

# “See That Ye Do Them”

*John Hilton III*

*John Hilton III (johnhiltoniii@byu.net) is a PhD candidate in instructional psychology at BYU.*

---

A young man went to institute the day before Thanksgiving. During the class, the teacher used several different methods to teach the topic of gratitude. At the end of the class the teacher challenged the students to take something from the class and teach it to their families or friends the following day. Although this young man was not living at home, he taught a lesson to the people he was living with. He later reported, “My Thanksgiving lesson was awesome! Everybody loved it!”

Another young man heard a talk on the subject of following the prophet. As he pondered the talk, he thought about the fact that he was steady dating a young lady—and he had not yet served a mission. He thought about what the prophets had said on this subject and decided to break up with his girlfriend. The talk he had heard had not specifically invited him to do this, but he felt inspired to apply what he had learned in this way.

These experiences illustrate two ways that learners can be invited to act as a result of participation in a class or sermon. Sometimes students are given specific direction from the teacher on what to do; on other occasions, the Spirit gives personalized instruction. In either case action is vital; as King Benjamin taught, “If you believe all these things see that ye do them” (Mosiah 4:10).

It is imperative that students *act* because conversion will come as they *do*. “What happens beyond the classroom has got to involve firsthand experiences with the principles of the gospel in application,”

explained Elder Neal A. Maxwell. “These experiences will give each of our young people a storehouse of spiritual experiences on which he can draw. . . . We need to be able to draw upon them to see our young people through the periods of time when they have intellectual problems; then experientially they will know the gospel is true because they have seen it happen.”<sup>1</sup>

As Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught, “A message prepared under the influence of the Spirit to further the work of the Lord . . . is given to inspire, to edify, to challenge, or to correct. It is given to be heard under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord, with the intended result that the listener learns from the talk and from the Spirit what he or she should do about it.”<sup>2</sup> Elder Oaks said that listeners should learn “from the talk and from the Spirit” what they should *do* as a result of hearing the message. In this article, I discuss ways in which educators can facilitate these kinds of learning, with the expectation that students do things as a result.

### Learning What to Do from the Talk

One of the simplest, most effective ways that religious educators can help their students learn what to do from the talk is to give an explicit call to action. The teachings of ancient and modern prophets are replete with examples of these types of invitations.

Nearly every significant sermon preached in the scriptures includes a call to action. These invitations to act can come during the beginning, the middle, or the end of a discourse. Consider the following examples, noting the specific actions the speaker invited the congregation to complete:

- “O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation. . . . Remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice” (2 Nephi 9:45, 52).
- “Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening” (Alma 34:21).
- “Behold, I say unto you, that ye must visit the poor and the needy and administer to their relief” (Doctrine and Covenants 44:6).

Modern Church leaders also often issue calls to action as part of their inspired messages. Consider these examples:

- “We are asking leaders in every unit to . . . counsel together with parents and pray to find at least one more young man, above those already committed, who can be called to serve.”<sup>3</sup>
- “All of the proceedings of this conference will appear in a subsequent issue of the *Ensign* and *Liabona*. We encourage you again to read the talks in your family home evenings and discuss them together as families.”<sup>4</sup>

These specific calls to action challenged listeners to *do* something as a result of what was being taught. Elder V. Dallas Merrell explained, “When teachers present a doctrine or a historical event, they should teach a related principle—something hearers should *do*, something they should apply to their lives. Then what? We invite! *Will you* live according to this principle? *Will you* pray? *Will you* live revealed moral standards? *Will you* tithe your income? *Will you* show by your smile and friendliness the joy of the gospel?”<sup>5</sup>

### **Learning What to Do from the Spirit**

Another important part of learning is the personalized instruction listeners receive from the Holy Ghost. President Henry B. Eyring said, “You’ve had the same experiences I’ve had, that someone will come up to you after you have taught or spoken to them and say what a wonderful insight they got while you were speaking and then it wasn’t anything you said about at all, and what you know is the Holy Ghost was taking something you were saying and then taking them in a different direction where the Holy Ghost wanted them to go; . . . very often the student will learn things way beyond what we are saying.”<sup>6</sup>

Many people have had experiences such as this. One young father attended a presentation at which the speakers quoted from a letter from the First Presidency dated February 11, 1999: “We counsel parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities.”<sup>7</sup> Though the speaker soon switched topics, the Spirit spoke to this young father and said, “You need to have much better family home evenings.” This message from the Spirit was what this individual remembered and applied from the talk.

