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“The Power of God unto Salvation”

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President Boyd K. Packer expressed feelings we all have when he said that we stand on the shoulders of giants.¹ As we stand on those shoulders, I add my testimony to yours, brothers and sisters, that there are prophets and apostles again on the earth. The scriptures declare that their testimonies and teachings establish faith in Christ,² foster obedience,³ warn of evil,⁴ develop unity among the Saints,⁵ explain scripture,⁶ and draw those who will listen to the Savior⁷ and his gospel. I believe that is at least part of what the Lord means when he says that their words are “the power of God unto salvation.”⁸

As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, the scriptures *and* the teachings of the prophets “occupy a privileged position; they are the key to teaching by the Spirit.”⁹ Therefore, one way we will accomplish our objective is by “[teaching] students the doctrines and principles of the gospel as found in the scriptures *and* the words of the prophets.”¹⁰ In fact, both are necessary in accomplishing our objective.¹¹

Teach the Scriptures

I have been invited to bear my testimony about that phrase “and the words of the prophets,” which concludes the first sentence of the “Teach” paragraph of our objective. As we begin our consideration of this important topic, I would like for there to be no misunderstanding. Our text is the scriptures.

President Boyd K. Packer’s clarion direction is that our “commission, [our] charter, [our] objective in religious education [is] to teach the scriptures. . . . If [our] students are acquainted with the revelations, there is no question—personal or social or political or occupational—that need go unanswered.”¹²

An Early Experience

As a new teacher, I was assigned to a seminary with three other new teachers, and we watched as our principal, another giant on whose shoulders we still stand, carefully taught students the gospel as found in the scriptures with a masterful inclusion of the teachings from general conference. His students had a fire for learning. They had a love for the scriptures. They left with increased faith in the Savior and the Restoration. We sensed that it had something to do with the words of the prophets and apostles, and we wanted that for our students as well.

The teachers on that and other faculties focused on this element of our objective. Those efforts began with a quote on the chalkboard or on the wall and included notes written in or glued into their scriptures, yet there seemed to be more to this effort than occasionally copying a quote on the board or imitating a method they observed in a colleague’s classroom.¹³ I watched these and other faculties wrestle with, ponder, discuss, and then act on great prophetic instruction such as this:

“[Honoring the President of the Church] will cause us to draw nearer unto the Father.”¹⁴

“The most important reading we can do is any of the words of the prophet.”¹⁵

“For the next six months, your conference edition of the *Ensign* should stand next to your standard works.”¹⁶

Some of these teachers subsequently provided a conference edition of the *Ensign* to each student. The feelings in those classrooms were miraculous. The students learned to look to the prophets for answers, explanations, and insights into the scriptures. When rightly pursued, this led to greater understanding

of the scriptures, powerful feelings of the Spirit, and an increase of faith in the Savior.

Additionally, our emphasis on student involvement is about more than students sharing their opinions and thoughts. There *are* gospel right answers! Including the words of the prophets in teaching and learning will help students learn to look for these answers while studying the scriptures in class and at home. There is a difference between asking students to share *their* opinions and teaching students to search the revelations to discover the mind of the Lord and his prophets on a subject and then asking them to share those discoveries.

A teacher recently told me, “As we were studying the scriptures in class, a student would raise their hand and say, ‘I’m reading President Monson’s talk, and I remember that he said . . .’ And then they [would] read it to us. [Then another student] would say, ‘Elder Scott commented on that!’ [This happened] all through the lesson, and I just knew what was happening in their bedrooms [at night].”

I recently spoke with an institute director who told me, “The dilemma is that I have so little time with so much material. I felt I was cheating the scripture block to reference general conference. I have learned that it is just the opposite. The students’ experience is actually enhanced, and their insight into the scriptures is magnified. The students have an instant connection with the living prophets and see all scripture as one great whole. The other thing I found is that I talked less about *my* experiences and *my* insights. General conference provides an endless supply of examples, stories, and insights into the scripture.”

Three Principles

I would like to suggest two principles for our students and a third for us as teachers.

