



The role of teachers is to help individuals take responsibility for learning the gospel — to awaken in them the desire to study, understand, and live the gospel and to show them how to do so.

Come, Follow Me: Learning Resources for Youth

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On September 12, 2012, the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced that a new curriculum for the Young Men and Young Women’s organizations and the youth Sunday School classes would be implemented beginning January 2013.¹ This curriculum, known as *Come, Follow Me*, was introduced to the Church membership in a worldwide release of twenty-three languages. A curricular release of this breadth, scope, and magnitude was unprecedented in the Church and created anticipation, excitement, and questions.

To truly understand the significance of the new youth curriculum, it is important to consider not only the events that were instrumental in bringing about the current curricular changes but the intricate timing involved as well. This point was articulated at a recent conference for women, where the Relief Society general presidency invited a panel with an administrator of Seminaries and Institutes and general auxiliary officers to discuss the reasons for the new youth curriculum, how it was developed, and how parents and youth leaders could effectively use the new resource in the classroom and in the home.² The new youth curriculum was compared to a “perfect storm”—an

event where many diverse factors converge at a precise moment in time to create an outcome of unusual and unprecedented magnitude, in this case productive rather than destructive.³ This paper compares the development of *Come, Follow Me* to a curricular perfect storm and thereby considers efforts dealing with gospel learning and teaching that impacted the development of the new youth curriculum, then looks at how these efforts converged precisely at the right moment to create unusual and unprecedented possibilities for effectively learning, teaching, and living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When considering the release of *Come, Follow Me*, some marvel how it appeared to come together so quickly and how it fit so well with other related events like *Preach My Gospel*, the *Teaching and Learning Emphasis* used in Seminaries and Institutes, the *Teaching Model* implemented at Brigham Young University–Idaho, or even the recent change in missionary age. Some assume the Church orchestrated every aspect of these amazing events with precision from conception to completion. Those who have worked on these projects and changes, however, feel that the eventual orchestration of design, timing, and convergence of these events was divinely providential. For example, at a recent seminar for new mission presidents, Elder David F. Evans, executive director of the Missionary Department, explained that the extraordinary changes in missionary work have happened because the Lord “has been very much in front of us preparing the way for these remarkable times.” He then said that any discussion about the recent change in missionary age would be incomplete without consideration of the Lord’s hand in bringing about the new youth curriculum. He said, “The introduction of *Come, Follow Me: Learning Resources for Youth* for Young Men and Young Women, and for youth Sunday School classes, is evidence that the Lord was well out in front of the missionary age change.” Elder Evans then explained:

Until the beginning of 2013, missionaries entered the field with little or no experience in being teachers themselves. And yet teaching is the very thing that these young men and women must do from the moment they step out of the MTC to begin preaching the gospel. Presidents and sisters, consider for a moment what this inspired, newly implemented curriculum will mean to preparation of the missionaries that you will be receiving. Under this curriculum, youth are learning to teach the gospel from their hearts, and they teach frequently. Such young men and young women will be better prepared missionaries who will teach His gospel with confidence, testimony, and faith.⁴

While these two events are directly connected and fit seamlessly together, they were not originally conceived to be parts of an eventual whole—at

least, not by those working on these events. When Elder Paul V. Johnson, Commissioner of the Church Educational System (CES) and member of the Seventy, spoke about the development of the youth curriculum and its relationship with the recent change in missionary age, he said that the new curriculum was not actually developed “in connection with the missionary age change.” A change in the missionary age was not even part of the early deliberations for changing the youth curriculum. Elder Johnson said the new curriculum was developed primarily because it was evident that changes needed to be made to meet the shifting needs of the youth. In hindsight, it is obvious that the Lord was orchestrating this “perfect storm,” but at the time of its conception and in almost every case dealing with gospel learning and teaching over the years, one committee or department was not fully aware of the agendas, timelines, intended outcomes, or even the projects being worked on by other committees or departments—at least, not until all the events and projects began to converge.

While *Come, Follow Me* was announced in 2012 and implemented in January 2013, this event was actually the culmination of decades of developing curricular frameworks, models, prototypes, methods, designs, concepts, emphases, and materials that were created by many different committees, organizations, and departments. At times the thought that all the variant ideas could possibly merge into a single curriculum would have stretched any imagination. “I don’t think it’s by coincidence,” Elder Johnson said of the convergence of the new youth curriculum and other related events. “That’s the way the Lord works, . . . It is just like when the Lord does anything—all the things fall into place at the right time, and that is what is happening with this.”⁵ Recognizing God’s hand in the coming forth of this new curriculum for youth merely reemphasizes that this truly is the Lord’s work and that his work will be hastened “in its time” (D&C 88:73). With this perspective in mind, it is apparent that each event along the way—whether considered a failure or success in its time—contributed to an eventual merging of ideas and efforts at precisely the right moment to create an unusual and unprecedented outcome—a curricular “perfect storm.”

Changing Times and Tensions

Prior to 1961, each auxiliary organization was considered a curricular institution of its own. Thus Sunday School had its own set of courses, or curriculum, as did the Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, and priesthood quorums.

As such, every course was conceived, developed, and produced in isolation by each individual organization. “Over the years,” B. Lloyd Poelman, a former member of the General Sunday School Board, explained, “there emerged an effort to draw all Church functions and programs into harmonious coordination under priesthood leadership.”⁶ On March 24, 1960, the First Presidency wrote to the General Priesthood Committee: “We of the First Presidency have over the years felt the need of a correlation between and among the courses of study put out by the General Priesthood Committee and . . . have also felt the very urgent need of a correlation of studies among the auxiliaries of the Church.”⁷

This correlated change was made effective in April 1961, when a Correlation Department of the Church was formed to ensure “suitable and effective use of its resources.”⁸ According to Harold B. Lee, the primary objective of church correlation and curriculum was “building up a knowledge of the gospel, a power to promulgate the same, a promotion of the growth, faith, and stronger testimony of the principles of the gospel.”⁹ This new department effectively put an end to auxiliaries creating their own curricula and materials and laid the foundation for curricular development for the next fifty years.