Perhaps because of the personalized nature of promptings from the Spirit, there are not abundant scriptural examples where listeners

specifically acted based on explicit promptings from the Spirit. Nevertheless there are some vignettes that show how this type of teaching may have been at work.

For example, after Nephi heard his father testify of the vision of the tree of life, he wrote, “I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (1 Nephi 10:17). Shortly thereafter Nephi records, “After I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:1). Lehi never specifically challenged his children to go and seek their own vision. Could it be that it was the Spirit who inspired Nephi, as he listened to his father’s message, to seek his own revelation?

Daniel K Judd, formerly of the Sunday School general presidency, said, “*It is the Spirit that is the most effective teacher in any given situation.*” President Joseph Fielding Smith taught: “The Spirit of God speaking to the spirit of man has power to impart truth with greater effect and understanding than the truth can be imparted by personal contact even with heavenly beings.”<sup>8</sup>

Gospel teachers and learners must recognize that powerful invitations to *do* things are coming from the Holy Spirit during gospel instruction.

### Therefore, What?

How can teachers help their students learn from the talk and from the Spirit things that they should do as a result of the time they spend in class? First, modern religious educators must recognize that one of their major roles as teachers is to facilitate change or repentance. Teachers should follow the counsel of Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, who taught, “Pray that your teaching will bring change.” One way that teachers can encourage change in their students is to invite them to do things differently as a result of the class. This will mean invitations for students to determine how they can apply gospel principles. Elder Oaks explained, “Teachers . . . should generally forgo teaching specific rules or applications. For example, they would not teach any rules for determining what is a full tithing, and they would not provide a list of *dos* and *don’ts* for keeping the Sabbath day holy. Once a teacher has taught the doctrine and the associated principles from the scriptures and the living prophets, such specific applications or rules are generally the responsibility of individuals and families.”<sup>10</sup>

This quote does not mean that teachers should not invite their students to make any changes as a result of the principles taught in class, but rather that teachers should not make the specific applications of the principles to the lives of the students. For example, after a class on observing the Sabbath day, it would be appropriate for a teacher to invite students to ponder what things they could do to more fully honor the Sabbath in their lives. To invite students to visit sick relatives on the Sabbath (a specific application) would most likely not be appropriate.

One institute teacher issued a call to action at the end of his lessons by having a weekly challenge. This challenge, which was related to the lesson, provided an opportunity for students to make small but important changes in their lives. These invitations focused on a gospel principle and left specific application to the province of the student. In addition to living gospel principles, students can be invited to do the class reading assignments, to visit a Web site such as <http://speeches.byu.edu>, or to read general conference talks.

The previous paragraphs demonstrate some ways teachers can help their students know what they should do by way of explicit invitations. In addition, teachers can help their students learn "from the Spirit" what to do as a result of what they learn.

Daniel K Judd also taught, "Several months ago I attended a training meeting where a number of General Authorities had spoken. After commenting on the excellent instruction that had been given, Elder David A. Bednar asked the following question: 'What are we learning that has not been said?' He then explained that in addition to receiving the counsel that had been given by those who had *spoken* or who would yet speak, we should also carefully listen for and record the *unspoken* impressions given by the Holy Ghost."<sup>11</sup>

Elder Bednar was acknowledging that students were receiving personalized instruction from the Spirit. Teachers can facilitate this type of learning by teaching their students about learning by the Spirit. They can take time to identify ways that the Spirit may be working in the class.

One teacher gave a class on the Creation. At the end of the class he asked the students, "Please take two minutes and write down some things you feel impressed by the Spirit to do as a result of what you have learned today."

After giving students time to ponder he invited two or three to share. One person said he needed to better organize his life; another felt inspired to more deeply study his scriptures. This second impression, although seemingly unconnected with a study of the Creation

provides an example of how the Spirit may provide personal promptings, tailored to the needs of specific individuals.

In another teaching setting, a family home evening lesson was given on Elder Bednar's parable of the pickle. The parent taught that "a cucumber becomes a pickle as it is prepared and cleaned, immersed in and saturated with salt brine, and sealed in a sterilized container."<sup>12</sup> After a discussion of Elder Bednar's talk, the parent asked, "What lessons do you feel that you can draw from this parable?"