Principle Number 1

Listening to and following the teachings of the prophets leads to greater faith in the Savior.¹⁷

Moroni quoted his father, Mormon, and taught the significant role of prophets in the development of individual faith when he asked and then answered the question “How is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing?”¹⁸

His answer includes these verses: “The office of their ministry [the angels] is to call men unto repentance . . . by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof.”¹⁹

A few weeks ago I sent my talk to a friend and colleague in the eastern United States, and he responded, “The phrase ‘according to the power thereof’ refers to the power engaged from hearing what angels . . . have declared unto modern chosen vessels. Our students’ understanding, relying, qualifying, and preparing is all predicated upon having these truths going down into their hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power is always present in the words of His prophets.”²⁰

These and other scriptures are clear, and I add my testimony that the words of the Lord’s chosen vessels, his prophets, lead to faith in the Savior.²¹

Principle Number 2

The teachings of the living prophets will fortify our students against temptation and increase their ability to withstand the evils and persecutions they face today.²²

President Henry B. Eyring, speaking as our then Commissioner of Church Education, said:

If I’d like to have a student be able to withstand persecution, I need to tune his ears to the words of living prophets. . . .

Your young people can be deeply affected by the way you tell them what prophets are like. . . . If, when you describe your experiences with the words of prophets, you tell them the joy you felt and the joy you feel from knowing that God speaks to you by living prophets, I bear you my testimony that you will be building power in them to resist temptation and to resist persecution.²³

I have spoken with several of our colleagues recently about this principle. One of them commented on the difference he has seen in his students as he has used the words of the prophets in class: “There is a huge difference. . . . I don’t know exactly what the difference is, except that I see the students are stronger. They are just stronger. They seem more protected; they seem to overcome temptation easier; they seem to be more powerful in the things they’re dealing with at the school. The more we learn to use the words of the

living prophets, . . . the more power I see in them. I don’t know how to explain it other than that.”

Brothers and sisters, I testify that our students will be strengthened, enlightened, and healed as they learn to “look on”²⁴ the prophets and their teachings.

Now, a Principle for Us as Teachers

Listening to and following the words of the prophets will ensure that our doctrine is pure,²⁵ our emphasis current, our explanations correct, and our methods powerful.

Doctrine, Emphasis, and Prophetic Priority

The words of our called and appointed leaders will help us keep our doctrine sound and our explanations current. Their emphasis should be our emphasis, and their explanations should be our explanations.²⁶

Elder Paul V. Johnson’s recent counsel to us to make sure that our teaching and explanations “[keep] up with the current stance of the Church”²⁷ matches what we have heard from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and President Henry B. Eyring:

What we . . . teach must be in harmony with the prophets and the holy scriptures. . . . Continue to study . . . but use caution and limit your classroom instruction to what the Brethren prescribe. Listen carefully and see what they choose to teach at general conference.²⁸

The best course for me has been to ponder that new insight, study, and pray before I teach it. Two good things come from that caution: The Spirit can confirm to me that what I thought was new had a long prophetic parentage. And, even better, among those multiple witnesses at least one of them will have said it more simply and with even more evidence of God’s love. It’s humbling, but it’s a good idea.²⁹

Someone recently related an experience that may mirror those of your own. A student approached the teacher with questions about family, gender, and roles. These questions continued for some time, as none of the teacher’s answers and explanations could calm the wrestle in this student’s heart and mind. The teacher ultimately invited the student to read the proclamation on the family. Following a personal experience with these words of the prophets, the student returned saying that the questions were answered. The stormy seas of doubt were now calm.

The words of the prophets teach sound doctrine, establish current priority, and respond to the issues and questions with which the youth wrestle in a way that invites inspiration and revelation and fortifies faith.

Scriptural Insight and Explanation

Besides clarifying doctrine and identifying emphasis, the prophets provide inspired insight which helps unlock the scriptures,³⁰ which are our daily text.³¹

President Marion G. Romney said it so clearly: “[Heavenly Father] has not left us unguided to jangle over the interpretations of those revelations, nor does he leave us ignorant of his will on current issues. He has given us living prophets to interpret those revelations and to declare to us his will on present problems.”³²

It is hard to imagine that any of us will ever teach about the laborers in the vineyard or the father with the afflicted child without referencing Elder Holland’s recent talks on those marvelous passages,³³ or about the Savior’s poignant question to the Pharisees “What think ye of Christ?”³⁴ without using Elder Neil L. Andersen’s talk “What Thinks Christ of Me?”³⁵

Can any of us imagine teaching Doctrine and Covenants 121 again without President Eyring’s prophetic insights into the pavilions that separate us from Heavenly Father?³⁶

Such examples are nearly countless. There are dozens of passages quoted each general conference, and a look through a single table of contents of the conference edition of the Church magazines reveals title after title with roots in the scriptures.