The Correlation Department established three committees designated to oversee curricula for the children, youth, and adults in the Church. The efforts of the committees were guided by the “Blue Book,” a document used to correlate which gospel topics should be taught to each age-group.¹⁰ In addition, a “curriculum planning chart” containing ten major categories with 245 gospel topics was developed. This chart outlined not only *what* doctrines and principles were to be taught to each age-group but *when* they would be taught as well.¹¹ It was obvious that developing curricula for the Church would not be, as Elder Carlos E. Asay pointed out, a “hit or miss proposition,” but instead a detailed and elaborate process to prepare a “systematic, progressive, balanced study . . . for the children and youth of the Church.”¹² Elder Asay illustrated the intricate detail of the process by explaining:

If we were to look at the curriculum planning charts to learn how and when the first principle of the gospel—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—is being taught, we would quickly learn that seventeen lessons are devoted to this principle in the children’s curriculum. The charts would also reveal that in the youth courses of study, twenty-one lessons have this principle as a major emphasis and eight additional lessons have it as a minor emphasis. The planning charts indicate the degree of complexity, the lesson objectives, supporting materials, the age group being taught, and the organization teaching the principle.¹³

From 1961 to 2010, the content of all youth curricula for Young Men, Young Women, and Sunday School were determined by the Blue Book and the extensive curriculum planning charts. Though the content of youth curricula remained essentially unchanged during this time, pressures to consider changes to the curricula began to surface.

Perhaps the first significant pressure for change in the youth curricula occurred in 1980. In an effort to “allow Church members more time for personal gospel study, for service to others, and for meaningful activities,” a new consolidated meeting schedule was introduced.¹⁴ The new schedule caused logistical incongruences that created tension with the existing youth curricula. This was primarily due to a decision to use existing class materials for the new schedule. Thus teachers struggled to teach a curriculum that was designed for a now outdated framework. This was particularly problematic for the Young Women. Prior to 1980, the Young Women met during the week rather than on Sunday. Thus much of the Young Women curriculum emphasized activities for personal enrichment rather than the new emphasis of “Sunday,” or “spiritual topics” focusing more on understanding the doctrines of the restoration. Another problem was that the existing curriculum only contained twenty-two lessons—less than half of what was needed for a full curricular year. To compensate for the difference, Young Women’s leaders and teachers were instructed to create their own lessons from other correlated Church materials as needed.¹⁵ Even with the significant tension created by the changes in the meeting format and schedule, only minor changes were made to the existing youth curricular materials over the next several decades. The tension did, however, make it difficult—but not impossible—to ignore the need for a new youth curriculum.

Revitalizing Teaching in the Church

By the 1990s, Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained, the First Presidency began to emphasize a need to “revitalize teaching in the Church.” Elder Oaks said that the First Presidency challenged the Quorum of the Twelve to lead the charge as assisted by the Seventy.¹⁶ It was during this time that Church leaders expressed feelings that the curricula and materials were excessively complex and that expensive programs and materials impeded the growth of the gospel throughout the world.¹⁷ As a result, Church leaders began pushing to reduce and simplify the curricula, programs, and materials.

The philosophy for developing Church curricula was also shifting during this time. In earlier curricular development, for example, it was felt that the curricula should primarily focus on building up and promulgating gospel knowledge. In 1991, the Priesthood Department, under the direction of the Quorum of the Twelve, began shifting its focus to creating curricula to “help individuals and families come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior; to follow His example of service, love, and righteousness; to perfect their lives by preparing them to make and keep sacred covenants, receive the ordinances of the gospel, and endure in faithfulness in order to enjoy the full blessing of exaltation.”¹⁸ This caused a new focus on the process of teaching and learning rather than just disseminating information and imparting knowledge, as is evident in the following developments.

Teaching, No Greater Call

For the next several years the Church worked to revise a 1978 manual called *Teaching, No Greater Call*. In preparation for its new release in 1999, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland invited all members to “exalt the teaching experience within the home and within the Church and improve our every effort to edify and instruct.”¹⁹ The new *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching* became the “standard resource” for gospel teaching then and now. An important contribution made by *Teaching, No Greater Call* to revitalize gospel teaching was a new emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of both the teacher and the learner. For example, *Teaching, No Greater Call* states, “Knowing that individuals are responsible to learn the gospel, we may ask, What is the role of teachers? It is to help individuals take responsibility for learning the gospel—to awaken in them the desire to study, understand, and live the gospel and show them how to do so.”²⁰

Teaching and Learning Emphasis

Other Church entities were independently considering the relationship between learning and teaching as well. In March 2000, for example, the Missionary Executive Council formed the Missionary Curriculum Task Committee to review “various missionary programs for any improvement or revitalization we can give to them.”²¹ This and other committees explored a wide range of missionary activities, including the preparation, maturity, and abilities of young missionaries to learn and teach the gospel message. Elder Richard G. Scott, a member of the Missionary Executive Council, encouraged

Paul V. Johnson to consider how seminary could help the youth more fully understand the doctrines of the gospel and, at the same time, improve their ability to articulate those doctrines to others.²² Almost immediately, CES began exploring ways to improve both learning and teaching in seminaries and institutes. As a result of their efforts, CES introduced the Current Teaching Emphasis in 2003. This highlighted many new emphases and adjustments designed “to help students learn to explain, share, and testify the doctrines and principles of the restored gospel” by giving “them opportunities to do so with each other in class.”²³