One family member who was going through some intense personal struggles said, "What came to my mind is the need for the cucumber to be *immersed* in the brine. If you take the cucumber out too early, it will not become what it needs to be. In my case, this means I need to work through this struggle I am having." Although this was perhaps not directly the message the parable was intended to convey, again the Spirit provided individualized direction of what a listener could *do*.

Whether students are learning from the talk or from the Spirit, teachers also have a unique opportunity to follow up with their students on whether or not they have done what they were invited to do in the previous class. Because teachers see their students regularly they can find out whether students have completed the things they have committed to do. As one priesthood leader said, "It's not only what's expected, it's what's *inspected* that gets done." By following up with students, teachers show that they truly care about whether or not their students are making changes.

During a class just before general conference, a teacher challenged his students to listen to every session of conference. At the next class he asked students to write about their experience applying this invitation. Some of the responses were as follows:

- "I noticed the difference because last time I did not attend all sessions. This time, when I went to them all, I got a lot more out of it."
- "I saw all of the sessions, and they were amazing."
- "General conference just gets better and better. It motivated me to make some changes in my life."
- "I wrote down some questions before going to conference, and I got almost all my questions answered. I felt the Spirit so strong!"

On another occasion, after a lesson which included Josiah destroying artifacts of idol worship (see 2 Kings 23), students were challenged

to ponder how they could apply the principle “I will get rid of bad influences in my life.” When the teacher followed up to see how the students were prompted to do so, he received the following responses:

- “I got rid of bad influences including old friends, to the point where I have no way of contacting them anymore. For all the better!”
- “I threw out the remainder of my bad music. It was exhilarating, and God showed me things I had forgotten about.”
- “I threw away my old car magazines and beat them into powder because they had improper content.”
- “I got rid of some shirts that were not very modest.”

This example illustrates that when students are left free to determine how to apply principles, the Spirit will often dictate ways to do it that would be most meaningful for them personally.

In addition to having their students write about their experiences, teachers can invite students to share what they have done with the class. Using the previous example, a teacher could contact three students during the week and ask, “Next week, would you be willing to tell the class what you did to apply the principle of getting rid of bad influences?” When students hear their peers testify of things that they have done to apply principles, they will be more motivated to do so as well.

## Conclusion

Elder Bednar taught, “One of the fundamental roles of a missionary is to help an investigator make and honor commitments—to act and learn by faith. Teaching, exhorting, and explaining, as important as they are, can never convey to an investigator a witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel. Only as an investigator’s faith initiates action and opens the pathway to the heart can the Holy Ghost deliver a confirming witness.”<sup>13</sup>

When applied to the classroom, we might paraphrase: One of the fundamental roles of a teacher is to help students make and honor commitments—to act. Teachers must pray that their teaching will bring change. They can give students specific things to do, help students recognize invitations from the Spirit, and follow up with students to ensure that they are doing things as a result of their instruction in the gospel. As religious educators do these things, it will increase the likelihood that the Spirit will go down deep into the hearts of the students and provide lasting conversion. **RE**

---

## Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "The Gospel Gives Answers to Life's Problems," *Liabona*, February 1978, 36.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Dedication of a Lifetime," Church Educational System fireside, Oakland, California, May 1, 2005.
3. M. Russell Ballard, "One More," *Ensign*, May 2005, 69.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Closing Remarks," *Ensign*, November 2007, 108.
5. V. Dallas Merrell, "Will You? Implementing the Mission of the Church," *Ensign*, October, 2001, 50; emphasis in original.
6. "Discussion," Church Educational System training broadcast, 2003.
7. "Policies, Announcements, and Appointments," *Ensign*, June 1999, 80.
8. Daniel K Judd, "Nourished by the Good Word of God," *Ensign*, November 2007, 94; emphasis in original.
9. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Therefore What?" address at the Twenty-Fourth Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators Conference, August 8, 2000.
10. Dallin H. Oaks, "Gospel Teaching," *Ensign*, November 1999, 78; emphasis in original.
11. Judd, "Nourished by the Good Word of God," 95; emphasis in original.
12. David A. Bednar, "Ye Must Be Born Again," *Ensign*, May 2007, 20.
13. "Seek Learning by Faith," Church Educational System broadcast, February 3, 2006, 3.