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Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith (Romans 12:6).

Stages

Charles Metten

Charles Metten retired from BYU in 1996 after completing thirty-five years in the Department of Theater and Media Arts. He now serves as dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts at Southern Utah University in Cedar City, home of the yearly Utah Shakespearian Festival. Professor Metten was born and reared in California, where he received his B.A. and M.A. from UCLA and met his wife, Patricia, who introduced him to the Church. He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Iowa and joined the faculty at BYU, where he was an insightful teacher, actor, mentor, and friend. He developed the first film courses at BYU, which have proven to be highly popular and enriching in the lives of thousands of students. The Mettens are the parents of five children and the grandparents of fifteen.

In the visual and performing arts, realities are portrayed by visible symbols. Because of the sanctity of the subject, however, rarely does anyone try to portray God in modern theater. As a consequence, in my career I have not found God in some sort of representation or performance. Further, as a teacher I have not found him in the mechanisms of Brigham Young University, whether its buildings or its committees. Where I have found him is in the most precious resources of the University, in its students, in my students.

My students have helped me to understand God, to appreciate God, to know him better, because I found in them and through them the qualities of patience, courage, understanding, compassion, love, caring, sacrifice, and discipline. For me, these qualities—qualities that the Savior teaches and exemplifies—represent God in my students. The following includes two examples of what I mean. They represent many other, similar experiences. A third story offers a glimpse into the joy that I have felt as a teacher of young people. On occasion, that joy has been full, even inexpressible. The source of such joy, as I have learned, is God himself.

I remember a young woman who came to BYU in the early 1960s. She was a vivacious, energetic, loving-of-life young woman with a terrific sense of humor. Over time, she took acting lessons from me, and we worked together in productions. She found that the University opened up the world for her. She buried herself in learning by studying dramatic literature and by acting in plays. I directed her and also saw her in productions directed by my colleagues. She was young, and her BYU experiences began to shape her maturity and her curiosity. As she worked with others in the classroom or in a play, she always had a positive word to say, she always had a nurturing thought, and she always had a laugh that was warm and wonderful.

The summer after she graduated from BYU, when her friends were getting jobs and starting families, she quietly accepted a mission call. In those days, not so many women went on missions, and I was impressed with her decision to go. Her decision was a lesson for me because it involved sacrifice on her part. She went to Europe. She came to love the people. I am sure they loved her. By the time she came home, she had fallen in love with a young man who also served his mission there. She was beside herself in love with this young man. A sparkle and a light came from her. They were married partway through her study for her master’s degree in theater history. After her graduation, they left the BYU community so that he could go to school elsewhere, and I lost track of her.

Over ten years later as a participant in the Know Your Religion lecture series, I was assigned to speak in a town in California. While sitting on the stand as I waited my turn on the program, I looked down and saw this young woman in the audience. I was delighted to see her again. She now had two children, and her husband had a wonderful job. She invited me to their home after the meeting, where we talked and renewed old acquaintances and relived some memories.

When I went back to BYU, I lost track of her again. A few months later, I received a letter from her asking if it would be possible for her to receive a teaching assistantship if she were to return to the University for further graduate work. I responded that I was sure she could earn an assistantship and didn’t think more about it. Another few months passed. Then, to my surprise, she appeared in my office. She and her husband had separated, and it looked like they would be getting a divorce. I was stunned.

While she didn’t show me the anguish or tears she had been through, I could sense that her pain was inexpressibly deep. She only told me that her husband had “made some decisions” that she couldn’t live with and that she now needed the assistantship she had inquired about. She had her children with her, and she was going to raise them

in Provo while she was going to school. I wondered if she knew the size of the mountain in front of her. She now had the burden of raising these children alone, of creating a profession of her own, and of forming a new home. In addition, there was tremendous anguish, pressure, and disappointment from the separation and the pending divorce, all while she was helping her children adjust to the changes in their lives.

Here's where I became aware of the power of God in her life. Never once when she came to my office—as we worked on her program, as we worked on her classes, as we discussed the writing of her papers—did she ever present a negative attitude or express a mean, vengeful kind of feeling toward her husband, or anyone else for that matter. The life she had prepared for and planned on was gone. Yet, instead of displaying bitterness and anger, she turned to the Lord. She told me that she was sure that bitterness only hurt the person who felt it and that she, like Joseph Smith, hoped to learn that “all these things shall give thee experience” (D&C 122:7). Her testimony of Jesus Christ and the importance of his teachings grew. She was determined to raise her children with love and peace, and she knew she had to prepare to support them at the same time.

We worked together. Her graduate committee was organized as well as her classes. Because she was proficient in German, her study focused on Georg II, the duke of Saxe-Meiningen. He is often referred to as the father of modern theater directing. His community, Saxe-Meiningen, was then in East Germany, a place that at that time was under Soviet control and for which it was extremely difficult to obtain a visa and permission to visit. But this did not stop her. She said she needed to see his theater, his library, and the museum that is housed in his former castle. She wanted her dissertation to be a real contribution to the field of knowledge, and she wanted it to be complete.

