Effective Gospel Teachers
Uniting Faith and History
“I’ve Lived My Dream!”

Truth and Tolerance
ELDER DALLIN H. OAKS
On the cover:
New beech leaves, Grib Forest
in the northern part of Sealand, Denmark.

PHOTO BY MALENE THYSSEN,
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Several threads connect the articles in this issue of the Religious Educator. One that stands out to me is truth. Those who embrace the restored gospel accept that there are absolute truths and that such truths about our Savior, Jesus Christ, and his gospel, understood and internalized, are saving truths (see John 8:31–32). Whether dealing with the role of the Spirit in Nephi’s learning and teaching or the role of the Spirit in our own teaching, several articles will help religious educators to more fully consider and fulfill their divine commission to teach truth. Moroni powerfully asserted, “By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5), and the scriptures indicate that one title for the Holy Ghost is “the Spirit of truth” (e.g., John 15:26; D&C 6:15). Thus the Holy Spirit cannot teach without teaching truth—the impressions and revelations of the Spirit will always be true (and hopefully we minimize impeding the workings of the Spirit!).

Other threads that connect many articles in this issue are teaching and learning. Obviously, teaching truth by the Spirit of truth and helping our students learn truth by the same Spirit is a major goal of every religious educator. Whether an Apostle, a seminary teacher, or a Sunday School teacher, we know the Spirit must attend our efforts to teach if we are going to participate in the process through which our students learn saving truths and become free through Jesus’ saving sacrifice.

Of course, there are other important themes in this issue’s articles, including faith, history, and the doctrine of the Godhead. We at the RSC invite you to thoroughly explore this issue of the Religious Educator. We trust it will assist you in faithfully learning and teaching the truths of the restored gospel.

Dana M. Pike
Editor
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My dear young brothers and sisters, Kristen and I feel privileged to be with you on this significant occasion. We meet on 9/11, the tenth anniversary of an event that has profoundly influenced our lives and thinking and will do so for many years to come. It is forever associated with the Twin Towers.

I have felt impressed to speak this evening about another set of twins, the twin ideas of Truth and Tolerance. These subjects were chosen not because they are uniquely your concern as young adults, like the dating, hanging out, and marriage I described to this audience some years ago. My treatment of truth and tolerance will invite you to consider and to teach these twin subjects because they are vital to the rising generation, in which you are the senior members.
We Believe in Absolute Truth

First, Truth. We believe in absolute truth, including the existence of God and the right and wrong established by His commandments. We sing:

Tho the heavens depart and the earth’s fountains burst,
Truth, the sum of existence, will weather the worst,
Eternal, unchanged, evermore.¹

In the words of President Joseph F. Smith, “We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer. No sect or religious denomination in the world possesses a single principle of truth that we do not accept or that we will reject. We are willing to receive all truth, from whatever source it may come; for truth will stand, truth will endure.”²

The existence and nature of truth is one of the fundamental questions of mortal life. Jesus told the Roman governor Pilate that He came into the world to “bear witness unto the truth.” “What is truth?” that unbeliever responded (John 18:37–38). In earlier times, the Savior had declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). In modern revelation, He declared, “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).

My young brothers and sisters, we know that the existence of God and the existence of absolute truth are fundamental to life on this earth, whether they are believed or not. We also know that evil exists and that some things are simply, seriously, and everlastingly wrong. You whom I address shun evil and seek truth. I salute you for your righteous actions and your righteous desires. As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I seek to help you make right choices in a world that is increasingly polarized between belief and disbelief, between good and evil.

Shocking reports of large-scale thievery and lying in civilized societies in the last two months suggest a moral vacuum in which many have little sense of right and wrong. Last month’s widespread rioting and pillaging in Britain and the scandalous, widespread cheating by teachers on state-mandated tests in elementary and middle schools in Atlanta, Georgia, have caused many to wonder whether we are losing the moral foundation Western countries have received from their Judeo-Christian heritage.³
Beware of Moral Relativism

It is well to worry about our moral foundation. We live in a world where more and more persons of influence are teaching and acting out a belief that there is no absolute right and wrong, that all authority and all rules of behavior are man-made choices that can prevail over the commandments of God. Many even question whether there is a God.

The philosophy of moral relativism, which holds that each person is free to choose for himself what is right and wrong, is becoming the unofficial creed for many in America and other Western nations. At the extreme level, evil acts that used to be localized and covered up like a boil are now legalized and paraded like a banner. Persuaded by this philosophy, many of the rising generation—youth and young adults—are caught up in self-serving pleasures, pagan painting and piercing of body parts, foul language, revealing attire, pornography, dishonesty, and degrading sexual indulgence.

On the foundational belief in right and wrong, there is an alarming contrast between the older and the younger generations. According to survey data of two decades ago, “79 percent of American adults [believed] that ‘there are clear guidelines about what’s good and evil that apply to everyone regardless of the situation.’” In contrast, a more recent poll of college seniors suggests that “three-quarters of [them] believe that the difference between right and wrong is relative.”

Many religious leaders teach the existence of God as the Ultimate Lawgiver, by whose action certain behavior is absolutely right and true and certain other behavior is absolutely wrong and untrue. Bible and Book of Mormon prophets foresaw this time, when men would be “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4) and, indeed, when men would deny God (see Jude 1:4; 2 Nephi 28:5; Moroni 7:17; D&C 29:22).

In this troubled circumstance, we who believe in God and the corollary truth of absolute right and wrong have the challenge of living in a godless and increasingly amoral world. In this circumstance, all of us—and especially you of the rising generation—have a duty to stand up and speak up to affirm that God exists and that there are absolute truths His commandments establish. In doing so, we Latter-day Saints rely on the truth we sing in the hymn I quoted earlier:

The pillar of truth will endure to the last,  
And its firm-rooted bulwarks outstand the rude blast  
And the wreck of the fell tyrant’s hopes.
As I face this audience of committed young people, I know that some of you may be wondering why I am speaking about what is obvious to you and what, you might assume, is obvious to others. Recall the survey data I mentioned earlier, suggesting that about three-quarters of all college seniors believe that the difference between right and wrong is relative.

I have chosen to speak about truth because teachers in schools, colleges, and universities are teaching and practicing relative morality. This is shaping the attitudes of many young Americans who are taking their places as the teachers of our children and the shapers of public attitudes through the media and popular entertainment. This philosophy of moral relativism denies what millions of believing Christians, Jews, and Muslims consider fundamental, and this denial creates serious problems for all of us. What believers should do about this introduces the second of my twin subjects: Tolerance.

Tolerance
Tolerance is defined as a friendly and fair attitude toward unfamiliar opinions and practices or toward the persons who hold or practice them. As modern transportation and communication have brought all of us into closer proximity to different peoples and different ideas, we have greater need for tolerance. When I was a young adult, about sixty years ago, it was only in books and magazines that most Americans were exposed to great differences in cultures, values, and peoples. Now we experience such differences in television, on the Internet, through travel, and often in personal interactions in our neighborhoods and the marketplace.

This greater exposure to diversity both enriches our lives and complicates them. We are enriched by associations with different peoples, which remind us of the wonderful diversity of the children of God. But diversities in cultures and values also challenge us to identify what can be embraced as consistent with our gospel culture and values and what cannot. In this way, diversity increases the potential for conflict and requires us to be more thoughtful about the nature of tolerance. What is tolerance, when does it apply, and when does it not apply?

This is a harder question for those who affirm the existence of God and absolute truth than for those who believe in moral relativism. The weaker one’s belief in God and the fewer one’s moral absolutes, the fewer the occasions when the ideas or practices of others will confront one with the challenge to be tolerant. For example, an atheist has no need to decide what
kinds and occasions of profanity or blasphemy can be tolerated and what kinds should be confronted. Persons who don’t believe in God or in absolute truth in moral matters can see themselves as the most tolerant of persons. For them, almost anything goes. “You do your thing, and I’ll do my thing” is the popular description. This belief system can tolerate almost any behavior and almost any person. Unfortunately, some who believe in moral relativism seem to have difficulty tolerating those who insist that there is a God who should be respected and certain moral absolutes that should be observed.

Three Absolute Truths for Tolerance

I will say no more about the tolerance or intolerance of nonbelievers. I am speaking to an audience of Latter-day Saints who believe in God and in absolute truth. What does tolerance mean to us and to other believers, and what are our special challenges in applying it?

I begin with three absolute truths. I express them as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I believe that most of these ideas are shared by believers generally.

First, all persons are brothers and sisters under God, taught within their various religions to love and do good to one another. President Gordon B. Hinckley expressed this idea for Latter-day Saints: “Each of us [from various religious denominations] believes in the fatherhood of God, although we may differ in our interpretations of Him. Each of us is part of a great family, the human family, sons and daughters of God, and therefore brothers and sisters. We must work harder to build mutual respect, an attitude of forbearance, with tolerance one for another regardless of the doctrines and philosophies which we may espouse.”

Note that President Hinckley spoke of “mutual respect” as well as tolerance. Speaking at BYU a decade later, a Muslim scholar, Dr. Alwi Shihab, an Indonesian, elaborated that idea in these words: “To tolerate something is to learn to live with it, even when you think it is wrong and downright evil. . . . We must go, I believe, beyond tolerance if we are to achieve harmony in our world.”

Relying on the teachings of the Quran, Dr. Shihab continued: “We must respect this God-given dignity in every human being, even in our enemies. For the goal of all human relations—whether they are religious, social, political, or economic—ought to be cooperation and mutual respect.”
Living together with mutual respect for one another’s differences is a challenge in today’s world. However—and here I express a second absolute truth—this living with differences is what the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us we must do.

The kingdom of God is like leaven, Jesus taught (see Matthew 13:33). Leaven—yeast—is hidden away in the larger mass until the whole is leavened, which means raised by its influence. Our Savior also taught that His followers will have tribulation in the world, that their numbers and dominions will be small (see 1 Nephi 14:12), and that they will be hated because they are not of the world (see John 17:14). But that is our role. We are called to live with other children of God who do not share our faith or our values and who do not have the covenant obligations we have assumed. So it was that, at the conclusion of His ministry, Jesus prayed to the Father “not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). We are to be in the world but not of the world.

Since followers of Jesus Christ are commanded to be leaven—not to be taken out of the world but to remain in it—we must seek tolerance from those who hate us for not being of the world. As part of this, we will sometimes need to challenge laws that would impair our freedom to practice our faiths, doing so in reliance on our constitutional rights to the free exercise of religion. As described by an attorney supporting a Lutheran school in a case now before the United States Supreme Court, the big concern is “the ability of people of all faiths to work out their relationship with God and one another without the government looking over their shoulder.” That is why we need understanding and support—including your understanding and support—when we must contend for religious freedom.

We must also practice tolerance and respect toward others. As the Apostle Paul taught, Christians should “follow after the things which make for peace” (Romans 14:19) and as much as possible “live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). Consequently, we should be alert to honor the good we should see in all people and in many opinions and practices that differ from our own. As the Book of Mormon teaches, “All things which are good cometh of God; . . . wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. Wherefore, take heed . . . that ye do not judge . . . that which is good and of God to be of the devil” (Moroni 7:12–14).

That approach to differences will yield tolerance and respect.
Our tolerance and respect for others and their beliefs does not cause us to abandon our commitment to the truths we understand and the covenants we have made. That is a third absolute truth: we do not abandon the truth and our covenants. We are cast as combatants in the war between truth and error. There is no middle ground. We must stand up for truth, even while we practice tolerance and respect for beliefs and ideas different from our own and for the people who hold them.

While we must practice tolerance and respect for others and their beliefs, including their constitutional freedom to explain and advocate their positions, we are not required to respect and tolerate wrong behavior. Our duty to truth requires us to seek relief from some behavior that is wrong. This is easy to see when it involves extreme behaviors that most believers and nonbelievers recognize as wrong or unacceptable. For example, we must all deplore murder or other terrorist behavior, even when done by extremists in the name of religion. And we must all oppose violence and thievery.
The Two-Sided Coin of Tolerance and Truth

As to less extreme behaviors, where even believers disagree on whether or not they are wrong, the nature and extent of what we should tolerate is much more difficult to define. Thus, a thoughtful Latter-day Saint woman wrote me about her concern that “the world’s definition of ‘tolerance’ seems to be increasingly used in relation to tolerating wicked lifestyles.” She asked how the Lord would define “tolerance.”

President Boyd K. Packer gave an inspired introduction to this subject. Speaking to an audience of institute students three years ago, he said, “The word tolerance does not stand alone. It requires an object and a response to qualify it as a virtue. . . . Tolerance is often demanded but seldom returned. Beware of the word tolerance. It is a very unstable virtue.”

This inspired caution reminds us that for persons who believe in absolute truth, tolerance for behavior is like a two-sided coin. Tolerance, or respect, is on one side of the coin, but truth is always on the other. You cannot possess or use the coin of tolerance without being conscious of both sides.