I would like for you to read the following commentary from one of our teachers and a seminary student on this principle:

Teacher: I think I have a strong testimony—and I’ve seen this with a number of students—that the modern prophets have a unique way, that they’re the very best commentary on the standard works, that they have a way to open up our students’ understanding and their minds and our understanding and minds to see the scriptures more powerfully because they teach us the scriptures. They teach us what the scriptures are about.

Student: And it says, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.” And this reminded me of a quote in the most recent general conference, and it is by Elder Craig A. Cardon. It’s the talk “The Savior Wants to Forgive,” and it says, “In His mercy”—that’s my favorite part because Christ, his mercy is endless—“in His mercy, He allows for improvement over time rather than demanding immediate perfection.” And I’m skipping ahead a little bit. It says, “As often as we

repent and seek His forgiveness, He forgives [us] again and again.” I know that Christ—no matter how bad our sins are, it’s always possible for his forgiveness. And because of his mercy and his endless love, he will always be there for us and forgive us again and again.

Teaching Methods

Now, in addition to all of that, careful consideration of what the Lord’s called and appointed authorities are saying to us today will highlight principles that, when pondered and applied under inspiration, lead to powerful teaching practices. We will learn not only about *what* should be taught but also *how* it should be taught. The more we study and ponder the words of the prophets, the more we will learn about the *how* of teaching.

The power of our teaching fundamentals and the practices espoused and taught in our handbook is not found in educational theory. It is found in doctrine. When methods³⁷ have their moorings in truth and inspiration,³⁸ rather than philosophy and imitation, then they will have greater power and be more effective.

Conclusion and Testimony

In conclusion, in the Lord’s great Intercessory Prayer, and in 3 Nephi, he prayed for his Apostles and for us that we, through believing on their words, might believe in him and become one.³⁹ In another place he said simply, “He that receiveth my servants receiveth me.”⁴⁰

A recurring theme in my personal study of the Book of Mormon this summer has been the role of living prophets. Near the beginning of Nephi’s vision, the angel asked, “Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb?”⁴¹

If the role of prophets and apostles is to teach and testify of the Savior, if their charge is to lead us to him, and if in turn our charge is to help youth and young adults understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of the Savior, we might well ask ourselves, “Rememberest thou the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb?”

Along with President J. Reuben Clark, I testify that our students will be blessed as we “teach this gospel, using as [our] sources and authorities the standard works of the Church and the words of those whom God has called to lead his people in these last days.”⁴² I testify that there are prophets again on the earth, and I testify of him to whom they point, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

Notes

1. See Boyd K. Packer, "On the Shoulders of Giants" (J. Reuben Clark Law Society devotional, February 28, 2004). jrcls.org/publications/clark_memo/sections/fo4/cmFo4_giants.pdf.
2. See Moroni 7:30–32; for an example of this principle, see Alma 5:10–12.
3. See 3 Nephi 5:1–3.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 101:43–62.
5. See Ephesians 4:11–13; Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, April 1950, 96–102.
6. See 2 Peter 1:20–21.
7. See John 17:6–21; 3 Nephi 28:34; Doctrine and Covenants 84:36 (see also verses 33–39).
8. Doctrine and Covenants 68:4.
9. Neal A. Maxwell, "Teaching by the Spirit—"The Language of Inspiration" (Church Educational System symposium on the Old Testament, August 15, 1991), 1.
10. *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), x.
11. President George Q. Cannon taught: "We have the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants; but all these books, without the living oracles and a constant stream of revelation from the Lord, would not lead any people into the Celestial Kingdom of God. This may seem a strange declaration to make, but strange as it may sound, it is nevertheless true." "Of course, these records are all of infinite value. They cannot be too highly prized, nor can they be too closely studied. But in and of themselves, with all the light that they give, they are insufficient to guide the children of men and to lead them into the presence of God. To be thus led requires a living Priesthood and constant revelation from God to the people according to the circumstances in which they may be placed." *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–74), 1:323.
12. Boyd K. Packer, "Teach the Scriptures" (address to Church Educational System religious educators, October 14, 1977), 3.
13. See Neal A. Maxwell, "Called and Prepared from the Foundation of the World," *Ensign*, May 1986, 34; see also Brent D. Fillmore, "With the Assistance of the Holy Prophets," *Religious Educator* 6, no. 3 (2005): 117.
14. George Q. Cannon, "Discourse," *Deseret News*, November 14, 1877, 642.
15. Ezra Taft Benson, "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet," in *1980 Devotional Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), 27.
16. Ezra Taft Benson, "Come unto Christ, and Be Perfected in Him," *Ensign*, May 1988, 84. President Benson stated: "For the next six months, your conference edition of the *Ensign* should stand next to your standard works and be referred to frequently. As my dear friend and brother Harold B. Lee said, we should let these conference addresses 'be the guide to [our] walk and talk during the next six months. These are the important matters the Lord sees fit to reveal to this people in this day' (in Conference Report, April 1946, 68)." "Come unto Christ," 84. President Harold B. Lee taught, "If you want to know what the Lord would have the Saints know and to have his guidance and direction for the next six months, get a copy of the proceedings of this conference, and you will have the latest word of the Lord as far as the Saints are concerned." "President Harold B. Lee's Closing Remarks," *Ensign*, January 1974, 128. President Marion G. Romney stated, "When I drink from a spring I like to get the water where it comes out of the ground, not down the stream after the cattle have waded in it" (from an untitled address to