Preach My Gospel

As CES was working on implementing the Current Teaching Emphasis, the Missionary Executive Council continued its efforts in evaluating missionary preparation, training, and ability to teach the gospel effectively. In 2002, Elder M. Russell Ballard was appointed as chair of the Missionary Executive Council and began calling for “the greatest generation of missionaries in the history of the Church.” His enthusiasm and urgent manner reflected the emerging need for serious changes in the way missionaries learn and teach the gospel. Elder Ballard explained that missionaries of the future needed to be prepared *before* receiving their mission calls. He said, “We cannot send you on a mission to be reactivated, reformed, or to receive a testimony. We just don’t have time for that.” Since the “bar that is the standard for missionary service is being raised,” Elder Ballard fervently challenged young men and women to “rise up, to measure up, and to be fully prepared to serve the Lord.”²⁴ Two years later, after researching, observing, setting new missionary standards, reemphasizing gospel doctrines, and underscoring the connection between learning and teaching the gospel, a new missionary curriculum called *Preach My Gospel* was introduced in 2004.

A Pending Revolution for Youth Curriculum

Even though the seminary, institute, and missionary curricula were transforming rather rapidly, the youth curricula remained unchanged. The shifting philosophical and practical moorings for developing curricula, however, were influencing the Curriculum Department, and subtle changes began to surface. In August 2003, for example, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles approved forming a committee to develop and produce a new Aaronic Priesthood quorum and Young Women curriculum.²⁵ While

there have been many committees formed in the past to develop and write curricular materials, there were several things associated with this committee that are notably different and illustrates the shifting approach to developing curriculum for the auxiliaries. This newly formed committee consisted of six women and six men, making it the first time that a collaborative effort of this magnitude was made between the two auxiliaries. It also appeared that the committee would be given more latitude and flexibility with this task than allowed in the past. For example, when the committee was first oriented by Elder Jay E. Jensen, member of the Seventy and director of the Curriculum Department and general auxiliary leaders, they were told that a new youth curriculum was essential in meeting the needs of the youth and helping them overcome challenges they face.²⁶ The committee was told that this assignment would require more than just thinking outside the box; it would require a “revolution” in curricular development.²⁷ Considering the strict process of developing curriculum that was put in place in 1961, this approach was definitely new. The committee took this charge to heart and worked together for three years in an effort to create a single curriculum for both Young Men and Young Women. Among other things, the committee suggested ideas of using Church magazines and the Internet to provide curricular materials and ensure that the materials would always be fresh and up-to-date. After three years, however, the committee was disbanded without making any tangible changes to the existing youth curriculum or materials. Obviously, the revolution envisioned was not going to be a sudden one, but at least changes in the way people were thinking about developing gospel curricula seemed to be gaining momentum.

The Learning Model of BYU–Idaho

The momentum for change received yet another boost from Brigham Young University–Idaho (BYU–I), and it came without any coordination between CES, the Missionary Department, or the Curriculum Department. On June 6, 2005, Kim B. Clark was introduced as the new president of BYU–I, and at his inauguration he emphasized the need to rethink education. President Clark said: “The challenge before us is to create even more powerful and effective learning experiences in which students learn by faith. This requires, but is more than, teaching by the Spirit. To learn by faith, students need opportunities to take action. Some of those opportunities will come in a stronger, even more effective activities program where students lead and teach one another

and participate broadly. Some of them will come in the classroom, where prepared students, exercising faith, step out beyond the light they already possess, to speak, to contribute, and to teach one another.”²⁸ Just two years after his inauguration, President Clark introduced a “learning model” focused on a proactive and engaged approach that would later be described as a “defining aspect of the BYU–I experience.”²⁹ According to BYU–I, “The Learning Model was created to deepen the learning experiences of students at BYU–Idaho” by enabling them “to take greater responsibility for their own learning and for teaching one another.”³⁰

Worldwide Leadership Training

Just as BYU–I’s learning model was being implemented, the presiding leaders of the Church had independently determined that teaching and learning would be the topic for the annual Worldwide Leadership Training for 2007. According to Elder Holland, this was an indication of the continued priority that the presiding Brethren give to the subject of learning and teaching in the Church. Elder Holland explained that “we all understand that the success of the gospel message depends upon its being taught and then understood and then lived in such a way that its promise of happiness and salvation can be realized.”³¹ During the worldwide training, President Boyd K. Packer spoke of the need to focus more on interchange between teacher and learner. He said, “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.”³² Elder Holland built upon this relationship during the training by focusing on putting the learner first in gospel teaching, as he explained, “We are teaching people, not subject matter per se.”³³ This phrase ignited the interest of gospel learners and teachers and became a motto of sorts for curricular designers and developers. It is now common to hear something like “teach people, not lessons” in almost all gospel teaching settings.

Handbook 2: Administering the Church

As the focus on the relationship of teaching and learning was independently finding its way into more Church departments and projects, the movement seemed to lack an institutional endorsement. Such an endorsement would help legitimize, direct, and even encourage the shifting ideas dealing with gospel learning and teaching for the entire Church. In fact, this would be

essential to create a new youth curriculum. The principles, policies, and procedures for administering Church quorums and auxiliaries are outlined in Church handbooks. The Church began working toward updating *Handbook 2* in 2007. When *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* was released in 2010, it reflected an official institutional change in emphasizing the crucial relationship between learning *and* teaching the gospel. For example, in previous handbooks the instructions, principles, and guidelines dealing with “teaching” focused exclusively on the teacher and the act of teaching. As a result, the role of the learner and learning was unintentionally minimized or overlooked. As the handbooks were being revisited, there was the intentional effort to emphasize the relationship between gospel learning *and* teaching. As a result, over twenty-five references dealing with the act or process of teaching were intentionally changed to emphasize that learning is inseparable from teaching. For example, rather than talking about “efforts to improve gospel teaching” the text of the handbook was changed to read: “efforts to improve gospel learning and teaching.”³⁴ While these changes may appear to be subtle to some, many of those working on the new youth curriculum later reflected that this institutional change in the *Handbook 2* was a very important event that created a legitimate opportunity to actually develop and produce *Come, Follow Me*.