Our Savior applied this principle. When He faced the woman taken in adultery, Jesus spoke the comforting words of tolerance: “Neither do I condemn thee.” Then, as he sent her away, He spoke the commanding words of truth: “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). We should all be edified and strengthened by this example of speaking both tolerance and truth: kindness in the communication, but firmness in the truth.

Facing Profanity, Cohabitation, and Sabbath Breaking with Truth and Tolerance

Let us consider how to apply that example to some other behaviors. Another thoughtful LDS member wrote: “In Mosiah 18:9, Alma tells us that when we are baptized we covenant ‘to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in.’ . . . What does this scripture mean for our day and how can it be applied by Latter-day Saints?

“Living in the mission field, I often hear the name of the Lord taken in vain, and I also have acquaintances who tell me that they are living with their boyfriends. I have found that observance of the Sabbath is almost obsolete. How can I keep my covenant to stand as a witness and not offend these people?”

Profanity, cohabitation, and Sabbath breaking—excellent examples to illustrate how Latter-day Saints might balance their competing duties to truth and tolerance in their own lives in these different circumstances.
I begin with our personal conduct, including the teaching of our children. In applying the sometimes competing demands of truth and tolerance in these three behaviors and many others, we should not be tolerant with ourselves. We should be ruled by the demands of truth. We should be strong in keeping the commandments and our covenants, and we should repent and improve when we fall short.

As President Thomas S. Monson taught us in the conference where he was sustained as our prophet, “My young friends, be strong. . . . The face of sin today often wears the mask of tolerance. Do not be deceived; behind that facade is heartache, unhappiness, and pain. You know what is right and what is wrong, and no disguise, however appealing, can change that. The character of transgression remains the same. If your so-called friends urge you to do anything you know to be wrong, you be the one to make a stand for right, even if you stand alone.”

Similarly, with our children and others whom we have a duty to teach—such as in our Church callings—our duty to truth is paramount. Of course, teaching efforts bear fruit only through the agency of others, so they must always be done with love, patience, and persuasion.

I turn now to the obligations of truth and tolerance in our personal relations with associates who use profanity in our presence, who live with a partner out of wedlock, or who do not observe the Sabbath day appropriately. How should we react toward and communicate with them?

Our obligation to tolerance means that none of these behaviors—or others we consider deviations from the truth—should ever cause us to react with hateful communications or unkind actions. But our obligation to truth has its own set of requirements and its own set of blessings. When we “speak every man truth with his neighbour” (Ephesians 4:25) and when we “[speak] the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), as the Apostle Paul taught, we are acting as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, doing His work. Angels will stand with us, and He will send His Holy Spirit to guide us.

In this sensitive matter, we should first consider whether or the extent to which we should communicate to our associates what we know to be true about their behavior. In most cases, this decision can depend on how directly we are personally affected by it.

Profanity consistently used in our presence is an appropriate cause for us to communicate the fact that this is offensive to us. Profanity used out of
our presence by nonbelievers probably would not be an occasion for us to confront the offenders.

Cohabitation we know to be a serious sin in which Latter-day Saints must not engage, whatever the circumstances. When practiced by those around us, it can be private behavior or something we are asked to condone, sponsor, or facilitate. In the balance between truth and tolerance, tolerance can be dominant where the behavior does not involve us personally. If the cohabitation

Elder Oaks speaking at the CES fireside at Brigham Young University on September 11, 2011.
does involve us personally, we should be governed by our duty to truth. For example, it is one thing to ignore serious sins when they are private; it is quite another thing to be asked to sponsor or implicitly endorse them, such as by housing them in our own homes.

On Sabbath observance, Latter-day Saints know that we are taught to observe the Sabbath day in a different way than many other Christians. Most of us are troubled by packed shopping centers and other commercial activities on the Sabbath. Perhaps we should explain our belief that our observance of the Sabbath, including our partaking of the sacrament, restores us spiritually and makes us better people for the rest of the week. Then, to other believers, we might express appreciation for the fact that we share common ground on what is most vital because each of us believes in God and in the existence of absolute truth, even though we differ in our definitions of those fundamentals. Beyond that, we should remember the Savior’s teaching that we should avoid contention (see 3 Nephi 11:29–30) and that our example and our preaching should “be the warning voice, every man to his neighbor, in mildness and in meekness” (D&C 38:41).

In all of this, we should not presume to judge our neighbors or associates on the ultimate effect of their behaviors. That judgment is the Lord’s, not ours. Even He refrained from a final mortal judgment of the woman taken in adultery. Tolerance requires a similar refraining in our judgment of others.

**Four Principles of Truth and Tolerance**

**When Seeking Government Action**

Having discussed the balancing of truth and tolerance in our personal behavior and in our relations with associates, I come to a different and more difficult circumstance. When believers enter the public square to try to influence the making or the administration of laws motivated by their beliefs, they should apply some different principles.

As young adults, you may wonder why I am speaking to you about the principles we should follow when we seek government action, such as by the legislature. You might say, “That is a matter for senior Church authorities to handle.” I describe these principles to you young adults because you are current members and future leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ, and you will need to decide these kinds of questions sooner than you think. You need to understand how our efforts in the public square are informed by the balance between truth and tolerance.
Whether or how we might seek to obtain laws that would compel or influence behavior that we deem desirable because of our belief in God and His commandments is too large a subject for adequate treatment in the concluding few minutes of my talk. I will, therefore, limit myself to describing four paramount principles that should govern such an effort.

First, when believers in Jesus Christ take their views of truth into the public square, they must seek the inspiration of the Lord to be selective and wise in choosing which true principles they seek to promote by law or executive action. Generally, they should refrain from seeking laws or administrative action to facilitate beliefs that are distinctive to believers, such as the enforcement of acts of worship, even by implication. Believers can be less cautious in seeking government action that would serve principles broader than merely facilitating the practice of their beliefs, such as laws concerning public health, safety, and morals.

In any event, as defenders of the faith, believers can and must seek laws that will preserve religious freedom. Along with the ascendancy of moral relativism, the United States is experiencing a disturbing reduction in overall public esteem for religion. Once an accepted part of American life, religion is now suspect in the minds of many. To them it has become something that must prove its legitimacy as a part of our public life. Some influential voices even question the extent to which our constitutions should protect the free exercise of religion, including the right to practice and preach religious principles.

This is a vital matter on which we who believe in a Supreme Being who has established absolute right and wrong in human behavior must unite to insist on our time-honored constitutional rights to exercise our religion, to vote our consciences on public issues, and to participate in elections and debates in the public square and the halls of justice. In doing so, we stand with angels. We must also stand shoulder to shoulder with other believers to preserve and strengthen the freedom to advocate and practice our religious beliefs, whatever they are. For this purpose, we must walk together on the same path in order to secure our freedom to pursue our separate ways when that is necessary according to our separate beliefs. Guided by heaven in this righteous cause, our words will be sweet and find place in the hearts of many.

Second, when believers seek to promote their positions in the public square, their methods and their advocacy should always be tolerant of the opinions and positions of others who do not share their beliefs. We should
not add to the extremism that divides our society. As believers, we must always speak with love and show patience, understanding, and compassion toward our adversaries. Christian believers are under command to love their neighbors (see Luke 10:27), to forgive (see Matthew 18:21–35), and to do good to those who despitefully use them (see Matthew 5:44). They should always remember the Savior’s teaching that we “bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use [us], and persecute [us]” (Matthew 5:44).

As believers, we should also frame our arguments and positions in ways that contribute to the reasoned discussion and accommodation that are essential to democratic government in a pluralistic society. By this means, we will contribute to the civility that is essential to preserve our civilization.

Third, believers should not be deterred by the familiar charge that they are trying to legislate morality. Many areas of the law are based on Judeo-Christian morality and have been for centuries. Our civilization is based on morality and cannot exist without it. As John Adams declared, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Fourth, believers should not shrink from seeking laws to maintain public conditions or policies that assist them in practicing the requirements of their faith where those conditions or policies are also favorable to the public health, safety, or morals. For example, even though religious beliefs are behind many criminal laws, and some family laws, such laws have a long-standing history of appropriateness in democratic societies. But where believers are in the majority, they should always be sensitive to the views of the minority.

We Latter-day Saints are sometimes accused of being self-righteous and intolerant of others, especially where we are in the majority or where others are in the majority and our beliefs cause us to oppose them. Surely Latter-day Saints do need to be more wise and skillful in explaining and pursuing our views and in exercising our influence when we have it.

That is the spirit of the two-sided coin of truth and tolerance. President Thomas S. Monson has provided an excellent example of the practice of these twin virtues. Throughout his life, he has been exemplary in reaching out and working with the members and leaders of other faiths in cooperative efforts on matters of common interest and in the Christian fellowship and concern that have no denominational boundaries.
Finally, the spirit of our balance of truth and tolerance is applied in these words of President Gordon B. Hinckley: “Let us reach out to those in our community who are not of our faith. Let us be good neighbors, kind and generous and gracious. Let us be involved in good community causes. There may be situations, there will be situations, where, with serious moral issues involved, we cannot bend on matters of principle. But in such instances we can politely disagree without being disagreeable. We can acknowledge the sincerity of those whose positions we cannot accept. We can speak of principles rather than personalities.”

The Gift to Know and the Gift to Believe

I close with this assurance and this testimony:

The Bible teaches that one of the functions of a prophet is to be a “watchman” to warn Israel (see Ezekiel 3:17; 33:7). In revelation the Lord added this parable for modern Zion: “Set . . . a watchman upon the tower,” who will “[see] the enemy while he [is] yet afar off” and give warning to save the vineyard “from the hands of the destroyer” (D&C 101:45, 54).

I have spoken to you as one of those watchmen on the subject the Spirit has assigned me. I assure you that my message is true. If you have doubts about this, or if you have questions about how to apply these principles in your own life, I urge you to seek guidance from the same source.

On the broader question being widely agitated by the atheists of our day, I proclaim my knowledge that God lives! His creations witness His existence, and His servants hear and proclaim His voice. Modern revelation teaches that some have the gift “to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, . . . crucified for the sins of the world” and that it is given to others “to believe on their words” (D&C 46:13–14). As one who knows, I invite you to believe on my words.

I testify of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the vineyard. He is our Savior, and He reaches out to each of us with the timeless invitation to receive His peace by learning of Him and by walking in His way (see D&C 19:23): “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.
Notes
Charged by the commissioner to serve as the corporate memory for the Church Educational System, Roger G. Christensen shares experiences from his years of working with the commissioner and the boards. This conversation with Casey Paul Griffiths took place on September 1, 2010, as part of a project to compile the history of the Church Educational System.

Griffiths: It’s a great opportunity to visit with you today. I know that you have a unique perspective on the Church Educational System and its work. What insights can you share with us?

Christensen: There is a statement that I have made frequently over the years. When you think about what constitutes the Church Educational System, referred to by many as CES, it always amazes me that there are very few people within CES that really understand what the organization is; there is virtually no one outside of CES who understands it. There are a lot of people that think they know something about CES, but usually they only know a very small segment of it, or a certain perspective of it. And so I try to be an advocate whenever I have an opportunity to explain how it really works.
Griffiths: What are some of the things that you think people commonly get mixed up about when it comes to the Church Educational System?

Christensen: Part of the confusion that existed over the years was that the organization we now call Seminaries and Institutes of Religion was referred to by many as the Church Educational System or CES, but it was only one of the five components of CES. In other words, they thought all that CES included was Seminaries and Institutes. And so in order to clarify, in 2007 we officially had the board approve a name change from CES to Seminaries and Institutes of Religion. There are five operating entities within the Church Educational System: Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, which includes the elementary and secondary schools—there’s a fun chapter in history on how that came to be—and then there are the four institutions of higher education: Brigham Young University, BYU–Hawaii, BYU–Idaho, and LDS Business College. So collectively, those five entities are the Church Educational System. Now, there are five separate boards that govern each of those entities. For Seminaries and Institutes, it is the Church Board of Education. For the four other institutions, because they are separate legal entities, it’s a Board of Trustees. The membership on all five boards is the same. And so when we have a meeting, we have one meeting that comprises all five of those boards. But when we do the minutes of those meetings, we have to separate them out, so you have a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Brigham Young University, the Board of Trustees of BYU–Hawaii, the Board of Trustees of BYU–Idaho, the Board of Trustees of LDS Business College, and the Church Board of Education.

Griffiths: So then the Church Board of Education and the Board of Trustees for each of the entities are made up of the same individuals?

Christensen: Yes, and there’s some interesting history on the composition of the board. Many years ago the boards, collectively all five of the boards, were composed of the First Presidency, the entire Quorum of the Twelve, members of the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishop. Later, the general Relief Society president was added and then later the general Young Women president. One interesting note to point out is that when President Thomas S. Monson was called to the Twelve in 1963, he became a member of all those boards. He has served continuously on the board from 1963 to 2010. So he’s got a forty-seven-year history of being aware of the kinds of things that are being discussed: what the issues are, what the challenges are, what is taking place in the organization. There is no other institution, especially no other
university, in this country that has that kind of longevity with members of the board.

