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The gospel is not a list of demands; it is the good news that Jesus Christ overcame sin and death.

“We Talk of Christ, We Rejoice in Christ”

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From a *Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* annual training broadcast, 12 June 2018.

Thank you, that was wonderful. We’re so blessed. It’s such a privilege to be together with all of you today. Thank you for all you’re doing. We love you and love serving with you.

With many of you, I think often of the opportunity that is ours to teach the youth and young adults of the Church and think often of how we might teach them with more power in helping them to build deep and abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As I’ve considered this important question, I’ve reflected on the idea that Elder Kim B. Clark shared last January with us when he said that the Savior’s invitation to learn of Him first means that we must learn to know Him. And second, that we must learn from Him. He quoted Elder Neal A. Maxwell, who referred to the Savior’s invitation to “learn of me” and added, “There is no other way to learn deeply.”¹

I have come to understand and believe that the single most important way in which we can help increase faith in the rising generation is to more

fully place Jesus Christ at the center of our teaching and learning by helping our students come to know Him, to learn from Him, and to consciously strive to become like Him. Every day, we must “talk of Christ, . . . rejoice in Christ, . . . [and] preach of Christ.”²

Many of you have already begun to respond to this invitation, intentionally preparing lessons with these ideas in mind and looking for opportunities to testify of Jesus Christ and of His divine attributes, His boundless power, and His unfailing love. In these classes there has been an increased influence of the Holy Ghost, more expressions of gratitude for the Savior, more meaningful and relevant personal application, and more young people acting in faith.

Of course, the most important way we can help our students come to know the Savior is to help them prepare for sacred priesthood ordinances and to keep their covenants.³ To help them qualify for the blessings of the temple is to help them know and follow Jesus Christ. But there are other things we can do, while they are with us, that will help them to rely on the Him and on His teachings and Atonement.

To this end, may I suggest four ways that we can place Jesus Christ more in the center of our learning and teaching every day?

Focus on the Titles, Roles, Character, and Attributes of Jesus Christ

First, focus on the titles, roles, character, and attributes of Jesus Christ. President Russell M. Nelson gave us an invitation to “let the scriptural citations about Jesus Christ in the Topical Guide become [our] personal core curriculum.”⁴ This invitation is intended to help us go beyond knowing about the things Jesus did and help us to come to know Him—His attributes and character.

For example, one of the titles of Jesus Christ is Creator. Under the direction of His Father, Jesus created the heavens and the earth. Creator is also one of His divine roles and speaks to His nature. As we study how and why Jesus created the earth, we might ask, “What does this teach us about who He is? What does it teach us about His motives, His love, and His power? What divine attributes of the Savior are revealed in His role as the Creator?”

You may remember that President Boyd K. Packer was an accomplished artist who enjoyed carving wooden birds. One day he was a passenger in a car driven by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, and one of his carvings rested on the backseat of the car. At an intersection Elder Tuttle slammed on the brakes,

and the carving tipped upside down on the floor and broke into pieces. Elder Tuttle was devastated, but President Packer was not. He simply said, “Forget it. I made it. I can fix it.” And he did. He made it stronger than it was and even improved it a bit. President Packer explained, “Who made you? Who is your Creator? There is not anything about your life that gets bent or broken that He cannot fix and will fix.”⁵

When our students understand Jesus’s role as the Creator, and as they ponder the scripture accounts that witness of His incredible power to fix and heal His creations, their hearts will long to experience that power and promise in their own lives. They will then act in faith to experience His incredible power to fix what is broken in them.

Another of Jesus’s sacred titles is Redeemer. The scriptures refer to Him in this role 930 times. What does this title teach us about His character and attributes? What did His redeeming power mean for Alma, Saul, and the woman taken in adultery? What did it mean to Matthew, the publican and Gospel writer?