The Youth Curriculum Committee

The handbooks were not the only evidence of administrative support and encouragement for changing the way the gospel could be taught. For example, by August 2009 it was clear that the presiding leaders of the Church were fueling the momentum for curricular change with renewed intensity. At that time, Elder Robert D. Hales was appointed as the executive director of the Priesthood Executive Committee for the second time and shared the growing passion and vision of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve to revitalize teaching in the Church and to strengthen the commitment and conversion of the youth. Both Elder Hales and his associate executive director, Elder Neil L. Andersen, were devoutly committed to do whatever was necessary to hasten this cause.³⁵ Elder Neil A. Anderson asked Elder Bruce C. Hafen, executive director of the Priesthood Department, to form a new ad hoc committee to investigate ways to enhance the effectiveness of youth curriculum. Like the committee formed in 2004, this new committee was encouraged to think beyond the traditional *modus operandi* for developing

curricula. Elder Hafen asked Elder Paul B. Pieper of the Seventy to oversee a new committee with Russell T. Osguthorpe, Sunday School general president, appointed as the chair. The committee included Elaine S. Dalton, Young Women general president, and David L. Beck, Young Men general president. This was the first time that all three general auxiliary presidents dealing with the youth were included on the same committee to jointly consider a new youth curriculum. It wasn't long before representatives of Seminaries and Institutes and staff from the Curriculum Department were participating in the process as well. When considering the composition of this new committee, Elaine S. Dalton said, "It makes total sense that Sunday School, Young Men, Young Women, and Seminary, along with parents, should be working together. We are all working with the same youth."³⁶

Unification in Purpose

But even more striking than the revolutionary composition of this new committee was the deep sense of unity felt by those involved. David L. Beck recalled: "There was a unified feeling that we needed to move forward together on this and see what we could do jointly. It wasn't just Sunday School doing something, or just the Young Women, or just the Young Men; . . . it would be a collective effort. There was a lot of power, . . . a lot of unity. I felt that throughout the process that this is not just a single organization but it is something that we've all felt we were all involved in right from the first, that there is something that we could do collectively and it would be stronger if we did."³⁷ In January 2010 the committee began drawing upon the efforts and ideas of the Young Men, Young Women, and Sunday School general presidencies and their board members, executive directors of the Priesthood Department, and staff in the Priesthood and Curriculum Departments. All involved would agree that the way this curriculum was developed was very different from past efforts, and most would indicate that the unity of the group empowered them to see new methods and possibilities. Elaine S. Dalton felt that the product of the group's unity was the ability to be fully directed by the Spirit and revelation. "What happened was it was more a spiritual experience where the Holy Ghost just taught us a completely different way of doing something," she said. "I don't think that could have happened if we hadn't had the unity that we felt."³⁸ This core group remained intact and met together almost every week for the next three years.

Counseling Together

The experience of bringing all those with a vested interest in the youth to counsel together and create a curriculum was so impactful that it naturally became an important element in the overall design of *Come, Follow Me*. The guidebook for the new youth curriculum points out, “Helping youth become converted requires the combined efforts of parents, leaders, advisers, and teachers, including seminary teachers.”³⁹ David L. Beck said, “There is power in councils—we know that and we saw that in the implementation.”⁴⁰ Thus *Come, Follow Me* encourages the parents, leaders, and especially the teachers of youth to “counsel together about the needs of the youth.” They are encouraged to find ways to build upon what they are learning at home, in seminary, and at church. Such gatherings may take place in leadership meetings (ward council, bishopric youth committee, presidency meetings, or classes for improving gospel learning and teaching), informal gatherings before or after meetings, or by e-communications (telephone, email, etc.). “When we saw them shift from talking about counseling about lessons to counseling about how can we touch a life,” Elaine S. Dalton said, “that’s when it [counseling together] really had the power.”⁴¹

A Concentrated Focus on Conversion

The unity of the committee was critical as they began to consider the structure and content for the future curriculum. It would have been easy for each auxiliary to concentrate exclusively on their own agendas or champion existing or new programs specific to their organization. But the auxiliaries were intently focused on creating a singular foundation for the youth curriculum based on the counsel of the presiding Church leaders. For example, Elder Henry B. Eyring taught, “The pure gospel of Jesus Christ must go down into the hearts of young people by the power of the Holy Ghost.” He then explained, “Our aim must be for them to become truly converted to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ while they are young.”⁴² Such statements or sentiments were common among the presiding leaders of the Church over the past several decades. More recently, the presiding authorities have been emphasizing “real growth” rather than just increasing the number of members. “When we speak of real growth,” Elder Oaks said, “we speak of what follows a person’s baptism into the Church.”⁴³ And it is clear that what should follow is a deep personal conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ for every person. “Conversion has to

happen within the heart and soul of every individual,” Elder L. Tom Perry pointed out.⁴⁴