**Griffiths:** I would imagine so.

**Christensen:** Over time, things have changed, and today the board is officially composed of nine members, including the First Presidency and three members of the Twelve—and those assignments are rotated through different members of the Twelve from time to time. It has one member of the Presidency of the Seventy—and again that assignment is rotated from time to time—and then the general Relief Society president and the general Young Women president, and those assignments are changed as those individuals are called and released from those assignments. And then there is an Executive Committee—again, there are five committees, but they all meet as one body—and that’s just a subset of the board. So today, the Executive Committee has two members of the Twelve, the member of the Presidency of the Seventy, and the general Relief Society president.

**Griffiths:** Now, I was surprised to find out that when you mentioned the five entities that the elementary and secondary schools of the Church aren’t counted as a separate entity—that they’re under the umbrella of Seminaries and Institutes. Can you elaborate a little more on why that is?

**Christensen:** In 1970, when Elder Neal A. Maxwell was appointed to be the commissioner, he was thinking strategically about the future of the Church Educational System. One of the issues he faced created an interesting challenge. If I remember the data correctly, there were approximately 145,000 students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools at that time and about 175,000 students enrolled in Seminaries and Institutes. You can see by the relative magnitude of those two operations that we had an extensive elementary and secondary school system: throughout Mexico, Central and South America, and the Pacific Islands. And as he started evaluating, the board had created a policy that we would have elementary and secondary schools only where there was inadequate public education, and the adequacy was based on local standards, not on US standards. In 1976, President Henry B. Eyring, who was then serving as the president of Ricks College, was brought into the Commissioner’s Office as a deputy commissioner under Elder Holland, who was then serving as commissioner. One of President Eyring’s first assignments was to travel the world and visit all of those schools and help define what the final disposition should be with each one of them. But the initiative was actually started under Elder Maxwell’s direction when he was the
commissioner. The decision was made to start closing all of those schools. And concurrently that was the time that the decision was also made by the board to have Seminaries and Institutes go worldwide wherever the Church went. So whenever the Church was being established and new countries opened up, Seminaries and Institutes went with the growth of the Church. But elementary and secondary schools were being closed. In order to simplify the administration of a changing global organization, responsibility for the elementary and secondary schools was given to Seminaries and Institutes. Today there are seventeen schools remaining: two schools in Mexico and fifteen in the Pacific—in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, and Kiribati. And there used to be a Church College of New Zealand, which is now closed.

**Griffiths:** When it comes to schools in the Pacific, we have an extensive educational system. Can you explain some of the reasons why those schools have been retained and how that fits into the work of Church education?

**Christensen:** Again, there’s a great tradition. We talk a lot in Church history about the missionary efforts after the organization and founding of the Church. The Prophet Joseph started sending missionaries out particularly to Great Britain and to the European continent and Scandinavia. And a lot of the early converts of the Church came from Scandinavia and Great Britain and immigrated to the United States. We don’t talk so much in some of our historical circles about the great missionary work that was taking place in the Pacific Islands. I had the opportunity to visit Tahiti probably in about 1994 or 1995 and noticed on the lawn of one of the chapels that there was a plaque commemorating the sesquicentennial of missionary work in the island of Tahiti. So there had been missionaries going to places like Tahiti, Tonga, Samoa, and New Zealand for well over 150 years, since the earliest days of the Restoration. As a percentage of the total population, the largest percentage of members of the Church, outside of the state of Utah, is in some of those islands. Again, I don’t know the exact number, but I think about one-third of the population in Samoa is Latter-day Saint. About 30 to 40 percent of the population in Tonga is Latter-day Saint. So because of the large concentration of members of the Church and because of the lack of really good public educational systems, historically, the Church has retained those schools there.

**Griffiths:** And as I understand, once upon a time those schools were staffed mostly by Americans. One of the moves made by Elder Maxwell was to employ natives in the schools. Is that correct?
Christensen: Yes. There were for many years a lot of expatriate teachers, and it was very expensive to operate those schools, even more expensive if you had to pay for expatriates, primarily Americans, to go staff those schools and live overseas, pay them commensurate with the US pay scale. And so they started making the transition to hire qualified local teachers. That continues to be a challenge and a problem—to find adequately qualified teachers for elementary and secondary schools in the islands.

Griffiths: So are there times occasionally when an American is still sent there if there is a need?

Christensen: Not typically anymore. There has been an extensive effort with the Seminaries and Institutes program working with BYU–Hawaii developing what they call the ITEP program, or the International Teacher Education Program. They have missionary couples that work at BYU–Hawaii and at the various schools in the islands to train and better prepare local teachers. Occasionally, they also will take teachers from those schools that don’t have an adequate educational background and have them go to BYU–Hawaii to get a degree, then have them go back to teach at one of the schools.

Griffiths: I’ve also heard that people in different areas around the world come to you and say, “We need to establish a school over here, a center.” Could you address briefly the forces that have led the board to make the Seminaries and Institutes program the international vehicle?

Christensen: As the Church continues to grow, there are many areas of the world where having Church-operated schools might be seen as a blessing to our members. Even in developed areas, the moral climate in some countries leads parents to suggest a need to have Church schools. However, the board has had a long-standing policy not to expand the number of elementary or secondary schools and to consider closing existing schools if adequate public education is available. Also, with enrollment caps on our current higher education institutions there’s a perceived need for more Church-owned universities, and many wonderful people say, “You know, it would really bless the lives of our students in—” fill in the blank: Southern California, the Midwest, the East Coast, Europe, Mexico, Brazil, Africa, wherever there are large numbers of members of the Church. They would like the Church to consider creating a new BYU campus somewhere. In 1999, President Gordon B. Hinckley gave a great talk in a general priesthood meeting entitled “Why We Do Some of the Things We Do.” At the beginning of his talk, he specifically addressed why the Church sponsors BYU and by extension any secular...
higher education. He commented in that talk that we wish we could provide that opportunity for all the worthy young Latter-day Saints who deserve to have a college education. But a university is very expensive, so he said it’s not likely that we’ll have more campuses. We will continue to support BYU, and at that time he mentioned Ricks College (now BYU–Idaho), BYU–Hawaii, and LDS Business College; and then we continue to support the Seminaries and Institutes program, which is a great support structure for those students who can’t come to the Church universities.

**Griffiths:** Why has the Church moved to build more institutes rather than more universities?

**Christensen:** It’s much more cost-effective to have an institute program. The students are able to get the same spiritual strength through an institute program that they could by going to BYU. There was an interesting study done about this. Some researchers wanted to measure the value of a BYU education. The cohort that they looked at was those students who were kind of right on the bubble, students that were equally qualified with some that were admitted to BYU and some that weren’t admitted to BYU. They then tracked to see what happened to them over time. Their conclusion was that those students who got into BYU over time were more active in the Church and were more likely to get married in the temple, to serve, to be full-tithe payers, and so forth. When that presentation was made to the board, the administrator for Seminaries and Institutes at the time, Stan Peterson, thought it would be interesting for them to look not just at those who did not get into BYU but those who went to some other university and graduated from institute. What was the impact of that experience? So he had the same sociologists do a follow-up study. And their conclusion was that if a college-age Latter-day Saint student attended institute, no matter what university he or she went to, the outcomes looked almost identical to those who had gone to BYU—their Church activity, their temple marriages, their service in the kingdom, their being full-tithe payers—all those factors were nearly identical. And we’ve done some follow-up studies on some other things that show this is the case.

**Griffiths:** That’s fascinating. Now, it seems like there hasn’t been a huge expansion, but there has been some expansion in higher education. For example, Ricks College was changed to BYU–Idaho and turned into a four-year institution. If the outcomes are the same, then why not invest that money into furthering Seminaries and Institutes; why do something like expand BYU–Idaho?
Christensen: Well, there is an interesting chapter relative to BYU–Idaho. We’ll touch on that and then we’ll talk about the relative experience of the institute program. President Eyring has told this experience, so I don’t think it inappropriate to discuss in this setting. Before he was the president of Ricks College in the early 1970s, President Eyring was on the faculty at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. When he was identified to be the president of Ricks College, he said he was told in no uncertain terms, and on more than one occasion, that Ricks College was a two-year institution, it would always be a two-year institution, and he should not try to change it into a four-year institution. Each succeeding president following President Eyring was basically given the same message. So following President Eyring you had Bruce C. Hafen, Joe J. Christensen, Steven D. Bennion, and then David A. Bednar. The timing is just further evidence of the Lord’s hand micromanaging the details of our lives and the organizations much more than we might fully appreciate. David Bednar was an organizational behavior professor at Texas Tech and subsequently at the University of Arkansas. His expertise was organizational change, so when he was appointed to be the president, he was told that they understood what his background was, but he was not to try to change Ricks College. It was a two-year institution, and it would continue to be a two-year institution. But in a rather remarkable revelatory experience, President Hinckley, as chairman of the Board of Trustees for Ricks College, came into a board meeting. We took care of business as we normally would. And then following the meeting, he asked the commissioner (Henry B. Eyring) to join him in his office. He stated, “Hal, do you think it’s time to make Ricks College a four-year institution?” And the commissioner, having a business background, a doctorate of business administration, and teaching experience in a graduate school of business, said, “President, it will cost you more.” Now, President Hinckley, you have to understand, was an English major. He wanted to become a journalist. He had graduated from the University of Utah and after his mission was hoping to go to graduate school at Columbia University. And yet the man, in addition to being a prophet, seer, and revelator, was a genius; he had already been processing and calculating marginal cost. He probably didn’t know what it was called, but he knew what he was talking about. He said, “No, it will cost me less per BYU graduate.” He had already decided he was going to call the school BYU–Idaho.

Griffiths: That’s fascinating.
Christensen: Now for the interesting chapter that I was involved in. I was not aware of the first conversation at the time. President Hinckley was always a man who wanted to get multiple inputs; he was always learning from whomever he possibly could. Since I was the secretary to the board and assistant to the commissioner, having responsibility for budgets and finance and the financial reporting part of the organization, he called me one day and said, “Roger, I want you to come and see me.” I met him in his office. He said, “Now, we’re planning on making Ricks College a four-year institution. How much is that going to cost me? You can’t talk to anybody, but just go figure out what the additional incremental costs are going to be and come back and let me know.” I did not know at the time that he had also called President Bednar and had given him the same assignment. So after a couple days of running a bunch of calculations, doing some estimates, not having a whole lot of input other than the fact that I knew what was going to happen, I went back to meet with the President and said, “Now, President, this is what the current operating cost is. To get these additional programs, it is going to cost this, this, and this, so your operating budget is going to go up this much. You’re going to have to have some additional facilities up there, so we’re estimating about this much in additional space.” I made my presentation. He then opened up his drawer, pulled out a sheet of paper that he had made some notes from the same conversation with President Bednar and compared my data with his data. He said, “It looks good; let’s go forward.”

Griffiths: How smoothly did the transition occur from a two-year college to a four-year university?

Christensen: One of the poignant points is watching the Lord’s hand in all of this. When he inspired the prophet to make the change to transition from a two-year school to a four-year university, he had in place a president that was a world-renowned expert in organizational change. And yet he is also very humble, and—using Ammaron’s terminology from the Book of Mormon—he was one who was “quick to observe” (Mormon 1:2). He had a great set of skills, and the Lord had put in place around him a marvelous group of vice presidents and faculty. As they started going through that transition, it was amazing how the Lord had put in place people that could do things that no one else could do to help with that transition. I participated in their last accreditation visit as a junior college in 1999. In 2000, when the announcement was made, the university had to go through another extensive accreditation process. I don’t think there has been any other institution
in the country that has tried to be accredited in one fell swoop from being a two-year school to a four-year university. It’s usually program by program over a period of time. And the administration, the board, and the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities that accredited that institution were amazed at how well and how quickly the transition took place.

**Griffiths:** So where does the institute program fit into this picture?

**Christensen:** When we talk about the expansion of the institute program, it is important to understand the context. It was established in 1926 to help combat secularism. In 1926 a lot of the students were getting inundated by worldly modernistic kinds of philosophies. So the purpose of an institute was to provide a religious foundation for them in order to compare what they were learning at the university and gospel doctrine. As the Church continued to grow, and under Elder Maxwell’s tenure as they were looking at the growth of the Church internationally, a lot more young adults who were non-students wanted to participate in institute. It’s one of the best mechanisms we have to help teach this rising generation the doctrine of the kingdom. So it was expanded, particularly internationally, to include the young adults. The definition of what is a student is another item that we wrestle with a lot. For example, you have somebody who is a college student, and then they go on a mission. When they come back and they’re not enrolled in school but they’re planning on going to school, are they students or not if they’re not enrolled? Well, they’re young adults. They were students, they’re planning on being students, but what are they today? Well, they’re institute students. And so the definition of those that the institute serves has been modified over time, and continues to evolve. And I think because it is more efficient and more cost-effective to help those students, wherever they happen to be, there are a lot of resources being channeled into the institute program.