Somehow she got her passport and her visas, and all of the red tape worked out for her to go into East Germany. (I became aware of the near impossibility of obtaining visas when we discovered a recent dissertation written by a scholar at another university who explained how the Soviets refused to let him in.) She took her children with her and went to that remote place. She was able to visit Georg's theater and interview several people there who explained his importance in their own work. Her travel was adventurous for her, and she completed the primary research which added to her dissertation and filled out the period of theater history that she was writing about. It was a real contribution.

She came back and completed her degree and found work at a university. Never, never did the words “I quit, I can't do it, I am just too tired” come from her. She continued to have her sense of humor. She continued to have her encouraging attitude. She expressed her faith to me and told me of the Lord's blessings in her life. We talked often in my office about our families, and we shared ideas about the raising of our children—I still had two sons at home myself.

Over the years, I find that I think of her often. Whenever the pressures of life become too much for me, I think about her. Her example has inspired me to work at being less critical, less impatient, less angry with an inexperienced actor or an opinionated colleague, and less frustrated at the competing demands of work, family, and church. In expressing her faith and testimony, she actually gave me advice as well as understanding and patience. For this I will be forever grateful. She was an example of a student who will live in my memory and in my heart forever, because in this student I was able to see God working positively in the life of a person torn by heartache.

The second student was a young man who was very much a part of our film program. He was one of the hardest workers whom I have ever met. He was always willing to bear his testimony—I even asked him to do that in class in either Japanese or English, and he did. His was an obedient spirit with a smile and with a positive attitude.

He started out in theater because he thought he wanted to be an actor. He performed as an actor in some of my productions, and then he became my assistant director for the play *A Tale of Two Cities*. He gradually learned the mechanics of directing and stagecraft. But then his main love, his great passion emerged—and oh, he had a passion. He wanted to become a writer and a director in the film industry. He began to work in the film program and took the basic courses. Finally, it came time for him to create a student film. His script had to be approved by several faculty members in the film program. Every time he submitted it, they sent it back to be rewritten. He rewrote and rewrote. But he couldn't win the approval of the committee. At one point they even suggested that he change the subject matter or the theme. But no, he would not give up on his project. He had a great belief in this film concept. He was determined that it was the film he wanted to do.

Eventually he came to my office, and he presented the script to me. I read it, and we talked about it. I tried to point out the various weaknesses in it. He listened. Then big tears came to his eyes, and he said, “Will I ever make the film that I believe in? I know it can touch people's hearts. What am I going to do, Brother Metten? What am I going to do?” I suggested that he sleep on it for a while and then try again.

He did try again. And again after that. Each time he rewrote his script after it had been to the committee, it became stronger. Each time the clarity they were looking for became more evident, and eventually, working together, they approved his script. He could now begin filming the story that he cared so much about.

I should explain that all student films are a real test of fortitude, strength, courage, and belief in oneself and

one's talents and skills. Getting the script approved, no matter how difficult, is only one part of the project. Student filmmakers have to raise their own money. Then they have to obtain equipment—heavy cameras, lights, dollies, carts—from the motion picture studio. They have to create a crew from their fellow students. His film took place in sheep-herding country, so they had to go on location. When films are done on location, the director has to provide food, housing, and warmth—the weather was bad. The mud and the cold made working conditions almost impossible. One experienced actor told me it was the worst experience on location he had ever undergone.

Yet this young man did not lose his passion. That's the lesson I learned from him. When we believe in something, know something is right, we must defend it without giving up. We must look for ways to solve the problems and overcome difficulties that appear. Then we learn. Eventually this young man overcame every obstacle, met every requirement, and completed the film. It was a good film and, naturally, he learned a great deal.

When he graduated from BYU, he applied for graduate school at UCLA. He was turned down. He applied a second time. This time he was able to coax a faculty member into looking at his film. The faculty member saw this young man's passion for his work, and he was accepted to the UCLA film directing program. While there, he made some student films, one of which won a prestigious award and was shown on French television. When it came time to make his major M.F.A. (Master of Fine Arts) film—a substantial requirement in completing the program—he applied for several grants and won one. The grant was based on his experience of working in theater, learning stage directing and stagecraft skills, and then applying his knowledge of stage directing and stagecraft to create a story on film. In short, it was based on the discipline and understanding that began to develop as he wrestled with that little undergraduate film.

I sent him to a major producer at Universal Studios, whom I knew, to see if he could give him some advice on raising money for commercial films and how to get a major studio to back him. The producer interviewed him and was impressed with his energy, and above all his spirit—his spirit of calmness, his spirit of joy, his spirit of life. The producer helped him, and the young man was able to get the camera equipment that he needed. He also helped him to get film stock—a very expensive ingredient—to go to a remote area in Utah during the winter to film and complete the project necessary for his graduate degree.