I find it interesting that we learn of Matthew’s call to the Twelve in the same chapter as the accounts of Jesus performing miracles and “healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”⁶ The motive for these miracles was that Jesus was “moved with compassion.”⁷ But why does Matthew alone, of all the Gospel writers, include his call in the midst of these miracles? It may have been a chronological account, but I think there is something else we can learn. Is it possible that Matthew recognized that the greatest miracle that Jesus did was to redeem us by forgiving, and loving, and lifting, and showing a person his or her true identity and potential, just as He had done for Matthew?

Another way to help students recognize Jesus’s attributes is to focus not just on scripture events but on what those events teach us about the Savior. For instance, why do we teach the story of Ammon cutting off the arms of men who scattered King Lamoni’s sheep? Is it to talk about the greatness of Ammon? Or is this story actually about the greatness of God? What does this story teach us about the Lord and the way He blesses those who put their trust in Him? Ammon’s own account concludes with this enthusiastic testimony: “I do not boast in my own strength. . . . I know that I am nothing; . . . therefore . . . I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things.”⁸

A few months ago, I was with a group of wonderful teachers and asked them to choose any scripture story or event in Church history and to think

about what it reveals about the nature of God. The first teacher responded with, “Polygamy.” My first thought was, “Thanks a lot! You couldn’t have chosen a more difficult topic.” But as we started to talk, a wonderful thing happened. People began to bear testimony to the fact that Heavenly Father loves all of His children and wants them to be cared for. Another talked about the Lord’s willingness to ask hard things of us, but that He always sustains us and rewards our obedience. Another spoke of God as someone who loves families and wants children to be taught by loving parents. As the conversation went on, I realized that the Spirit was witnessing of the nature and character of God, that we felt closer to our Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus Christ, and that we had come to know and love Them a little more.

Jesus Christ is our Creator. He is our loving and forgiving, compassionate Redeemer and Deliverer. He is also Immanuel, the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, and the Author and Finisher of Our Faith. As we focus on His titles, roles, character, and attributes, the Spirit will testify of Him, bringing greater understanding and love for who He truly is and a greater desire to become like Him.

Emphasize the Example of Jesus Christ

A second way to place Jesus at the center of our teaching is to recognize and emphasize that He is the perfect example, the embodiment and expression of all gospel principles.⁹ One of our teachers recently shared with me that for their family scripture study, they’ve decided to read the New Testament again. But this time, rather than focusing on what Jesus said, they’re focusing primarily on what Jesus did. Focusing on His perfect example also invites the Holy Ghost to testify of Him.

Even when Jesus is not directly referred to in a story we’re teaching, we can still point to Him as the example of the principle that the story illustrates. For example, after identifying and analyzing a principle, we might ask, “Can you think of a time in the scriptures when Jesus exemplified this principle?” Or, “When have you seen Jesus exemplify this principle in your life or on your behalf?” One student was recently asked that question with regard to the Savior’s example of gentleness. Her thoughts and feelings raced to the gentle way in which the Savior has always treated her. This experience, right in a classroom, created in her a deep desire to be more Christlike and gentler with the people who depend on her, as she depends on the Lord.

You could scour all the books ever written and not find a better illustration of each gospel principle than is found in the scripture accounts of Jesus and His eternal ministry. Pondering examples of the Lord in His roles as Jehovah, the mortal Christ, and the resurrected Savior will increase our students’ power and capacity to take effective, righteous action. It will take our lessons beyond discussions about ethics and self-mastery and connect students to the power of the Savior and the eternal plan of happiness.

By way of illustration, how might we teach the principle of honesty? Simply as the “best policy,” because people will trust us more if we are honest? Or is integrity central to the character of Christ? If we’re to be like Him, must we learn to follow His perfect example in being totally honest? The same types of questions could be asked for every principle of the gospel.