**Griffiths:** What other changes have surprised you during your service with the boards, particularly with Seminaries and Institutes?

**Christensen:** In 1998 and 1999, Seminaries and Institutes ran a pilot to test the concept of teaching English and computer skills at an institute building in São Paulo, Brazil, and one in Monterrey, Mexico. The concept was that if we could provide these two skills to the students and members of the Church, it would enhance their ability to get employment locally. And so under the direction of Stan Peterson, that pilot program was run for a year or two. They then came back and reported the results. It was a great success. The recommendation from Seminaries and Institutes was to expand that program
into other institutes in other countries. The board considered it and said, in effect, “Thank you very much. We appreciate the report. We recognize the success. We’d like you to shut it down.”

**Griffiths:** After the programs had been successfully piloted?

**Christensen:** Right. People in Seminaries and Institutes were scratching their heads, saying, “How is it that you could have a wildly successful pilot program and then have the board say, ‘No, we don’t want you to do that’?” Apparently, there were discussions taking place in other venues about what could be done to expand beyond just this particular group. It was shortly thereafter that the Perpetual Education Fund was announced. And so it was taking lessons learned from these pilot programs in Mexico and Brazil and then the lessons learned from Seminaries and Institutes through the International Education Fund and combining that together and creating the Perpetual Education Fund.

A lot of the things that are done in the Church lay the groundwork for other things that the Lord has in store in the future.

**Griffiths:** I’d like to go back to something that you mentioned just in passing, and that’s the Church Board of Education and Boards of Trustees being made up of a group of men and women that come from diverse backgrounds. It’s not the same as a Board of Trustees per se at a secular university, where most of them have educational backgrounds. Can you comment on how this sort of more diverse set of people, at least when it comes to the background they come from, affects the decisions that the board makes?

**Christensen:** You bet. Again, we recognize that among the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, the Lord identifies, qualifies, and calls those men that he wants to serve in those positions. They come from very diverse backgrounds, and because of that diversity, they bring a very rich discussion into all the various conversations that they would have in whatever setting they are in. As it relates to education and the board currently, let’s talk about some of the background of those who are currently on the Board: President Monson has a publishing background, President Eyring has an education background, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf was an international pilot. And then Elder Russell M. Nelson, who is the chairman of the Executive Committee and the senior member of the Twelve on the board, is an internationally renowned cardiologist/heart surgeon. Elder M. Russell Ballard is a businessman. Elder Bednar is an educator. Elder Steven E. Snow, from the Presidency of the Seventy, is an attorney. And Sister Julie B. Beck and Sister...
Elaine S. Dalton both have college degrees but basically are wonderful mothers. They are both very bright and very capable and are very articulate women. Because of their unique backgrounds, when we have discussions there are different things that are brought up that come to bear in our conversations that are very insightful. But probably the best way to describe the interaction of how the board works is to quote Elder Bednar when he was the president of BYU–Idaho. He would frequently say to his staff, “We have the most unique Board of Trustees of any institution in the world because we have prophets, seers, and revelators. So our responsibility is to let prophets be prophets.” And so you do your homework the very best you can, you make your presentation to them so they understand the issues, and then you listen. Sometimes there are questions of the President, questions of the commissioner, questions of me sometimes as a support staff. But then they talk about what they really want to have, given everything else, because education is only a narrow portion of the portfolio of everything that’s going on in the Church. As they sit in counsel together, those brethren know all the other ramifications and implications and try to say, how does the educational component fit into everything else that we’re doing in the Church? So it’s just a very rich and very interesting dynamic. The transitions from President Ezra Taft Benson, when he was President of the Church, then President Howard W. Hunter, then President Hinckley, and now President Monson—just the dynamics of the personalities of leadership make a big difference. There’s such great respect for seniority that there’s a lot of deference to the chairman of the board, but there is often a lot of rich discussion about different issues and how things will fit together.

*Griffiths:* What is it like to work so closely with the leaders on the boards?

*Christensen:* Let me share just a couple of highlights. Working with President Eyring was probably one of the most wonderful blessings of my life because he is a unique blend of brilliance and humility, and I had a very close working relationship with him when he was the commissioner. Because of his role as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, he had a lot of other responsibilities and demands, so he and I would be together regularly so that I could keep him apprised of educational matters. A couple of specific memories that I think would be relevant here: We were planning a trip up to BYU–Idaho to review their budget information. Spending three and a half to four hours, just President Eyring and me in a car driving up to Rexburg and having him tutor me, was a remarkable experience.
Another time we were headed to Idaho to be with the administration at BYU–Idaho, but it happened to be the same day that they normally have their devotionals in Rexburg, which is Tuesday afternoon. There was someone who had already been invited to be the speaker. As we got close to Rexburg, we would have arrived in time to go to the devotional. Brother Eyring’s comment at the time was, “It wouldn’t be fair to the person who has prepared the talk to have a member of the Twelve sitting there on the stand. Let’s just go find something else to do for a while, and then we’ll go up after the devotional is over.” So we pulled into a seminary building in Idaho Falls and visited four classes. Obviously the principal and the teachers who were there were somewhat overwhelmed. As he walked into a classroom, the teacher was standing up in the middle of a lesson; his jaw dropped, and you could tell he was wondering, “Well, now what do I do?” So he invited President Eyring to come up and speak. President Eyring then said, “Well, I don’t want to take very much time because you have a wonderful teacher who has prepared for the lesson today. I’m just curious to know what it is you’re talking about.” The curriculum that year happened to be New Testament. So in one of the classes, he said, “What is the lesson on today?” One of the students said, “Well, we’re just learning about Jesus calling the Twelve Apostles.” President Eyring said, “I happen to know a little bit about how that works today,” and then he shared a little about his calling to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, which means to be a special witness of Christ. To see the impact that had on the lives of those kids! We went into another class and he asked the same question, “What are you learning today?” And they said, “We’re learning about some of the miracles Jesus performed.” And he asked, “What do you think the greatest miracle was?” Some young lady sitting on the back row raised her hand and said, “I think that was the Atonement.” As we walked out of the building, he turned to me and said, “The Church is in good hands because there are some real believers in our seminary classrooms.”

Griffiths: What else have you learned about how the Brethren operate?

Christensen: One thing sticks out that I think is important to remember. This was unique to President Hinckley, but I think the concept applies to all of the senior Brethren. President Hinckley always looked through two sets of eyes whenever any decision was being made: as it related to the Church ecclesiastically—he always wanted to see the world through the eyes of a stake president and how decisions the Brethren were making would impact the role of the stake president and the flock that he was shepherding, what his
responsible were and the members of the Church, how it impacted them in their day-to-day lives. And then, significantly, through the eyes of a faithful, humble widow—whether it was in Piute County, Utah, or the Altiplano of Bolivia, in the Ukraine, or anywhere else in the Church. He was always cognizant of being true and faithful to that faithful tithe payer anywhere in the world and utilizing the resources of the Church appropriately. Now, when it comes to education, he would also look through two sets of eyes, but they were slightly different. The first set of eyes was the same widow, because he wanted to make sure we were using the resources appropriately. The second set of eyes was an eighteen-year-old freshman, and we ask, are we doing anything in seminary, in institute, or in higher education that will in any way undermine the faith and testimony of that young person who is now just getting out of their parent’s tutelage and stewardship and maybe for the first time in their life getting out on their own and having to make some very critical decisions that will affect the rest of their life and generations to come? Are we doing anything that would not be uplifting and strengthening and building to that individual? If we are doing something that would undermine their testimony, we would be in deep trouble in the Church. Because, as President James E. Faust and others have said, “We are just one generation away from extinction in the Church if we don’t build the faith of the rising generation.”

**Griffiths:** You have a wider perspective on Church education than most. You’ve probably traveled a lot. Where have you traveled and been able to see in person the impact of Church education?

**Christensen:** In my assignments, I’ve had the remarkable privilege of being on every continent of this planet with the exception of Antarctica. If we ever have a Seminary and Institute program there, someday I may get there as well. But I don’t know of many penguins currently enrolled in institute! But I have been able to visit every continent and have had some interesting experiences. I think maybe the most touching to me personally was traveling in both West Africa and South Africa. It was amazing to go on a Saturday morning at six o’clock in the morning to a humble 8 x 8 or maybe 10 x 10 room and see the teacher standing with her back to the wall with a blackboard in the doorway and having benches fill the space and every seat occupied and then to see the faces of humble seminary students that were anxious and willing to spend their time learning the doctrine of Christ. That happened in Ghana. It happened in Nigeria. It happened in Zimbabwe. It happened in South Africa. Everywhere I have been and seen a seminary class, it is amazing to see the
remarkable blessing that it is in the lives of students of any race, any color, any creed, any country. Once they have embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, they want to come to know the Savior and are willing to do whatever it takes, even at six o’clock on a Saturday morning when there is no transportation except by foot, to get to a seminary classroom.

**Griffiths:** We started our discussion with you saying most people don’t grasp what the Church Educational System is exactly. From your perspective, what would you want a teacher in the field—whether it’s a teacher like the one you spoke of in Africa or a teacher in released-time seminary or a teacher at a university—to understand about the big picture if you could sit down and talk with them?

**Christensen:** I think the real message is that the First Presidency and the Twelve recognize the challenges that young people are facing in the world today. From the perspective of the board, as we talk about different things, they seriously consider what’s going on in the world and they want to know that we are building faith. Every teacher has a different style, and recognizing that the Lord has blessed everybody with different talents, they need to use their talents to teach effectively. But the purpose of teaching in Church education, particularly in religious education—Seminaries and Institutes and the departments of religion at the higher education institutions—it’s not about trying to entertain the students; it’s about keeping them coming back. There’s a lot of entertainment in the world. We cannot keep up with the technology and the media and everything that the world is throwing at them. You can’t compete with that for entertainment. What you need to do is teach them the doctrine and make sure they are firmly rooted in doctrine, because you’re affecting their lives and the lives of generations to come. So don’t do anything that would undermine the faith of these precious sons and daughters of God.

**Griffiths:** Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Christensen:** There is one additional comment I would give to teachers about the role of the board. I think it is important for those who spend their time from day to day teaching in the classroom to know that of all the things the board considers, the one they consider of greatest importance is the approval of faculty. They rely heavily on the information provided through the General Authority interview process, but they then review and consider each name individually and approve the employment of each teacher. They recognize that faculty in Seminary and Institute classes typically have more contact time with students than other youth leaders, including Young Men...
and Young Women leaders, bishops, and so forth. The influence of a great (or not-so-great) teacher is long lasting, and the board wants to make sure we have the best people available teaching and strengthening the rising generation.

Griffiths: Well, thank you. This has been really enlightening, and you've given me lot of wonderful information. Do you want to conclude with your testimony?

Christensen: I’d be delighted to, thank you. One of the unique blessings and privileges that I have had in my life is, on a regular basis, to interface with men and women of God. That’s students, that’s faculty, that’s administration, but most significantly for me in my role it is with members of the board. And because of the sacred settings that I’ve been able to sit in and interface with these good men and women that are on the board, I know that God works through his prophets, that he is guiding the work in the last days. And we are blessed to live in a time when there are prophets, seers, and revelators on the earth. God lives, and Jesus is the Christ. We are about God’s business. As Sister Dalton has consistently taught in her service as the general Young Women president, we all need to be living virtuous lives so that we can qualify for the gift of the Holy Ghost to know what we should do and what we should say in order to bless and strengthen the rising generation, because we are living in a time when Satan is buffeting all of us and we need to be worthy to have the presence of the Holy Ghost with us. I know that it is real. I know that Joseph Smith saw what he said he saw and that God lives and that we are fortunate to live in a day when priesthood power is on the earth and when there is a prophet who sits at the head of the Church and, in our case, fortunately, as the chairman of the Church Board of Education and the Boards of Trustees.
Nephi would not have seen what he desired to see if he had not been quick to observe.
On several occasions Elder David A. Bednar has shared his fascination with Nephi’s vision found in 1 Nephi 11–14 and, in particular, what it teaches about teaching and learning. The purpose of this paper is to begin exploring principles of learning and teaching that can be distilled from the interactions Nephi had with the Spirit of the Lord and an angel and to discuss what learners and teachers can do to apply these principles. I state at the outset that this represents only the beginning of such a study. I also acknowledge that the lens I bring to 1 Nephi 11–14 is undoubtedly colored by my own views relating to teaching and learning.