I am firmly convinced that without the gospel, this young man would have been just like every other young filmmaker who was in competition with him. But his testimony, his experience on his mission, his willingness to work, all sustained him when seemingly insurmountable barriers were put in his way. The gospel of Jesus Christ was paramount in this young man's life. He lived it everywhere he was. Whatever I asked him to do for me when we were working on *A Tale of Two Cities* he enthusiastically completed. On occasion, for example, I asked him what he would suggest to make a crowd scene better. He would study it out. Then he would talk to me about the actors in the crowd—that is, the supernumeraries, the spear carriers, the ones in the fifth row away from the audience. He would point out a few to me, three or four of them, and tell me what a great job they were doing. His comments were always positive. He always had an uplifting comment. I always felt better after working at a rehearsal with this young man.

In my own life, I have pursued projects that I believed in. For instance, when we were developing the film program at BYU, I struggled hard to get it off the ground. In some ways it seemed so silly. Here we were, hundreds of miles from filmmaking centers, isolated from talent and opportunity. Yet I dreamed that young members of the Church, with dreams of their own, might learn to make film at BYU and lead happy, productive lives doing something that they really wanted to do. During those years I thought a lot about my young friend and his love for film. His courage increased my own as we developed our program. Now our young graduates are getting jobs—I can think of three executives at major film studios who are graduates of our program. Again a student at BYU let me know who God is and what God stood for in his life so I could understand better who God was in my own life. I will be forever grateful to that student.

Now let me share a story about the joy of being a teacher of young people at BYU. The young woman in this experience helped me solidify something in my own mind that I have now come to believe is truth. Teaching, *real* teaching, occurs only when the student is the focus, and the process of working together helps her accomplish something that is within her.

This young woman came to BYU from an Italian family living in California. Her family was a large one, although she was the only girl. She had come to BYU, where I first met her in one of my beginning speech classes. My, but she was shy. She wanted to drop the class because she was so frightened at having to get up in front of the other students to speak. I discovered that all her brothers were football players, basketball players, or track stars. She told me that she couldn't do anything. I kept talking to her—I wouldn't let her drop the class—I kept telling her to just stay with it and watch the other students.

Finally, the day came when I asked her if she would complete an assignment of telling us something she did well. She cried. After class she came up to me and sobbed, "Oh, Brother Metten, Brother Metten, I can't do anything

well. I don't know anything well." So we talked. For several days I had her come to my office, where we talked about her life on the farm and life with her brothers, life with her mom and dad. Finally in our discussions I found out that she loved to make pizza. So I said, "Show me." Right there in my office she showed me with nothing—she just pantomimed—how she made pizza with all the ingredients. She went through all of the motions. She stirred, and beat, and rolled the dough, and threw it in the air, thinning it out. She did the whole thing—laid out the olives and the salami, the pepperoni, then the cheese, and then she baked it. I said, "Would you do that in class?" "Oh," she said, "no, I can't. No. I'm scared, I'm frightened." She said, "I'd faint." (Many of the students say they will faint, but they never do. It's always an exciting experience to think about, though.)

Finally she agreed to do it, and one day she stood in front of that class. Only this time she brought her ingredients and her bowls and she started from scratch and made that pizza. The class was fascinated. They watched, they laughed, and they cheered as she went through making the pizza. And then, as she was finishing her talk, she said, "I put it in the oven and bake it. And now I would like you to taste some of my pizza." She had brought a big pizza that she had cut up into twenty-one slices, and we all sat there and ate some of her pizza. When we were done, the class stood up and applauded and whistled and stomped their feet. They knew how difficult this presentation had been for her. She just stood there with flour on her face and hands and cried.

I went up to her and put my arms around her and said, "What is the matter? Why are you crying? You have done so well. Everybody loved what you did." She said to the class, and this stays in my heart, "I have never been applauded in my life."

Well, from that point on she began to gain some courage. She made friends, got an A in the class, and on the day she graduated she made it a point to introduce her family to me—her mom and her dad and her brothers.

About a year later she became engaged and married her young man in the Salt Lake Temple. I was invited to the wedding reception, and when I started through the wedding reception line, there she was, a beautiful bride, my pizza girl who had just blossomed in that class. And in turn, she had become a mentor and guide and teacher to other shy frightened students, both men and women, in other classes. As I greeted her and shook her hand, she pulled me to her and whispered in my ear, "Thank you, Brother Metten, for being my teacher."

My working in classrooms and projects with young people improved after that. I looked for ways to connect with students and ways to increase their own gifts and talents. This young woman reminded me that God himself represents understanding and love, and that God lets people know that he loves them. He lets us know that we are important. He lets us know that we can do things well. This young woman—my pizza girl—certainly made me feel so.

These three are only a few of the students who have helped bring God into my life. Through them—and others—I found God in many interactions during my office hours, in my classes, in play rehearsals, and on student films where I worked with young people. They made a difference in my life. I know that they have moved on from BYU to make a difference in other lives. I thank the students whom I taught for thirty-five years at BYU for teaching me and for bringing God into my life. And I thank the mothers and the fathers of those students, who were so willing to share, sacrifice, and let them come to BYU so I could benefit from their sons' and daughters' spirits and learn the meaningful things they taught me.