Arthur Henry King taught this idea beautifully when he said, “We symbolize [good] in a real individual—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is a man, not a principle, a man who includes all principles. . . . And following a man is very different from following a principle. . . . We do not have to work out philosophical complexities of ethics. It has nothing to do with that. We have to study the Gospels, see what Christ did, and try to identify ourselves with what he did. It is because we catch the spirit of the Master, the Master’s love, and because we have soaked ourselves in the gospel, that we know what it is that we must do. The gospel which we have stored within us enables us at any moment to feel what we should do in a certain situation.”¹⁰

There is power that comes when we connect our efforts to live the gospel to Jesus Christ. If we ever feel we are just going through the motions or that living the gospel has become a list of tasks to perform, we may have disconnected from the source of the grace and joy we seek. We might even be doing all the right things but find that we are missing the mark. The gospel is not a list of demands; it is the good news that Jesus Christ overcame sin and death. Jesus Christ is the central figure in our Father in Heaven’s plan to help us to become like Him. He is the perfect example of how we are to live and the source of the divine enabling power we need. As we learn to follow His example and connect our efforts to live the gospel to Him, we will find joy in being His disciples.

Look for Types and Shadows of Jesus Christ

Third, we should look for types and shadows¹¹ of the Savior in the lives of prophets and other faithful men and women as they are recorded in the

scriptures. As the prophet Jacob taught, “All things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.”¹²

Because of this idea, when I taught the Old Testament in seminary, I placed large pieces of paper on the back wall of the classroom. On the top of each paper I wrote the name of an Old Testament prophet. When we had finished studying a section of the Old Testament, I asked the students to think of the things they had learned about the prophet we had been studying and how his experiences foreshadowed or reminded them of the Savior. After learning about Adam, students wrote things like “Adam was a son of God.” “He was immortal.” “He went into a garden.” “He voluntarily took upon himself death that we might live.” It would not take long before someone would ask, “Are we still talking about Adam, or are we talking about Jesus?”

During that time, a student came early to class to share with me her experience studying the scriptures. The night before she had been reading about the consequences of the Fall of Adam in Moses 4, which says, “Thorns also, and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.”¹³ Since she had learned to ask the question, “How does this account testify of Christ?,” she was led to ask, “Did Jesus know when He was speaking to Adam that someday He would literally wear the consequences of the Fall as a crown of thorns?”

Our students found another example in the life of Joseph of Egypt, identifying over sixty ways in which he is a type of the Savior. Students pointed out that both of them were beloved by their Father, despised by their brothers, and sold for the price of a slave. They noticed the similarities in their temptations and in the fact that God was always with them. These connections are so much more than merely something interesting to note. The lives of the Lord’s chosen prophets are types of Him and teach us of His divine attributes. When used effectively, this set of lenses can help us come to know Jesus better and to be more like Him.

My wife, Kristi, was recently teaching this same scripture account of Joseph in Egypt and asked the class, “What Christlike characteristics do you see in the example of Joseph?” We talked of his ability to turn every trial into a blessing. We talked of his obedience, his patience, his willingness to remember those in need, and his willingness to forgive. The question caused me to remember a previous time studying this story and imagining what it was like when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. The scriptures say they were “troubled at his presence.”¹⁴ Can you envision what that moment must have been like and how they must have felt, knowing what they had done? But

Joseph responded to them, “Come near to me . . . I am Joseph your brother. . . . Be not grieved . . . for God did send me before you to preserve life.”¹⁵ As I picture that event in my mind, I better understand what it will be like when we stand before the Lord at Judgment Day. Certainly I can imagine that we will remember our sins and may feel “troubled” being in His presence. But I can also imagine Him saying as He lifts us from our knees, “Come to me, come near to me, I am your brother. God did send me to preserve life.”

When we focus on types and shadows of Jesus Christ, we can then help our students recognize His attributes and characteristics by asking questions such as:

- “What Christlike characteristics do you see in the life of this prophet?”
- “When have you been blessed because Jesus possesses this attribute?”
Or, “How has the Savior demonstrated this characteristic on your behalf?”
- “What could you do to become more like Jesus Christ and acquire this divine attribute?” Or, “What have you learned about your Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ that inspires you to act in faith to follow Them?”