This focus on real growth and personal conversion was deeply reinforced to the General Auxiliary presidencies when Elder Robert D. Hales and Elder Neil A. Andersen were first called to the Priesthood Executive Council in 2009. For example, while meeting with the general auxiliary presidencies, Elder Hales impressed the need for getting the gospel deep into the hearts of the people as he invited every person in the meeting to search the scriptures for evidence of individuals and people who experienced conversion. Upon finding such evidence, he then asked each person to identify what brought about personal conversion in that situation. All presidency members were asked to report their findings to Elder Hales the following week. This experience deeply impressed a focus on the process of personal conversion upon all those that would eventually be working directly with improving gospel learning and teaching. When considering this example, it is not surprising that Elder Craig C. Christensen, member of the Seventy and executive director of the Priesthood Department at that time, said that one of the key factors to the development and production of the youth curriculum was the inspired and passionate leadership of Elder Hales.⁴⁵

From the very beginning, the heart of *Come, Follow Me* was an intense focus on personal conversion. Russell T. Osguthorpe, Sunday School general president, said, “The new learning resources for youth have one central goal: to help youth become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ While conversion may have been the intended outcome for every gospel curricula in the past, the actual focus of the lessons were mostly on imparting gospel knowledge. “We wanted to teach for conversion and not just for increasing their understanding of doctrine,” Osguthorpe said of designing the new curriculum. “If we just increase knowledge, then that’s not enough. It’s harder for the youth to go out and live it unless they become converted to it.”⁴⁷ By October 2010, the objective of the new youth curriculum was reported as: “Help youth become converted, lifelong disciples of the Savior by actively learning and teaching gospel doctrines together, and by using them to meet the challenges of their daily lives.”⁴⁸

Doctrines of the Restored Gospel: The Core of *Come, Follow Me*

Those working on *Come, Follow Me* in the early stages emphatically agreed that the new youth curriculum must help the youth meet the current challenges,

needs, and questions of their daily lives. It was no surprise, therefore, that the new learning outlines for *Come, Follow Me* would have questions that youth might ask to be the titles for the outlines. Rather than relying on popular answers to questions or advice dealing with contemporary issues, however, it was obvious that the new youth curriculum needed a staying power that could change, facilitate, and even support productive attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of the youth. The teachings of President Boyd K. Packer and others greatly impacted the early considerations for a new youth curriculum. “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior,” Elder Packer taught. “The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.”⁴⁹ Elder David A. Bednar also spoke to this principle when he said, “Our tendency as members of the Church is to focus on applications. But as we learn to ask ourselves, ‘What doctrines and principles, if understood, would help with this challenge?’ we come to realize that the answers always are in the doctrines and principles of the gospel.” He then observed, “Given that true doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior, then: What doctrines and principles, if understood, would help me or you to live more consistently what we know is true?”⁵⁰ With this type of prophetic counsel guiding the early deliberations of the committee and with personal conversion being the primary objective, it was obvious that the structure and core content of the future youth curriculum must be focused upon the key doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, the Youth Curriculum Committee identified nine key doctrines to be the core content for the youth curriculum: (1) Godhead, (2) Plan of Salvation, (3) Atonement of Jesus Christ, (4) Dispensation, Apostasy, and Restoration, (5) Prophets and Revelation, (6) Priesthood and Priesthood Keys, (7) Ordinances and Covenants, (8) Marriage and Family, and (9) Commandments.⁵¹ In a sustained effort to establish a unified youth experience, Seminaries and Institutes adopted by 2012 the same nine doctrines as the basis for their *Teaching and Learning Emphasis*.⁵² It really shouldn’t be surprising that the same core doctrines are also foundational to *Preach My Gospel*.

When reflecting upon the doctrinal strengths of *Come, Follow Me*, Russell T. Osguthorpe said, “The great thing about this [curriculum] is they [the youth] are talking about doctrine, . . . the core doctrines of the kingdom.”⁵³ David L. Beck added, “I think one feature that the Brethren really appreciated and desired was being able to go deep into the doctrines and let them really sink deep into their hearts. Instead of a mile-wide and inch-deep

curriculum, we really focused it on key doctrines.”⁵⁴ To increase opportunities for doctrinal depth, *Come, Follow Me* was designed to focus on a single doctrine each month, which would coordinate gospel learning experiences across the Church and in homes. Each doctrinal unit contains more learning outlines than can be possibly taught in a single month, so ward leaders, teachers, parents, and even the youth should counsel together to determine what outlines best meet the needs of the youth. This design provides flexibility in the curriculum by allowing learners and teachers to spend more than one week on an outline if needed.

Even though doctrinal conversion was at the core of designing the youth curriculum, it was also determined that the unique purposes of the family, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and seminary should not be ignored. For example, since the family has the primary responsibility for teaching and preparing their children for eternal life (D&C 68:25–28), *Come, Follow Me* was intentionally designed to be “learning resources for the youth” to be used by parents as well as by teachers and advisors.⁵⁵ Other unique needs of the youth shaped the structure and content to *Come, Follow Me*. For example, the Young Men learning outlines provide opportunities to conduct quorum business and to encourage and support each other in their *Duty to God* efforts. Young Women learning outlines allow young women to learn and live the Young Women values and standards of *For the Strength of Youth* and to move forward with *Personal Progress*. The Sunday School learning outlines are specifically designed to provide opportunities for young men, young women, and their teachers to learn and teach the doctrines together and to strengthen one another in living them. And Seminary’s role is to help youth to understand, apply, explain, share, and live gospel principles found in scripture.