Before the Vision
A clear lesson for learners and teachers is that the process of teaching begins before formal instruction starts. Nephi makes it clear that he had made extensive preparation for the learning he was about to experience. He states, “After I had [1] desired to know the things that my father had seen, and [2] believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I [3] sat pondering...”
in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:1; emphasis and numbering added). Those who want to learn can ponder on what they can do to bring this type of preparation to the learning settings that they are in. Those who want to teach can attempt to discern what they should do to encourage their students to prepare in this manner. It is also important to recognize that the types of instruction given by the Spirit of the Lord and by the angel may be best suited for learners who have prepared themselves sufficiently for and desire deep learning.

Initial Teachings

The first teacher Nephi has is the Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord begins the conversation by asking, “What desirest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:2). In other words, the teacher began the conversation by essentially asking, “What do you want to learn?” This question allowed Nephi to set the agenda. At times a teacher may come prepared with what he or she thinks is the most important message to share. And perhaps it is the most important message. However, in this case, it appears that the Spirit of the Lord did not have an agenda of what to teach but instead opened it up to the learner.

The fact that Nephi has a ready response to the question “What desirest thou?” is also important. Some teachers face settings where some students might answer this question by requesting treats! Nephi’s active desire to learn contributed in large part to the learning that was about to take place.

From a practical standpoint, it may be difficult for a classroom teacher to ask students, “What desirest thou?” In a class of twenty students, there may be twenty different answers to this question. Thus it could be difficult to follow each of those paths. Perhaps a more difficult situation to encounter would be a class of twenty students all of whom respond to the question “What desirest thou?” with heads that are down or with blank faces. Students who are in this state may need coaching as to the whys and hows of gospel learning. When students don’t desire to actively learn, the teaching that can take place will likely be limited.

After Nephi explains his desire (to see the things his father saw), the Spirit asks him a pointed question: “Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?” (1 Nephi 11:4). Nephi responds by stating, “Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father” (1 Nephi 11:5).

Why does the Spirit ask a question to which both he and Nephi know the answer? Perhaps there is power in the question “Do you believe?” as it invites
people to take a stand. It seems likely that had Nephi responded to the Spirit’s question by saying, “Not really,” the teaching would have gone in a completely different direction.

After Nephi responds that he does believe, the Spirit cries out exuberantly, praising God and complimenting Nephi on his belief. One possible insight here is that the Spirit shows genuine gratitude and enthusiasm for his student’s preparation and learning. Modern teachers can also seek for opportunities to praise their students.

Nephi’s initial desire is to behold the things his father saw (see 1 Nephi 11:3). The focal point of Lehi’s dream was the tree, so the Spirit shows Nephi the tree that his father had seen. At this point the Spirit has fulfilled Nephi’s original request—to show him what his father saw—and he goes no further. The Spirit again asks, “What desirest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:10).

This time Nephi shares an expanded desire—to know the interpretation of the dream—and what unfolds is expanded learning and teaching. All of what Nephi has been shown and is about to be shown is dependent on Nephi taking action as a learner. Nephi’s proactive decision about what he wants to learn made possible the learning that took place. It is also interesting to note that the angel’s instruction in 1 Nephi 12–14 goes beyond Nephi’s second request.

After Nephi expresses this second desire, the Spirit directs Nephi to look, and when Nephi looks he finds that the Spirit “had gone” (1 Nephi 11:12). Nephi looks again and sees the beginning of the answer to his question. Thus Nephi first looks to his teacher and, not finding him, begins to look for answers on his own. One important implication for learners is that Nephi saw and discovered part of the answer to his question when his teacher was not there. He learned for himself. Some of the most significant learning takes place outside the direct supervision of the teacher.

However, Nephi is not without a teacher for long. An angel appears to him and begins the longest one-on-one conversation in the Book of Mormon.

**Elements of the Interaction between Nephi and the Angel**

*Look, and I looked (behold, and I beheld).* One of the most obvious elements of the interaction between Nephi and the angel is the frequent exhortation to look. As stated previously, the Spirit twice instructs Nephi to look (1 Nephi 11:8, 12), and the angel tells Nephi to look an additional eleven
times (1 Nephi 11:19, 24, 26, 30, 31, 32; 12:1, 11; 13:1; 14:9, 18). In each instance, Nephi looks.

The angel also tells Nephi to “behold” on eight additional occasions (1 Nephi 11:35; 12:14, 16, 22; 13:5, 8, 11, 23), and Nephi looks or beholds. Because the word “behold” means “to fix the eyes upon; to see with attention; to observe with care,” this instruction can be seen as additional encouragement to look. Thus combined, there are twenty-one times that Nephi explicitly says “I looked” or “I beheld” in response to the Spirit’s or the angel’s injunction to look or behold. To have twenty-one such occurrences in such a brief encounter cannot be inconsequential. What principles of teaching and learning can be drawn from this frequent exhortation to look?

There are at least two obvious answers. First, Nephi looked every time that he was instructed to look. He was not distracted by text messaging or some other way of not paying attention. He was fully engaged, and he looked when he was instructed to do so. This is an important lesson for learners. Seminary students who open their scriptures and look at the verses their teachers point out will generally learn significantly more than students who do not look. Nephi continually acted as an agent by asking for further enlightenment and by choosing to look.

Second, much of what of the angel did was point Nephi to interesting things to look at so that Nephi could begin to make meaning out of them. A general pattern that appears in 1 Nephi 11 is that the angel shows Nephi something, Nephi tells us what he saw, and then he and the angel discuss it.

How could a religious educator facilitate a similar teaching environment? One answer could be to invite students to look at scripture text and make their own meaning of it, as opposed to simply telling them about the scripture text. For example, there are several powerful phrases in 1 Samuel 17 that typically are not included in a simple retelling of the story of David and Goliath. A teacher could invite students to look at specific sections of 1 Samuel 17 and find phrases that stand out as meaningful to them and then invite students to share what they have found.

The frequent invitations to look could go beyond looking in the scripture text. While the angel had some pretty incredible audiovisual resources (a heavenly vision!) that most teachers do not have immediate access to, there are many audiovisual resources that students could be shown with an invitation to look. Teachers can also invite students to look at object lessons, cross-references, supporting quotations, and so on. All of this is done for the
purpose of giving students something to look at so that they can begin to make sense of it and construct their own understanding.\(^7\)

Another aspect of the invitation to look is that at times the angel instructs Nephi to “behold” (look at) something, and while Nephi is looking at it, the angel explains what Nephi is seeing (see 1 Nephi 12:8; 14:16, 21). Similarly, at times a teacher today might point students to verses and comment on them. However, when the angel says “Look!” most often it is Nephi, not the angel, who comments on what he sees. Teachers can thus invite students to look and to comment on what they see.

Another subtle aspect of the invitations to look is the decreasing number of invitations to look or behold. Nephi is told to look or behold nine times in chapter 11, five times each in chapters 12 and 13, and twice in chapter 14. This may indicate that as the teaching process progressed, Nephi was able to see and comprehend information in different ways. Perhaps students need more active guidance early in the learning process than in later stages.

**Counting the words.** Another insight from Nephi’s learning experience comes from analyzing Nephi’s conversation with the Spirit of the Lord and later with the angel. In these conversations Nephi says 106 words, while the Spirit and angel combined say 2,537.\(^8\) While that may seem like an imbalanced conversation, it may have important implications for teaching and learning.

Even in an era where active learning is often touted, lecture can sometimes still be an effective way to help students understand. This account makes it clear that in some circumstances it is fine for a teacher to lecture and impart vital knowledge. However, it should be noted that one of the reasons this lecture was so successful was that Nephi actively participated in the experience. Although he did not say much, he was active in looking and seeing for himself. Nephi uses the phrase “I saw” thirty-three times in 1 Nephi 11–14. The phrase “I saw” is very different from “I was told”!

It also may be of importance to note that the amount the Spirit or angel speaks changes throughout the teaching. In chapter 11 the Spirit and angel combined say 248 words. In chapter 12 the angel speaks 272 words, in chapter 13 he speaks 1,240 words, and in chapter 14 he speaks 777 words. After adjusting for chapter length,\(^9\) we see a clear pattern of the angel speaking very little at first then increasing to the point where in chapters 13 and 14 there is much less looking on the part of the learner and much more telling on the part of the instructor. This pattern may indicate that different types of
teaching are appropriate as the learning process progresses. It may also have been that in chapters 11 and 12 the angel was listening to and observing Nephi so that he could discern and know what to say in chapters 13 and 14.\textsuperscript{10}

Possible implications for teachers and learners include the following:

1. At times, lecture is appropriate.
2. If you are going to lecture, make sure there are ways for students to look and act so that they can benefit from the lecture.
3. Lecture may not be the most appropriate approach when teaching students who have not come prepared to seriously study the topic.
4. Lecture is particularly effective when it is prompted by a student’s desire to learn.
5. Learners who are listening to lectures should take responsibility to be active participants in the learning process—even if they do not speak, they can still actively learn.

What beholdest thou? On two different occasions the angel asks Nephi, “What beholdest thou?” or in other words, “What do you see?” (1 Nephi 11:14; 13:2). This powerful question (similar to the invitation to look) allows Nephi to make his own meaning out of what he sees. Some educational theorists believe that this type of knowledge construction is the best way to help students deeply understand the material they are learning about.\textsuperscript{11}

Nephi is shown something, and the angel invites him to construct meaning around what he has seen. Similarly, teachers today can present students with material (a series of verses, a song, a video, a quote, and so forth) and invite them to build on what they already know and to make deeper connections by asking questions like, What do you see? What stands out as meaningful to you? What questions do you have?\textsuperscript{12} This allows the students to engage with material at their level and invites them to be active participants in the learning process.

Questions asked. The Spirit of the Lord and the angel ask Nephi ten questions. While some of these questions have been analyzed in other sections of this paper, it may still be helpful to see all of these questions in one place. Table 1 lists these questions, along with the verses in which they were asked. It is interesting that while teachers are sometimes instructed to avoid yes-no questions, six of the ten questions posed to Nephi are yes-no questions. However, Nephi gives a one-word response to only one of these questions. Only one of the questions asked is rhetorical—this question, “Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb?” appears to serve the purpose of calling Nephi’s attention to a point that the angel was about to make.
Three times Nephi is asked a question that essentially begins, “Do you know . . . ?” In two of these instances Nephi does not know the answer. Why does the angel ask Nephi, “Do you know?”

One possibility is that while the angel already knows that Nephi does not know, he wants to help Nephi realize that he doesn’t know. There can be a great virtue in helping people realize that they do not know the answer. If people believe they know everything there is to know on a subject, they will not be very teachable. But if they recognize that they do not know something, they will be much more likely to learn.

Another reason why the angel might ask “Do you know?” is that the angel was trying to determine where the edge of Nephi’s knowledge was so that he could help expand this knowledge. Educational theorists have postulated that the best learning takes place when students are at the very edge of their understanding.13

One other curious feature of questions in this dialogue is that Nephi did not ask the angel (or the Spirit) any direct questions. Nevertheless it is clear that Nephi had a desire to learn and clearly had questions, although he did not directly ask them.

**Preview and review.** One common teaching technique is to both preview and review material. We see both of these activities taking place in this teaching exchange. The Spirit of the Lord previews for Nephi what he will see in his vision, stating, “After thou hast beheld the tree which bore the fruit which thy father tasted, thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Question asked</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 11:2</td>
<td>What desirest thou?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 11:4</td>
<td>Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 11:10</td>
<td>What desirest thou?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 11:14</td>
<td>What beholdest thou?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 11:16</td>
<td>Knowest thou the condescension of God?</td>
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<td>1 Nephi 11:21</td>
<td>Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 12:9</td>
<td>Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 13:2</td>
<td>What beholdest thou?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 13:21</td>
<td>Knowest thou the meaning of the book?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi 14:8</td>
<td>Rememberest thou the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel?</td>
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him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that
it is the Son of God” (1 Nephi 11:7).

At two different points in the teaching process, the angel reviews with
Nephi some of the information that has been discussed. In one instance he
states, “Thou hast beheld that if the Gentiles repent it shall be well with them;
and thou also knowest concerning the covenants of the Lord unto the house
of Israel; and thou also hast heard that whoso repenteth not must perish”
(1 Nephi 14:5; see also 1 Nephi 13:24). Classroom teachers can enhance
student learning both by previewing concepts that are to be taught and by
reviewing them afterwards.

What didn’t happen. Sometimes in educational research the most impor-
tant discoveries are of what did not happen, as opposed to what did happen.14
In the case of 1 Nephi 11–14 it may be what the Spirit and angel did not do
that is most telling.

Some modern teachers believe that they must spend a good portion of
their lesson getting students ready to learn. While so-called readiness activi-
ties certainly have their place, it may be significant that neither the Spirit nor
the angel appear to have used an attention-getter to capture Nephi’s attention.
Of course, this could be based on the intense desire to learn that Nephi had.