And when students give answers like “pray” or “read the scriptures,” we would do well to help them connect those actions to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ by asking them questions like

- “How will your prayers be different knowing whom you are talking to?”
- “How will you study the scriptures in a way that will help you know the Savior better and be more like Him?”

These types of questions will help our students develop greater power and capacity to know the Savior and to learn from Him.

Bear Pure Testimony of Jesus Christ

The fourth thing that we can do is to bear pure testimony of Jesus Christ.

We need to speak of Him more often and more powerfully and with more reverence, adoration, and gratitude. We need to share our own testimonies, and we must find effective ways to invite our students to share their

testimonies with each other. In a recent class discussion on the principle of prayer, a teacher invited students to consider what the Lord's invitation to pray and His promise to teach us about the nature of our Father in Heaven. They were then invited to consider the attributes of the Savior that allow us to pray in His name. With these simple questions, a lesson on prayer turned into the opportunity for students to bear testimony of the power and love of our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ. Students left with increased appreciation for their relationship with Deity and for the incredible blessing we have been given to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who is our Advocate with the Father.

Another essential way to testify of Jesus Christ is to allow the testimony of prophets, both ancient and modern, to be heard in our classrooms. The apostle Peter said we are “witnesses chosen before of God. . . . He commanded us to . . . testify that it is he which was ordained of God. . . . To him give all the prophets witness.”¹⁶

More recently, Elder Robert D. Hales made a statement that has caused me much reflection. He said, “We watch, hear, read, study, and share the words of prophets to be forewarned and protected. For example, ‘The Family: A Proclamation to the World’ was given long before we experienced the challenges now facing the family.” And then he added this thought, “‘The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles’ was prepared in advance of when we will need it most.”¹⁷

I am not one who is given to gloom and doom, but it has become evident why the proclamation was given in advance of the strong winds that have been blowing against traditional families. And to hear a prophet say that the “Living Christ” document was given “in advance of when we will need it most” makes me think that additional winds will be blowing, battering the faith of our students and our children.

“The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles” declares:

We offer our testimony of the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice. . . . He was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New. . . . He walked the roads of Palestine, healing the sick, causing the blind to see, and raising the dead. He taught the truths of eternity. . . . He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. . . . He rose from the grave to ‘become the firstfruits of them that slept.’ . . . He and His Father appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, ushering in the long-promised ‘dispensation of the fulness of times.’ . . . We testify that He will someday return to earth . . . [and] rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords. . . . Jesus is the living Christ, the immortal Son of God. He is the great King Immanuel, who stands today on the right hand of His Father. He is the

light, the life, and the hope of the world. . . . God be thanked for the matchless gift of His divine Son.¹⁸

This witness of God's prophets was given before the time our students and our children will need it most. We must help them plant this testimony deeply in their minds and hearts. There is nothing we can do that will bless our students more than to help them to come to know Jesus Christ. We must help them to love Him, follow Him, and intentionally strive to become like Him. To the witness of God's prophets I add my humble testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world.

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. **RE**

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Notes

1. Kim B. Clark, “Learn of Me” (evening with a General Authority, 26 January 2018).
2. 2 Nephi 25:26.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 39.
5. Boyd K. Packer, “The Instrument of Your Mind and the Foundation of Your Character” (Church Educational System devotional for young adults, 2 February 2003), 9, speeches.byu.edu.
6. Matthew 9:35.
7. Matthew 9:36.
8. Alma 26:11–12.
9. See Charles W. Penrose, “Discourse Delivered by Elder Chas. W. Penrose,” *Deseret Evening News*, 29 November 1884, 1; *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 79.
10. Arthur Henry King, *The Abundance of the Heart* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 123.
11. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 49.
12. 2 Nephi 11:4.
13. Moses 4:24.
14. Genesis 45:3.
15. Genesis 45:3–5.
16. Acts 10:41–43.
17. Robert D. Hales, “General Conference: Strengthening Faith and Testimony,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 7.
18. “The Living Christ,” *Ensign*, May 2017, inside front cover.