26). The gospel is very practical.

You may be an older person who thinks that your ministry is finished, you may be a young person who is frightened about everything or a mother who is so busy with the children or a father who is preoccupied, but you can teach, and you can pray, and you can be guided. And you will. You'll be blessed of the Lord—I can promise you that.

When the Lord was teaching, He always dealt with things that the people knew about. For instance, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net" (Matthew 13:47)—it isn't really a net, but it's just like unto it; and then He explained why. And "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking [after] goodly pearls" (Matthew 13:45). When He gave the parable of the sower (see Matthew 13:3–8), that was something they could relate to, and it's not only possible but quite probable, after He gave the parable of the sower and talked about seeds being thrown on hard ground and on productive ground, that a month later one of those who was hearing and out doing some planting, seeing the seeds in his hand, would relive that lesson.

If you use parables and stories and illustrations, it lives after the students are out of the class. His method was remarkably simple. He was at times fairly stern, but always His teachings were on their level.

Teaching is a sacred calling, a holy calling. The thing I think I would tell teachers is that they never teach alone. They never have to be alone. The Lord has promised that in the scriptures. Alma said the Lord granteth unto all nations, in every tongue, teachers (see Alma 29:8), and the Lord said, "Teach ye diligently and my grace [will] attend you" (D&C 88:78).

I don't know how to teach the gospel without a constancy of prayer. You can speak a prayer, but you can also think a prayer. A lot of times when I've been teaching a group or a class I've just been praying inwardly, "How can I get through?" And I don't know how to do it other than having that power available.

## The Responsibility to Teach

*Elder Perry:* Teaching is central in all the activities of the Church. Who has the responsibility to prepare themselves to teach?

*President Packer:* Everybody is a teacher—the leader is a teacher; the follower is a teacher; the counselor is a teacher; the parents are teachers. So we have a responsibility to learn the principles of teaching. The Lord set up His Church so that we all do everything in the Church. There's a statement in

the Doctrine and Covenants that “every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, . . . the Savior of the world” (D&C 1:20). How blessed we are that we have a lay priesthood, as it is called, so that all of the brethren can hold the priesthood. All of the sisters are eligible for callings in the Church, and all of us will be parents. Therefore, teaching is the center of all that we do.

*Elder Perry:* You’ve mentioned teaching in the home. What is the difference between teaching in the Church and teaching in the home? Is there any great difference?

*President Packer:* In the home it’s more intimate and better and easier and less formal, and parents are teaching by example. Parents also teach some things that are kind of painful to kids when they ask “why,” and all the parents can say is “because”—because they don’t know why, they just know it isn’t the thing to do, and they teach them obedience so that they will know and understand. And at home there’s that powerful bond of love between parent and child that you won’t let go until you get it taught.

## **Teaching by the Spirit**

*Elder Perry:* President, how do you get the Spirit in the classroom from the teacher to the students in such a way that it will be a meaningful experience to them?

*President Packer:* First, they have to know that you love them, that you want to teach them. Then you have to communicate on their level. We can’t float around above them—even in the gospel—about subjects that they cannot connect with. That isn’t what the Lord did. The Lord walked with them and talked with them in everyday life, and His teachings were on that level always.

If you have something to teach, they really want to learn. Teenagers even—teenagers especially—want to learn. They have a thirst for it.

A lot of teachers think they have to be prepared to the very sentence. Yes and no. That preparation includes having the presentation loose enough to involve the students and having them ask questions and bringing them into it. You have to leave a little room for inspiration.

We have a memory prompter in the Holy Ghost. If we have a challenge of something to teach, and we think about who we are and what we do, there’s always some little experience we’ve had or someplace we’ve been or something we’ve seen that we can bring into the lesson. And the scriptures are part of all of that. They aren’t just a book you read now and again to figure out the rules and regulations of the Church.

Quite a bit of teaching that is done in the Church is done so rigidly, it’s lecture. We don’t respond to lectures too well in classrooms. We do in sacrament meeting and at conferences, but teaching can be two-way so that you can ask questions. You can sponsor questions easily in a class.

Suppose you were teaching the Martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Here you are a Church history teacher, and you’ve studied it all, and you know it was on June 27, 1844, at 5:00 p.m. in the Carthage Jail when the Prophet was shot. If you ask them what time of day and where and so on the Prophet was shot, none of them will know. You didn’t know before you read the manual. But you can say, “What brought him to that? What do you think brought him to that?” The minute you say, “What do you think?” they have something to say. They can contribute; even the students that are the most backward

will have something to say. So there's a way to handle questions and to monitor and manage the class. Respond to questions. Feel free to ask questions in a class.

You can't give away something you haven't got anymore than you can come back from someplace you haven't been. So you have got to have the Spirit.

### **Points to Consider**

- The presentations from this worldwide leadership training meeting can help you improve as a teacher and learner. To identify and apply the ideas in these presentations, read the information in the yellow boxes that have been placed near the beginning of each presentation. You may also want to mark scriptures and key phrases in the presentations and write impressions you receive.
- Read President Packer's opening remarks. Identify ideas that can help you become a better teacher and learner.
- Ponder the following question, and write down the ideas and impressions that come to you: What should I do to ensure I have the Spirit in my teaching at home and at church?
- What do you think helps make President Packer an effective learner?