Another thing that the Spirit and angel did not do was entertain Nephi.
While humor and fun certainly have their place in the classroom, some teach-
ers take it to an extreme by spending large amounts of time entertaining
students. Teachers’ focus on entertainment may be a manifestation of their
lack of faith that the students they teach are seekers who are hungry for the
gospel. The Spirit and the angel did not use gimmicks, tricks, or bribery to
encourage Nephi to act as an agent in the learning process.15

In addition, the Spirit and the angel appear not to have come with a rigid
teaching agenda. Rather than giving Nephi a prepared lecture, they asked him
questions and based their teaching on clarifying points that Nephi wanted to
learn about.

Conclusion

In this article we have seen some of the implications for learning and teaching
that come from Nephi’s interactions with the Spirit of the Lord and the angel.
Some of the lessons learned include the following:
Learner preparation—including praying, pondering, believing, and desiring—is very important. The process of looking is important both in that the learner must be willing to look and in that the teacher needs to have valuable material to direct the learner to look at. In addition to pointing Nephi to things to look at, the angel did not hesitate to offer commentary regarding what Nephi was seeing. It can be effective to ask questions that invite learners to examine their beliefs and knowledge. Students should have the opportunity to vocalize how they are making sense of what they are studying. Learning can be aided by previewing and reviewing teachings. We can learn from what the Spirit and angel did not do in addition to what they did do.

There is much more that could be done to analyze the learning and teaching interactions that take place in 1 Nephi 11–14. For example, one could analyze the order of the visions that Nephi saw. In addition, it would be interesting to compare how Nephi was taught with how he taught his brothers the things he had learned. As stated previously, this article represents a beginning of studying 1 Nephi 11–14 in terms of learning about teaching. I hope that this article inspires readers to study these chapters deeply and to discover their own lessons on how to become better learners and teachers.

Notes

1. Here are two such statements:

I have long been fascinated by the nature of the interaction between the Spirit of the Lord and Nephi found in chapters 11 through 14 of 1 Nephi. As you recall, Nephi desired to see and hear and know the things his father, Lehi, had seen in the vision of the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8). In chapters 11 through 14 the Holy Ghost assisted Nephi in learning about the nature and meaning of his father’s vision. Interestingly, thirteen times in these chapters the Spirit of the Lord directed Nephi to “look” as a fundamental feature of the learning process. Nephi repeatedly was counseled to look, and because he was quick to observe, he beheld the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 11:8); the mother of the Savior (see 1 Nephi 11:20); the rod of iron (see 1 Nephi 11:25); and the Lamb of God, the Son of the Eternal Father (see 1 Nephi 11:21). I have described only a few of the spiritually significant things Nephi saw. You may want to study these chapters in greater depth and learn from and about Nephi’s learning. As you study and ponder, please keep in mind that Nephi would not have seen what he desired to see, he would not have known what he needed to know, and he could not have done what he ultimately needed to do.
if he had not been quick to observe. Brothers and sisters, that same truth applies to you and to me! (David A. Bednar, “Quick to Observe,” devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, May 10, 2003)

Recall how Nephi desired to know about the things his father, Lehi, had seen in the vision of the tree of life. Interestingly, the Spirit of the Lord begins the tutorial with Nephi by asking the following question, “Behold, what desirest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:2). Clearly the Spirit knew what Nephi desired. So why ask the question? The Holy Ghost was helping Nephi to act in the learning process and not simply be acted upon. (I encourage you at a later time to study chapters 11–14 in 1 Nephi and notice how the Spirit both asked questions and encouraged Nephi to “look” as active elements in the learning process.) (David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” address to CES religious educators, Jordan, UT, February 3, 2006)

2. This preparation was also emphasized as Nephi said, “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).

3. The purpose of this paper is to outline principles of learning and teaching that can be drawn from these teaching interactions. Thus a detailed list of suggestions for how to handle a situation where twenty learners all have a different desire is beyond the scope of this paper. Possible ideas include (1) having students work in pairs or groups to answer the questions they have, (2) prayerfully selecting one or two students and following the direction they wish to go, and (3) collecting a list of answers to the question “What do you want to learn?” and then following the Spirit in discerning which ones to answer first.

4. Compare with Joseph Smith’s statement to his mother: “I have learned for myself” (Joseph Smith—History 1:20).


6. For example, “Is there not a cause?” (1 Samuel 17:29), “the battle is the Lord’s” (1 Samuel 17:47), and “David hasted, and ran . . . to meet the Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:48).

7. In commenting on the teaching and learning in 1 Nephi 11–14, Bryce Dunford states that there is a “great difference . . . between telling students the answers and guiding them through the process of discovery so they find their own solutions. When Philip met a man from Ethiopia who was reading from the book of Isaiah, Philip asked him, ‘Underestad thou what thou readeast?’ ‘How can I, was the reply, ‘except some man should guide me?’ (Acts 8:30–31). Notice that he did not ask for someone to tell him; rather, he wanted someone to guide him to understanding. That is why students need teachers—not to tell them all the answers but rather to guide them to find the answers themselves. Doing so helps students own the truths they discover. They are then more likely to carry those principles and doctrines in their hearts as a permanent possession throughout their lives.” “Hey, Teacher, You’re in the Way,” Religious Educator 6, no. 3 (2005): 76.

8. These words include the words that they quote “the Lamb” as saying (e.g., 1 Nephi 13:34–37).

9. The angel spoke virtually the same amount of words per verse in 1 Nephi 13 as in 1 Nephi 14.

10. This would be following the pattern of teaching set forth by Elder David A. Bednar: “I think we talk too much because we believe talking and telling is teaching, and it’s not. To teach you first have to observe and listen so that you can discern and then know what to say.”


12. Eleanor Duckworth, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, writes, “If others tell us about the connections they have made, we can only understand them to the extent that we do the work of making these connections ourselves. Making connections must be a personal elaboration.” The Having of Wonderful Ideas (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University), 26. A question like “What beholdest thou?” allows students to create their own connections and meaning about what is being studied.

13. One example of this theory is Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. This theory posits that some tasks are too easy for learners and others are too difficult. The best tasks for increasing learning will be those that push learners to stretch beyond current abilities, but not so far that they have no chance of success. See Lev S. Vygotsky, Thought and Language, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1986).


15. Elder Richard G. Scott said, “There is no place in your teaching for gimmicks, fads, or bribery by favors or treats. Such activities produce no lasting motivation for personal growth nor any enduring beneficial results.” “Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led” (CES Symposium address, August 11, 1998).
After Nephi heard his father tell of his dream, Nephi too desired to “see, and hear, and know of these things.”
Helping Our Students Become Spiritually Self-Reliant

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After Nephi heard his father tell of his dream, Nephi explained that he too desired to “see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him” (1 Nephi 10:17). As a result of the messengers—both the angel and the Spirit—using fundamental teaching principles in a divine pattern, Nephi did see, hear, and know by the power of the Holy Ghost of those things that he desired. As we teach using the fundamental principles taught by the Spirit and the angel, we too can help our students to see, hear, and know by the power of the Holy Ghost those things which are of greatest value to them, thus helping them become spiritually self-reliant.

Spiritual Self-Reliance

Nephi’s dream came because he desired, as Joseph Smith and others did, to know for himself. This spiritual process of coming to know for oneself is taught throughout the scriptures. Adam and Eve, the brother of Jared, Peter, and many others sought to know for themselves and were granted that blessing.
The Prophet Joseph Smith, for example, was expert not only at teaching truth but in showing us how to obtain truth for ourselves and to have our own personal experiences with God, or to become spiritually self-reliant. Joseph Fielding McConkie expertly taught:

The prophetic efforts of Joseph Smith did not center in sharing his spiritual experiences but rather in the effort to qualify us to have our own spiritual experiences. The emphasis of his ministry was not on what he had seen but on what we could see. . . . Critics of the Church have made a lot of fuss about the fact that we have so few contemporary accounts of the First Vision. But that rather makes the point. Joseph was talking more about what we could do than what he had done. We have a dozen revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants that invite us to see God. Joseph invited us to check him by having our own Sacred Grove experience. The validity of an experience is if it can be repeated. A good seed not only bears good fruits but it always bears the same fruits—regardless of who plants it.1

Just as Joseph Smith had his own experience and then tried to show us how to have our own personal experiences, Nephi too was trying to have his own experience and then teach us, the readers, to do the same. The scripture could have simply read, “I desired to see, hear, and know the things of my father by the power of the Holy Ghost, and my desires were granted by the Lord.” Instead, however, we are taught by Nephi how to receive our own revelation, and by following his example, we then can help others receive theirs. Thus we are helping them become spiritually self-reliant. It seems that Nephi’s emphasis on the process he went through to see, hear, and know is equally as important as what he actually saw, heard, and knew. Is this not what we are also about—trying to have our own spiritual experiences and becoming personally self-reliant, acting rather than being acted upon, and then helping others do the same?

Like Nephi, our students need not only to be taught what the Holy Ghost is but to feel it as well. They must not only be told what the fruit is but taste it. Note that Nephi did not merely want to listen, look, and read; he wanted to hear, see, and know. It was Nephi’s desire to become spiritually self-reliant. Our students desire the same. It is our responsibility as teachers to help them get there. As religious educators, many of us are aware of the important role of the Spirit, the teacher, and the students in the teaching and learning process. We cannot underestimate the importance of any of these roles, but the role of the Spirit is especially critical to be understood as we, as teachers, try to better understand our role and the role of the students.
The Holy Ghost’s Role Is to Teach

It is interesting to note that Nephi, from the beginning, understood the role of the Holy Ghost in his own learning process. Fundamental to all gospel teaching is the recognition and understanding that the Holy Ghost truly is the teacher. In our efforts, therefore, to help our students see, hear, and know of the things of God, as Nephi desired, we must help our students recognize, as Nephi recognized, that true gospel learning is possible only through the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is not only present with the teacher who teaches by the Spirit but is also present with students and teaches them directly, as well as helping them teach each other and the teacher. In other words, the Spirit is the teacher in all gospel learning and does not need to come only through the teacher. I have observed three types of classroom experiences, with the last usually being the most effective. In the first experience, the teacher tries to teach students by the Spirit. In the second, the teacher and students focus on learning directly from the Spirit. In the third, teacher and students are all involved in both learning from the Spirit and in teaching each other in order that “all may be edified of all” (D&C 88:122).
In the beginning of the Book of Mormon, for example, Lehi is the teacher. Nephi recognizes the role of his father in teaching his family but still has a desire to learn for himself. In a sense, Lehi becomes a catalyst to Nephi’s ability to learn directly from the Spirit. The Lord does not need to go through Lehi, however, to teach Nephi what Nephi needs to know. After having his experience with the Spirit and angel, Nephi is better prepared to teach his brothers. Thus, in a sense, the Spirit taught Lehi, who inspired Nephi to learn for himself, which allowed him to be better prepared to teach his peers, or brothers, if they would be but willing to learn. As teachers we at times, even in our desire to teach by the Spirit, become an eclipse between the Spirit, who is the teacher, and the student—trying to teach by the Spirit but getting in the way of the Spirit actually teaching. In no way does this minimize the important role of the teacher in the classroom, but perhaps it reminds us of the true role of the teacher. It was Lehi who inspired Nephi to know for himself. Without the influence and guidance of Lehi, Nephi perhaps would not have known what he desired. Understanding the fundamental role of the Holy Ghost as the teacher will better help us help our students to use the Spirit as Nephi did to see, hear, and know by the power of the Holy Ghost—in other words, become spiritually self-reliant.

The Teacher’s Role Is to Help Students Act

Just as understanding the role of the Holy Ghost is critical to effectively helping students become spiritually self-reliant, so too is understanding the role of the gospel teacher. Elder David A. Bednar wisely explained: “The role of the teacher is to invite a learner to act in accordance with the truth taught by the Savior. A parent or teacher cannot push truth into the hearts of children and young people. Our best efforts can only bring the message of truth unto the heart (see 2 Nephi 33:1). Ultimately, a learner needs to exercise agency in righteousness and thereby invite the truth into the heart—and thereby seek to obtain the spiritual gift of understanding.”

This role of the teacher as described by Elder Bednar is a paradigm shift for many, but it is what the Brethren have constantly and consistently been teaching. Becoming proficient in our abilities as teachers to help our students effectively act upon the teachings of the Savior—and I would add, the Holy Ghost—can take effort on our part. This stretching of ourselves as teachers, however, for the benefit of the students, is what is being asked of us in these days.
Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught a group of professional religious educators: “We need to devote the same kind of effort toward improving our teaching abilities that a man or woman in any other profession would exert, be they physicians, or attorneys, or computer experts, or microbiologists. In the Church Educational System it is essential but not sufficient that we be good men or women—we must also be good at what we do. We must be very good. Our subject matter and the lives of our students demand that we give our very best effort in our teaching.”