- religious educators, April 13, 1973). Quoted in Richard G. Scott, "Four Fundamentals for Those Who Teach and Inspire Youth" (Church Educational System symposium on the Old Testament, August 14, 1987), 6.
17. See Helaman 15:7–8; 3 Nephi 5:1–3. Elder David A. Bednar taught that the steps outlined in Helaman 15:7–8 contain "the Lord's blueprint for becoming steadfast and immovable." "Steadfast and Immovable, Always Abounding in Good Works," *New Era*, January 2008, 5.
18. Moroni 7:20.
19. Moroni 7:31–32.
20. See Moroni 7:20–32; see also Alma 5:10–12.
21. See Jacob 4:6; Mosiah 26:15; Alma 5:10–11; 3 Nephi 28:34; Doctrine and Covenants 1:17–21; 20:26.
22. See Ether 9:28–35; Doctrine and Covenants 21:4–6.
23. Henry B. Eyring, "Eyes to See, Ears to Hear," in *Supplement: A Symposium on the New Testament, 1984* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984), 11.
24. Acts 3:4 (see verses 1–6).
25. See 2 Peter 1:20–21.
26. See Acts 26:22; Mosiah 18:19–20; Doctrine and Covenants 52:9, 36.
27. Paul V. Johnson, "A Pattern for Learning Spiritual Things" (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion training broadcast, August 7, 2012).
28. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Pitfalls and Powder Sheds," quoted in Paul V. Johnson, "The Dangers of Priestcraft" (Church Educational System conference on the Doctrine and Covenants and Church history, August 12, 2002), 1–2.
29. Henry B. Eyring, "To Know and to Love God" (an evening with a General Authority, February 26, 2010), 3. President Eyring also taught, "Let us be modest, waiting for the living prophet, in applying the scriptures to explain news." "The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest" (an evening with a General Authority, February 6, 1998), 5.
30. See lesson 8, "Prophets Interpret Scripture," in *Scripture Study—The Power of the Word Teacher Manual*, rev. ed. (Church Educational System manual, 2001), 25–26.
31. See LDS Scripture Citation Index at scriptures.byu.edu.
32. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, April 1945, 89.
33. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Laborers in the Vineyard," *Ensign*, May 2012, 31–33, and see "Lord, I Believe," *Ensign*, May 2013, 93–95.
34. Matthew 22:42.
35. Neil L. Andersen, "What Thinks Christ of Me?," *Ensign*, May 2012, 111–14.
36. Henry B. Eyring, "Where Is the Pavilion?," *Ensign*, November 2012, 72–75.
37. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. counseled, "Before trying on the newest fangled ideas in any line of thought, education, activity, or what not, experts should just stop and consider that however backward they think we are, and however backward we may actually be in some things, in other things we are far out in the lead, and therefore these new methods may be old, if not worn out, with us." "The Charted Course of the Church in Education" (address to religious educators, August 8, 1938), 6.
38. See 2 Nephi 32:5.
39. See John 17:6–21; 3 Nephi 19:28–29.
40. Doctrine and Covenants 84:36 (see verses 33–39); see also 3 Nephi 28:34.
41. 1 Nephi 12:9.
42. J. Reuben Clark Jr., "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," 10.