Teaching and Learning: The Heart of *Come, Follow Me*

Because conversion is so intimate, creating a “one-size-fits-all” way of learning and teaching would not be very effective in bringing about deep conversion. If, however, the curriculum focused on common principles of learning and teaching that facilitate and empower personal conversion for everyone, then such an experience could be truly life changing. Conversion is not something that can be simply imparted or given to another person, for it is the product of the learner’s efforts and free-willed agency. Elder David A. Bednar explained:

The spiritual understanding you and I have been blessed to receive, and which has been confirmed as true in our hearts, simply cannot be given to our children. The tuition of diligence and of learning by study and also by faith must be paid to obtain and personally “own” such knowledge. Only in this way can what is known in the mind also be felt in the heart. Only in this way can a child move beyond relying upon the spiritual knowledge and experiences of parents and adults and claim those blessings for himself or herself. Only in this way can our children be prepared spiritually for the challenges of mortality.⁵⁶

This means that conversion requires that both the teacher and the learner act upon the doctrine of Christ or, in other words, exercise his or her agency. Elder Robert D. Hales taught that conversion is a “process” and Russell T. Osguthorpe described conversion as a “lifelong quest to become more like the Savior” rather than a “onetime event.”⁵⁷ Thus the more opportunities both learners and teachers have to exercise personal agency, the more likely personal conversion will take place.

When considering *Come, Follow Me*, David L. Beck said that the committee understood early on that classrooms and lives would be transformed if the youth were empowered.⁵⁸ As a result, it was determined that every learning outline would “engage the youth in learning, teaching, discovering, and sharing the gospel”—all acts of agency.⁵⁹ It is interesting that some leaders, teachers, and even learners have concluded that the goal of the new youth curriculum is not merely to increase participation or to engage the youth in the classroom. While active learning is an important practice, it alone will not empower personal conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a discussion about gospel learning and teaching, Elder Bednar pointed out, “Now I want to be very clear in saying, we’re not just making this ‘discussion groups,’ we’re not employing the kinds of methodologies that are used in education in all parts of the world. That’s not what this is about. It is about moral agency. It’s about acting and not being acted upon. The plan of happiness is so that we can learn from our own experience.”⁶⁰ As individuals exercise their own agency, opportunities for relevant and life-changing gospel learning become available. It is clear that every gospel teacher has a responsibility to present the doctrines of the gospel message (D&C 88:77) *and* that they must present those doctrines in a way that the Holy Ghost can entice the learner to act upon those doctrines (2 Nephi 33:1–2). Elder Bednar explained that “a teacher standing and talking, can deliver a lot of stuff right here [pointing to his heart], but it’s not until we invite the learner to act that the learner begins to invite it inside.”⁶¹ Bringing gospel truth unto a learner’s heart and

inviting him or her to act upon that truth is what Elder Bednar called “the complete range of teaching.”⁶² Whenever a learner accepts an invitation to act, it is, according to Elder Richard G. Scott, “an exercise in agency that permits the Holy Ghost to communicate a personalized message suited to their individual needs.” Elder Scott then explained, “Creating an atmosphere of participation enhances the probability that the Spirit will teach more important lessons than you can communicate.”⁶³ Thus every outline in *Come, Follow Me* was intentionally designed to present many different opportunities for learners to use their agency. This can change the entire experience and outcome in a classroom and in the home. “Instead of a class full of just learners,” David L. Beck pointed out, “we have a class of learners, and all are teachers.”⁶⁴

As those involved with developing *Come, Follow Me* contemplated the best ways to teach the gospel or, in other words, to help learners to learn the gospel for themselves, certain characteristics of learning and teaching surfaced rather quickly. “When we begin to analyze ourselves and look to improve ourselves as teachers, what better model could we find?” Elder Boyd K. Packer asked. He then said, “What finer study could we undertake than to analyze our ideals and goals and methods and compare them with those of Jesus Christ?”⁶⁵ When asked if *Come, Follow Me* is merely a new way of teaching, Russell T. Osguthorpe replied, “This is not a new way of teaching, it’s how the Savior taught the Gospel.”⁶⁶ Elaine S. Dalton added, “We know people in the Church know the Savior. They know what He is like. It would be easy to just say, ‘Come, Follow Me.’”⁶⁷ In the early stages of testing the curriculum, Elder Craig C. Christensen recalled that the concept of “teaching as the Savior taught” was easily understood regardless of culture, doctrinal understanding, or teaching experience.⁶⁸ As a result, “Teaching in the Savior’s Way,” became the framework for *how* gospel teachers can teach for conversion. Upon its release in 2013, teachers were told that their “sacred calling” was to “to teach as the Savior taught” and they were promised that teaching in this manner “will lead to conversion—the ultimate goal of [their] teaching.”⁶⁹ As young people are taught in the Savior’s way, their gospel commitment increases as they learn and teach in meaningful ways. “When [this] happens,” Elder Christensen observed of *Come, Follow Me*, “amazing things take place.”⁷⁰

It is interesting that perhaps the best content in the curriculum is actually not contained in the curricular materials at all. David L. Beck pointed out, “Once you engage youth, once there is active learning, pointed out, once

they start sharing with each other their stories and testimony, they create the content.”⁷¹ Thus, rather than providing illustrative material, stories, and examples in the outlines, the structure of *Come, Follow Me* relies on parents, teachers, and particularly the learners to provide their own illustrations, examples, and stories. This is not to say that the new youth curriculum is void of direction, help, or suggestions. In truth, the structure of the curriculum was carefully crafted to invite individuals to find personal connections with understanding, sharing, and living the doctrines of the gospel. “We haven’t packed this curriculum with stories from Salt Lake,” Brother Beck explained, “We’ve invited those who teach and those who learn . . . [to] share their stories. And it is edifying when someone tells their story.”⁷² According to the scriptures, edification is the promised blessing when a teacher is appointed and all (learners and teacher) are given equal privilege to speak and listen one to another (D&C 88:122). The appointed teacher must, however, lead appropriately. Brother Beck suggested that while “*Come, Follow Me* is the name of the curriculum; it’s also a charge to teachers to invite your students to follow you.” He then invited all teachers to “make sure you’re living these doctrines and living the gospel fully in your life.”⁷³ As parents, leaders, teachers, and learners recognize the influence of the gospel in their own lives, study the doctrines, and, even more importantly, live the gospel, they become powerful witnesses of truth because this allows the Holy Ghost to teach and testify without restraint.⁷⁴