Just as there are different ways to perform surgeries or different ways to practice law, there are different ways to teach. There is not one correct methodology, because there are different people, different doctrines, and different desired outcomes. Consider the various methodologies used by Christ. Perhaps some of Christ’s greatest teaching moments were when he said little at all: at his birth, at his death, and in his resurrection. Consider the principles and doctrines learned at each of these occasions. Yes, Christ taught using parables, but he also taught with object lessons, stories, questions, lectures, and silence. Consider the many teaching methodologies Christ used on the cross!

Christ himself taught in various ways, but one consistency in how he taught was that regardless of what he taught, he always required the individual to act. Why did he allow or invite the man to move the stone in the raising of Lazarus? Why didn’t he move it himself? Why did he have the little children open their mouths and teach things previously unknown? Why did he use the fish of the young man or draw on the sand and talk with the woman at the well and allow her to talk and ask questions? For that matter, why do we have a prophet on the earth? Why do we have callings? Why do we teach when Christ could do it all himself? He desires us to become like him—which requires action, learning by faith, and asking and answering questions of each other. Indeed, Christ is the great example of one who is helping us to see, hear, know, and feel. He wants us to become like him, he who walked among men healing the sick, causing the lame to walk, asking questions, and going to his father. He was a teacher, a mentor, a guide, a friend.

In secular terms, much of what Christ did would be titled “active student learning,” but it was much more than that. Like the Lord, we are concerned not with merely being active or convincing but rather with converting, and that requires methodology consistent with the teachings of the Lord. It requires our students to learn by faith.
As has been the case with the other fundamental principles, learning by faith is demonstrated clearly by the angel in Nephi’s vision. In fact, the angel uses a variety of methods to help Nephi learn by faith, to act and not be acted upon. Elder Bednar recently encouraged all religious educators to study chapters 11–14 of 1 Nephi and “notice how the spirit both asked questions and encouraged Nephi to ‘look’ as active elements in the learning process.”

Asking Questions

It is a pattern of the Lord throughout the scriptures to ask questions of his children. The first words the Spirit says to Nephi are in the form of a question: “What desirést thou?” (1 Nephi 11:2). Nephi states that he “desir[es] to behold the things which [his] Father saw” (v. 3), to which the Spirit responds, “Believést thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?” (v. 4). There is no question that the Spirit knew the answer to this question before he asked, but he, in the very asking of the question, invites Nephi to respond, thus helping him exercise his faith and exercise his agency. Nephi is now involved, and the Spirit has the opportunity to rejoice in Nephi’s response.

The Spirit’s next question, then, will lead to Nephi’s ability to interpret what his father saw and to see, hear, and know for himself. The Spirit asks, “What desirést thou?” (v. 10). And again Nephi has the chance and takes the opportunity to respond: “To know the interpretation thereof” (v. 11). Note that neither the Spirit nor the angel gives him the interpretation. Nephi, rather, is guided through the process and not only comes up with the interpretation on his own but goes deeper into the feeling and thus the conversion process. He states, “Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things” (v. 22). Only after Nephi comes up with his own conclusion does the Spirit testify with Nephi and confirm his interpretation, but he adds his own feelings of confirmation as if they have both now experienced it for themselves. This is more than a true-false test or multiple-choice level of thinking; Nephi understands the tree of life and feels the love of God beyond cognitive ability. It is as if Nephi, like Lehi, has partaken of the fruit for himself, and it too filled his soul with exceedingly great joy. Indeed, the things of the Spirit are often caught, not taught.

Note the other questions asked of Nephi in this experience:
Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken? (1 Nephi 11:4)

What desirest thou? (v. 10)

Nephi, what beholdest thou? (v. 14)

Knowest thou the condescension of God? (v. 16)

Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? (v. 21)

Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? (1 Nephi 12:9)

What beholdest thou? (1 Nephi 13:2)

Knowest thou the meaning of the book? (v. 21)

Rememberest thou the covenants of the Father unto the house of Israel? (1 Nephi 14:8)

These are thought-provoking, personalized, applicable, and covenant- and doctrine-oriented questions that allow the angel to evaluate where Nephi is, help Nephi evaluate himself, and see what is important to Nephi and the angel. The angel was able to take Nephi where he was, allow Nephi to learn from his own responses, and then guide him to learning even greater truths. The questions asked are formative, with the seeming intention of helping Nephi to see, hear, and know for himself as part of a larger learning process, not summative, as a test question with a regurgitated right or wrong answer. The questions allowed Nephi to feel as he explained and to learn for himself during the process of responding, and they allowed the Spirit to confirm to him truth which would eventually help him to act. The questions seemed to open Nephi’s eyes, heart, and mind. He was seeing, hearing, and knowing for himself as a direct result of being asked the questions. How would Nephi know that he knew for himself from the Spirit had he not been given the opportunity to respond personally to these questions? Each question required him to participate and learn by faith and be active in the learning process. Elder Richard G. Scott taught, “Appropriate questions lead a student to think about doctrine, appreciate it, and understand how to apply it in his or her personal life.”

A more careful study of these questions shows the importance of not only open-ended questions such as “What do you see?” and “What beholdest thou?” but other questions that are very specific and doctrinally oriented. Those asked of Nephi were not mere fact questions but were questions of import to him as a learner and to all of us. They had application to him at that time in his life and would guide him in the future. The doctrine of the condescension of God, the tree of life, the Twelve Apostles, the book, and the
covenants all have eternally significant purposes that the angel knew Nephi needed for him and others to obtain salvation.

The angel’s questions also kept Nephi personally invested in the learning experience. Not only was he required to be in attendance but he knew he would be expected to be an active participant. It is difficult in the classroom to have all of our students be accountable for the questions being asked, but there are a variety of methodologies that allow for greater personal, one-on-one experiences for our students. Although the exact methodology may not be the same, the principles of accountability and student involvement can still be accomplished. Our students must be acting and not merely being acted upon. Expecting our students to actively participate in class by answering questions, whether voluntarily or by being called upon, posed by teachers, other students, and especially the Lord enables the Lord to teach them and give them the blessings associated with acting on truth.

**Inviting to Look**

To look is a simple act of obedience with great consequences. In 1 Nephi we are reminded of the house of Israel and the negative consequences of those who do not look “because of the simpleness of the way” (1 Nephi 17:41). We are also reminded by Nephi that those of the children of Israel who did look to Christ “might live, even unto that life which is eternal” (Helaman 8:15). It is interesting to note that the humble not only look but they look to God. This is what the angel invited Nephi to do—to look to God. This is what President Boyd K. Packer invites us to do as teachers—to help our student “look into the eternities.” Nephi’s simple statement “He said unto me: Look! And I looked” (1 Nephi 11:24) is impressive. It says much about Nephi as a learner, yet the invitation from the angel is critical. The invitation to look allows Nephi to act in faith and not be acted upon. As stated previously, the angel invites Nephi, “Look and behold the condescension of God” (v. 26). He allows Nephi to learn for himself by looking. Note that the angel does not tell Nephi what the condescension of God is, but rather, through the invitation, allows Nephi to learn for himself. The angel does not tell Nephi what he sees but allows Nephi to have his own experience looking and reporting and learning, and then the angel follows with clarification, testimony, and further questions. Nephi looks and beholds and sees throughout all three of the chapters. The angel, although at times doing much of the talking, is constantly inviting and asking Nephi to be a serious participant in the learning. For in
Helping Our Students Become Spiritually Self-Reliant

reality, there is no teaching if there is no learning. It is clear that the angel is teaching Nephi the subject matter, not teaching the subject matter to Nephi. It is noteworthy that at the beginning of Nephi’s experience, after Nephi was asked by the Spirit “What desirest thou?” and he responded, “To know the interpretation thereof,” the Spirit told him to look. Nephi instinctively looked “as if to look upon him” (v. 12), but he states, “I saw him not; for he had gone from before my presence” (v. 12). The Spirit gets out of the way, steps to the side, so to speak, and allows Nephi to see for himself. The angel does step in shortly after, but during this entire chapter it becomes clear to the reader that it is Nephi who is experiencing and looking as invited by the angel, and the angel does very little instructing, except that based upon what Nephi sees. Later, the angel does become more of a focal point in the story, but not until Nephi has become completely and actively involved in the learning process and has shared what he has learned.

Too often, we as teachers, as stated earlier, even with the best of intentions, become a spiritual eclipse in the lives of these students. If we are merely filling buckets and talking the entire time, giving information that must be learned for a test, we are giving little time in class for the students to be taught by the Spirit. In a sense, we are baptizing by water but not with the Holy Ghost. Just as John the Baptist decreased so that the Savior could increase, so it is with us and the Holy Ghost.

President Hinckley, quoting Phillips Brooks, made the observation “How carefully most men creep into nameless graves, while now and again one or two forget themselves into immortality.” We must recognize our true role as teachers and be willing to allow the students to hear, see, and know by the power of the Holy Ghost. Elder Bednar asks: “Are you and I agents who act and seek learning by faith, or are we waiting to be taught and acted upon? Are the students we serve acting and seeking to learn by faith, or are they waiting to be taught and acted upon? Are you and I encouraging and helping those whom we serve to seek learning by faith? You and I and our students are to be anxiously engaged in asking, seeking, and knocking.”

Through asking questions and having Nephi look, not only did Nephi see, hear, and know for himself by the power of the Holy Spirit the things which his father saw, but he also felt. How else would he know that the tree of life was “the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things” (1 Nephi 11:22)?
What a difference it makes individually and with students for teachers to ask them the questions of the heart and look for those which go beyond knowledge to understanding. Rather than asking simple fact questions about Joseph Smith, for example, in teaching the introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants, perhaps a teacher could ask, “Who in here will recount the experience Joseph had in the Sacred Grove and testify of how you know it to be true?” After guiding a scripturally focused discussion with students about the Atonement, perhaps a teacher could ask the class, “Who in here learned something for themselves about the Atonement that was not necessarily written on the page or spoken by another member of the class, including myself?” As students are trained to pay attention to the teachings of the Holy Ghost in their personal learning experience as Nephi was trained by the angel and then are asked to express what they have learned, with the expectation that they have learned and can express to a degree what they have learned, when the experience is not too personal, and then receive positive reinforcement from the teacher and others members of the class, they will be more likely to look and see for themselves and thus become spiritually self-reliant.

Note that as the angel spoke with Nephi, he expected Nephi to answer. The angel asked, “What seest thou?” not “Did you see anything?” In our classrooms, then, rather than asking, “Is there anyone in here who can testify?” ask instead, “Who in here will testify?” Rather than asking, “Did anyone in here learn something for themselves?” ask instead, “Who in here learned something for themselves?” Asking the second type of question shows the students your high expectations of them as learners as well as your recognition that as they follow the pattern shown by the angel to Nephi, they too have received and can testify of these experiences.

This answer goes beyond mental cognition to understanding and feeling. Elder Scott taught: “You can learn vitally important things by what you hear and see and especially by what you feel, as prompted by the Holy Ghost. Most individuals limit their learning primarily to what they hear or what they read. Be wise. Develop the skill of learning by what you see and particularly by what the Holy Ghost prompts you to feel. Consciously seek to learn by what you see and feel, and your capacity to do so will expand through consistent practice. Ask in faith for such help. Live to be worthy of it. Seek to recognize it.”

Our students must understand that there is a process to receiving revelation and becoming converted, and this requires obedience and faith, which includes action. Through his faithful obedience, Nephi not only received
what he desired to see, hear, and know, but also seemingly learned by what he felt. This learning can take place only as we follow the example of the Spirit and invite our students to use their agency as a critical key to the learning process.

**Training Our Students in Their Role to Act**

With this in mind, as teachers we must understand that each student is endowed with his or her own agency to act or to be acted upon. We cannot dismiss the fact that Nephi was critical in his own learning process, as were Laman and Lemuel in theirs. Of himself Nephi writes, “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). On the other hand, Laman and Lemuel believed that “the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us” (1 Nephi 15:9). Each of these individuals was raised in the same family, by the same father and mother, and in other similar circumstances. Each had his own agency to choose whether to act or to be acted upon. It is difficult, if not impossible, to know for sure what causes Nephi to react differently than his brothers did from the beginning, allowing him to have this dream, but we do know that it was a conscientious choice of Nephi to act and therefore receive. A teacher may be as close to the character of Christ as possible, have perfect expectations, know and live the doctrine, and have the best methodology, but ultimately it is up to the student to learn. Elder Bednar reminds us: “When a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth [the message] unto the hearts of the children of men’ (2 Nephi 33:1). Please notice how the power of the Spirit carries the message *unto* but not necessarily *into* the heart. A teacher can explain, demonstrate, persuade, and testify, and do so with great spiritual power and effectiveness. Ultimately, however, the content of a message and the witness of the Holy Ghost penetrate into the heart only if a receiver allows them to enter.”