Implementing *Come, Follow Me*

New ideas and designs for the curriculum came about in stages. By February 2010 it was proposed to create a comprehensive approach to youth learning and teaching that would “reach the hearts and behavior” of the youth.⁷⁵ A six-week “pre-pilot” was proposed in August 2010 to test a new curriculum that focused on “helping young people exercise their agency to learn, teach, and live the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁶ It was hoped that this approach would aid in developing a conceptual design for a much broader-based pilot test in the future. The “pre-pilot” was launched in two stakes and four wards in Utah in November 2010. The Quorum of the Twelve approved the new approach for youth curriculum in May 2011, and a pilot test was conducted in three domestic and three international stakes.⁷⁷ In August 2012, after learning, tweaking, and testing, the youth curriculum was approved for a worldwide release.

With the shifting changes in curricular development experienced over the past several years, it wasn't too surprising that the implementation of this unique curriculum would not follow traditional patterns. "It wasn't something we just handed out," Elaine S. Dalton emphasized, "it was released through the power of the priesthood."⁷⁸ Prior to general conference in October 2012, all Area Presidencies throughout the world met with general auxiliary presidencies, priesthood department executive directors, and staff of the Priesthood Department to receive an orientation on *Come, Follow Me* and training on how to implement it in their area. Area Presidencies returned to their respective areas and oriented and trained all Area Seventies, who in turn oriented and trained all stake presidents in their respective coordinating councils. Stake presidents then oriented and trained all stake leaders and bishops, who in turn provided local orientation and training to ward leaders, parents, and youth. All this was accomplished by the end of December 2012.

This new method of implementation was important for several reasons. First, the responsibility for the success of implementing the new curriculum rested on priesthood leaders from top to bottom. As such, they felt the responsibility for the overall success of the curriculum. Another important outcome of this model of implementation was that all priesthood leaders—from the general to the local level—were intimately aware of what the new curriculum was and how it should be used. This was of particular importance because all matters dealing with the auxiliaries are accomplished "under the direction of" a designated priesthood leader. With priesthood leaders intimately aware of the details of the curriculum and their accompanying role and responsibility, they were more willing and ready to empower others under their direction.

E-curriculum: A New Way to Deliver Materials

A key design of *Come, Follow Me* is the opportunity for a progressive and ever-relevant curriculum. In the past, curricular materials were expensive to produce, which typically resulted in bulk productions. Quantities dictated the shelf life of a curricular product, making updates, revisions, or directional changes nearly impossible. By 2012, it was clear that materials created for and disseminated through the Internet could be very cost-effective and could be continually updated at relatively minimal cost. There were, however, concerns with Internet availability, bandwidth, hardware costs, and even the technological competence and capabilities of the members. With encouragement from the presiding leaders, it quickly became clear that the benefits of

using the Internet far outweighed the concerns; those areas in the world with limited online access could receive printed material as needed.

The electronic approach in conceiving, developing, and distributing *Come, Follow Me* created an exciting, entirely new, and invaluable opportunity in curricular development. This permitted immediate updates, revisions, and changes to the existing curriculum with hardly any significant cost. “In terms of relevancy,” David L. Beck said, “not only is this curriculum relevant to [the youth’s] needs but it’s relevant in terms of the words of the living prophets.”⁷⁹ Consider, for example, that just days after April general conference in 2013, *Come, Follow Me* was updated with the most relevant doctrinal teachings of the prophets, seers, and revelators. Never before have curricular materials been updated or revised within weeks, months, or even years of their creation. For this reason, Brother Beck referred to *Come, Follow Me* as a “living curriculum for a living church.”⁸⁰

Conclusion

Elder John A. Widtsoe once wrote, “The church should be, first of all, a great teaching institution.”⁸¹ Nearly seventy-five years later, we are still working toward that lofty goal as parents, leaders, teachers, and learners strive to improve gospel learning and teaching in the church and in the home. *Come, Follow Me* was developed to help the Church and the home become great learning and teaching institutions. When leaders and teachers first encounter a new curriculum they typically think of new manuals and materials. As such, *Come, Follow Me* might be viewed by some as only a new design, layout, revision, method, or program. For example, one young woman described *Come, Follow Me* as lessons that are “more modern” and “relevant.” In similar tone, the *Church News* characterized the lessons as “interactive” and said teachers would be required to “evolve from reading manuals.”⁸² While both accounts are essentially true, *Come, Follow Me* is much more than just a modernized version of outdated curricular materials or a breath of new life into old methods. *Come, Follow Me* is a new way of thinking about the integrated relationship between learning, teaching, and living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Come, Follow Me provides leaders, parents, teachers, and learners with a powerful framework to implement the principles emphasized in this new curriculum for their personal lives, homes, classes (regardless of subject or age), and congregations. With this in mind, learners and teachers would do well to embrace that which makes *Come, Follow Me* so fresh and different in their

own learning and teaching. Thus, rather than acting independently, they can join with other teachers and leaders in a unified effort to counsel together to determine what outlines would best help those in their homes and classes. They can work together in supporting each other discover ways to help reluctant learners, understand those they teach, appropriately address challenges, and improve learning. Informed leaders join in the effort by empowering and supporting teachers to fulfill their calling as they help others work toward personal conversion.

Instead of focusing exclusively on preparing and presenting “lessons,” *Come, Follow Me* helps teachers focus on key doctrines of the restored gospel of Christ and show how those doctrines can help learners change their hearts and behavior. Rather than concentrating on what they will do for their learners during their experience together, teachers who embrace *Come, Follow Me* will ponder, pray, and prepare on what they will have their learners do during the class.⁸³ Rather than merely giving the youth a lesson manual and asking them to teach “a lesson,” *Come, Follow Me* teachers understand that the youth should be teaching every class period as they seek, find, explain, and share one with another during every class. Learners need many opportunities to exercise their agency both in and out of class. They need to assume responsibility for their own learning. Elder Russell M. Nelson pointed this out as he said, “You teenagers, embrace your new curriculum and teach one another the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Now is your time to prepare to teach others about the goodness of God.”⁸⁴ When teachers and learners act in accordance with their roles and responsibilities, everyone is “edified of all” (D&C 88:122).

Finally, teachers who embrace *Come, Follow Me* sincerely strive to teach as the Savior teaches. They readily accept the invitation of President Thomas S. Monson when he implored, “As we teach others, may we follow the example of the perfect teacher, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. . . . He instructed his disciples of that day—and to us He speaks the same words—‘Follow Thou, Me.’”⁸⁵

Understanding how *Come, Follow Me* unfolded is a testimony that the Lord’s hand is hastening his work and leading others to conversion. We see how the work was hastened by converging decades of growth, learning, ideas, and experiences at precisely the right moment in time to create opportunities for unusual and unprecedented possibilities. As teachers and learners immerse themselves in these principles, they will feel and experience the peace and power that comes from personal conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. **RE**

Notes

1. "First Presidency Announcement," September 12, 2012; <https://www.lds.org/pages/new-youth-curriculum/announcement?lang=eng> (accessed May 15, 2013).
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4. David F. Evans, "Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept," seminar for new mission presidents, June 23, 2013.
5. Quoted in Sarah Jane Weaver, "Church Leaders Discuss the 'Hastening the Work,'" *Church News*, January 8, 2013; <http://www.lds.org/church/news/church-leaders-discuss-the-hastening-of-work?lang=eng> (accessed July 15, 2013).
6. B. Lloyd Poelman, "Sunday School," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1426.
7. "First Presidency Letter, March 24, 1960," in "Curriculum Planning: A Brief History, 1972–78," Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
8. Kay H. Smith, "Correlation of the Church, Administration," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:324.
9. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1961, 79.
10. David B. Marsh, interview by Matthew O. Richardson, May 15, 2013, in author's possession.
11. David B. Marsh, interview. The Curriculum Planning Chart was revised again in 2002 and outlines 12 major categories and 167 gospel topics.
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13. Asay, "For the Perfecting of the Saints," 17.
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15. Jay M. Todd, "Report of the Regional Representatives' Seminar," *Ensign*, May 1980, 99–101.
16. Dallin H. Oaks, "Gospel Teaching," *Ensign*, November 1999, 78.
17. Smith, "Correlation of the Church, Administration," 1:325.
18. "Mission of the Priesthood Executive Council and the Priesthood Department," March 5, 1991 (n.p.). Priesthood Department Records, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
19. Jeffrey R. Holland, "A Teacher Come from God," *Ensign*, May 1998, 27.
20. *Teaching, No Greater Call* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 61.
21. Benjamin Hyrum White, "The History of *Preach My Gospel*," *Religious Educator* 14, no 1 (2013): 134.
22. Robert Lund, interview by Matthew O. Richardson, May 22, 2013, in author's possession.

23. Randall L. Hall, “The Current Teaching Emphasis: An Update,” CES Satellite Training Broadcast, August 2003; <http://www.LDSCES.org-Administrative Resources> (accessed May 10, 2013).
24. M. Russell Ballard, “The Greatest Generation of Missionaries,” *Ensign*, November 2002, 47.
25. “History of Proposed 2003 Aaronic Priesthood and Young Women Curriculum,” Attachment 1, 2003–2006, Priesthood Department Records, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
26. Susan W. Tanner, Young Women general president; Elder F. Melvin Hammond, member of the Seventy and Young Men general president; and staff from the Curriculum Department were part of the orientation as well.
27. Personal notes, 2004, in author’s possession.
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29. “Innovative Teaching & Learning,” Brigham Young University–Idaho; <http://byui.edu/about/defining-aspects/learning-model> (accessed July 11, 2013).
30. Learning Model, Brigham Young University–Idaho; <http://www2.byui.edu/LearningModel/src/default.htm> (accessed July 11, 2013). The model is structured around three steps: Prepare, Teach One Another, and Ponder/Prove. It was said that the key to this model would be the complementary roles of student and teacher, where student preparation is “designed, guided and aided by the instructor, but the impetus for actually doing the work is on the student.” See “Learning Model Overview: Prepare,” Brigham Young University–Idaho, January 28, 2009; http://www.byui.edu/Documents/instructional_development/overviews/Prepare%20Overview.pdf (accessed July 11, 2013).
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32. Boyd K. Packer, “Principles of Teaching and Learning,” *Ensign*, June 2007, 87.
33. Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” 57.
34. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 5.5.3 and 12.5.
35. Craig C. Christensen interview by Matthew O. Richardson, May 13, 2013, in author’s possession.
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50. David A. Bednar, *Act in Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012).
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65. Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 22.
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76. “Purpose of the Youth Curriculum Pre-Pilot,” October 27, 2010, Priesthood Department Records, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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