It is not, however, enough to simply say that they have their agency and leave the responsibility for growth to the student. They must be taught correctly in order to act wisely, and this involves training and teaching on the part of the teacher. Alma taught that the Lord gave Adam and Eve commandments “after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil” (Alma 12:32; emphasis added). As teachers, we must do as Joseph Smith taught and “teach them correct principles, [even those of
receiving spiritual knowledge and conversion] and [let them] govern themselves.” Our students must know that it takes effort on their part and, like Nephi, a willingness to pay the price. President Henry B. Eyring reflected: “It has been my experience in life that most of my gospel teachers didn’t prepare me quite for the effort that the prize takes. . . . I have tasted sweetness in the scriptures, but it never came easily . . . and I know that the price of getting that sweet taste of the scriptures is tremendous effort. You better teach me that it takes effort.”

It is clear in 1 Nephi that both the angel and the Spirit required Nephi to put forth effort, and Nephi knew of this requirement. Nephi came prepared. He recognized the role of the Spirit in teaching and desired himself to be spiritually self-reliant. He had lived a worthy life of obedience, he had had great and correct expectations of the Lord and of revelation and of himself, he listened to his father and understood his language and the doctrines of the gospel, and he was desirous to look and listen and ask questions. He was willing to work. President Heber J. Grant, speaking on the purpose of Church welfare, instructed: “Our primary purpose was to set up, in so far as it might be possible, a system under which the curse of idleness would be done away with, the evils of a dole abolished, and independence, industry, thrift and self-respect be once more established amongst our people. The aim of the Church is to help the people to help themselves. Work is to be re-enthroned as the ruling principle of the lives of our Church membership.”

It is not good enough to say that our students have their agency and therefore can choose to listen or not. Just as with the Church welfare system, there must be opportunities for growth provided. There must be training and effort on the part of the leaders and teachers to help those receiving the assistance to use their agency wisely. Ultimately, it is up to the individual, but it is amazing what powerful impact one teacher, such as the angel or the Spirit with Nephi, can have on an individual learner.

One of the best ways a teacher can help students use their agency is to invite them to act. For example, asking students to raise their hands, Elder Scott teaches us, shows the Holy Ghost that that student is ready to learn. Teach this simple concept to the students, and invite them to do so. Teaching students the importance of writing in regard to revelation and then inviting them to write, and acknowledging them when they do so, is a great invitation that allows the students to act and not be acted upon. Creating an environment in the classroom where students can ask questions, testify, comment,
and participate actively, as well as inviting all to participate, allows the students to act. Many students need simple training and invitations in order for them to use their agency to act wisely.

**The Power of Love**

Paul wrote to the Saints at Corinth:

> Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
>
> And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.
>
> And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1–3)

I would add, “Though I have all doctrinal knowledge, all pedagogy, the environment set, the true character of Christ in every way imaginable, though I have my PowerPoint slides, and knowledge of language and history and facts galore, if I have not charity as a teacher, I am nothing.”

In speaking of the ideal teacher, President Packer reminisced, “I noticed that he has a sincere compassion for his students, that he knows them and loves them, and he cannot help himself. And the less they deserve his love, the more of it there seems to be sponsored within him.”

I believe that love is the greatest method of all—for what grabs the attention of youth, even mankind, greater and with more enduring significance than honest love? It wasn’t the methodology practiced and perfected which made Christ so effective in his teaching the souls of man, but rather it was his profound love which inspired the method suitable for each case. In fact, understanding the who and the what, when motivated by love, automatically presents the perfect method suited to that individual or group at that time. It was Christ who laid the groundwork through perfect love for perfect teaching. Through his pure love he bids us to come unto him. It is not some contrived method per se but a system of precepts and principles aided by pure love. He who knows all—all people, all doctrine, all laws, all methods—also knows best how to save us all. Christ was the great teacher, and his teaching was inspired by love for all men. President Hinckley conveyed, “I hope that you will cultivate in your hearts not only a love for the Savior of whom you bear testimony, but also a deep love for those you teach.” Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf recently reminded us: “Not all teachers are the same, nor should
they be. We each have different talents, skills, and abilities. We need to celebrate and take advantage of these differences rather than force everyone into the same pattern. But there are some things we all should have in common: we should live righteous lives, love our students, love the gospel, love the Lord, and teach by the Spirit.”

Conclusion

As we recognize the role of the Holy Ghost as the teacher and our complete dependence on him, and as we strive to help our students achieve their great potential by acting and not being acted upon, motivated by the pure love of Christ, they, like Nephi, will see, hear, and know by the power of the Holy Ghost those things which they desire. This generation of youth has been reserved for this time, as Nephi was reserved for his. The doctrines and principles revealed in this dispensation through the standard works and the words of the modern prophets, when understood, will change the attitude and behavior of our students. As we encourage our students to act in faith, as was the case with the messenger and Nephi, our students will become spiritually self-reliant—seeing, hearing, and knowing by the power of the Holy Ghost for themselves—and will help others do the same. They then will take upon themselves the role of the teacher, and, like Nephi to his brothers and future learners, strive with all of their hearts, exhorting all to come unto Christ (see Moroni 10:32).

Notes

2. David A. Bednar, Increase in Learning (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 70; emphasis in original.
7. Jacob 4:14 offers a description of what these people become because of their unbelief.
13. Quoted by John Taylor in “The Organization of the Church,” *Millennial Star*, November 15, 1851, 339; also quoted in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 284.
Laman and Lemuel’s approach to life repeatedly demonstrated a rash, reactionary mentality. When things got rough, they responded with murmuring and misplaced aggression.
Any books and papers have been written on what Nephi experienced as a learner under the tutelage of the Spirit and the angel in 1 Nephi 11–14. Ironically, his experience as a student on the mountaintop was immediately followed by many opportunities for him to become a teacher in the wilderness to his family. Nephi’s interactions with the Spirit and the angel likely served as more than just a vision and discovery of eternal truths; his divine tutelage could also have served as a teacher-training experience. This idea leads us to ask the following questions: (1) What information exists in the chapters immediately following Nephi’s vision that reveals what kind of learners Laman and Lemuel were compared to Nephi? (2) Is there any textual evidence in chapter 15 that Nephi employed the same methods and approaches with his brothers that had been so effectively used on him by his own heavenly tutors? (3) What can we discover about learning and living by comparing and contrasting Nephi and his brothers through their wilderness wanderings in chapter 16? And finally, (4) what implications might these chapters and their principles hold for teachers and students of the gospel in our day?

Nephi: An Ideal Teacher of Less-Than-Ideal Students

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The Role of the Student: Comparing Nephi with His Brothers in Chapter 15

What kind of a learner was Nephi? How well did Laman and Lemuel fulfill their roles as learners? All three of them were students in the same “classroom” of 1 Nephi 8 with father Lehi as their teacher and his dream as the subject matter. Nephi had a drastically different student experience than his two brothers did. Hearing the words of his father caused Nephi to magnify his role as a learner. It was not good enough for Nephi to hear about his father’s experience. Instead, he stated, “I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things” (1 Nephi 10:17). A major key that unlocked his role as a learner was revealed in the next phrase of this verse: “by the power of the Holy Ghost.” Nephi was not just entertained, intellectually stimulated, or emotionally moved by Lehi’s role as a teacher. Nephi recognized the true source of Lehi’s teachings and the power that he felt as his father taught. Another key was that he desired to know those same things for himself, from the same source from which his father had received them. He also believed “that the Lord was able to make them known unto [him]” (1 Nephi 11:1). But he was not content to sit idly and wait for revelation to come to him. As he “sat pondering in [his] heart [he] was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (v. 1). By appropriately fulfilling his own role as a learner, he invited the Holy Spirit to fulfill his role as the ultimate teacher. Chapters 11 through 14 contain the rich reward for Nephi’s effort and faith.

What about Laman and Lemuel as learners? Their response to Lehi’s teaching was not revealed until after Nephi had finished his vision and returned to the camp in chapter 15. How excited Nephi must have been returning to the tent of his father. Imagine his joy at knowing he had not only experienced “the things which [his] father [had seen]” (1 Nephi 11:3) but also gained additional insights into his father’s dream. Consider how frustrating it must have been for Nephi to be welcomed into camp by his brothers “disputing one with another concerning the things which [Lehi] had spoken unto them” (1 Nephi 15:2). Laman and Lemuel had failed to hear or recognize the whisperings of the Spirit during their father’s teachings. Having cut themselves off from the Spirit as their guide, they were left with only a few alternatives: (1) go to Lehi and ask follow-up questions on what he had taught, (2) discuss with each other what Lehi’s words meant to them, (3) argue with each other about what Lehi had said, or (4) totally ignore and disregard what Lehi had said. Unfortunately, they chose the third option. Nephi instantly recognized
the source of their problem, that “they being hard in their hearts . . . did not look unto the Lord as they ought” (v. 3).

Nephi’s mountaintop experience would have been exhausting in every way, but seeing his brothers’ lack of faith and their disputations must have taken an additional toll on him. He gave one short line in verse 6 to hint that he was overwhelmed: “after I had received strength I spake unto my brethren” (emphasis added). And with that statement, Nephi began what would prove to be a mostly frustrating series of interactions with his brothers as their teacher.

Nephi began his “class” similarly to how the Spirit had begun with him, by asking a few questions. His brothers’ responses helped Nephi determine their level of readiness to learn. Nephi used what he had observed in his students’ behavior and “[desired] to know of them the cause of their disputation” (v. 6). Nephi modeled for us a wonderful example of not jumping to conclusions about students’ behavior until they have been given a chance to account for their own actions. Unfortunately, Laman and Lemuel’s response in verse 7 revealed a complete lack of understanding of Lehi’s teachings. Nephi’s logical follow-up question reiterated his own reflexive reaction as a learner: “Have ye inquired of the Lord?” (v. 8). Even though he was asking a question, Nephi was also teaching by example when he humbly acknowledged the true source of learning with his simple, faith-filled question. Therefore, he was hoping that his students had done that which continually came so instinctively to him. Laman and Lemuel’s answer proved to be a significant turning point for Nephi as an instructor. They said, “We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us” (v. 9).

That answer exposed the major chasm between Nephi and his brothers as learners. Nephi had used his agency to act; he consistently sought to learn “by study and also by faith” (DC 88:118). Laman and Lemuel, however, regularly waited “to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:14). Because of their lack of faith and action, Nephi could not use many of the more powerful teaching techniques that had been so effectively used on him by the Spirit and by the angel in his own learning. Many religious educators today might consider Nephi’s teaching techniques with Laman and Lemuel less effective. However, Laman and Lemuel’s reactions to Nephi’s teaching forces us to acknowledge that students’ willingness to appropriately fulfill their role in learning has a significant effect on both what and how a teacher teaches.
A final observation on Laman and Lemuel as learners might be helpful to contextualize what skills and willingness they brought with them to Nephi’s “classroom.” There is no textual evidence in the Book of Mormon that Laman and Lemuel ever read from the brass plates or made any records of their own proceedings. We never find them reading from the scriptural record. Instead, Nephi used phrases like, “I did read many things to them, which were engraven upon the plates of brass, that they might know concerning the doings of the Lord in other lands. . . . And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses. . . . I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah” (1 Nephi 19:22–23; emphasis added). These plates were written in Egyptian, while they spoke Hebrew (see 1 Nephi 1:2; Mosiah 1:4). It would have required extra effort on their part to master scripture reading and writing. It is possible that Laman and Lemuel read the scriptures, but Nephi chose not to mention it. Another possible scenario is that Laman and Lemuel were capable but simply chose not to read the plates. This would be similar to many people today who know how to read but choose not to spend any time in the scriptures for themselves. One more potential scenario is that Laman and Lemuel had never taken the time and effort to learn the language of scriptures. Whatever the real situation was, it is apparent that Laman and Lemuel relied on Nephi to read and interpret the scriptures for them.

Two additional factors later in the Nephite and Lamanite story may help inform us on this issue: (1) Omni 1:17 reveals the consequences of people who do not have scriptures or who do not use them. The early Lamanites fulfill all of these results perfectly—they had many wars and serious contentions (e.g., Jacob 7:24; Omni 1:10; Words of Mormon 1:13; Mosiah 9:13–18; Alma 24:20), their language had become corrupted (Omni 1:17; Mosiah 24:4), and they denied the existence of their creator (Mosiah 10:11–12). If Laman and Lemuel had valued the words on the brass plates, they could have made their own copy of the record before Nephi left in 2 Nephi 5:5. Instead, their tradition was that Nephi had stolen the plates from them (see Mosiah 10:16). (2) Consider how other writers in the Book of Mormon clearly stated that they had been “taught in all the language of [their] fathers (Mosiah 1:2; see also 1 Nephi 1:2–3; Enos 1:1). Based on many clues of how sluggishly Laman and Lemuel fulfilled their role as learners in most other settings, it would not be surprising to find that they had simply refused to put forth the effort to master the skill of reading scriptures and thus had to rely on Nephi
and Lehi to read from the plates for them. A lack of scriptural literacy would greatly affect their ability to learn and would help explain more clearly why Nephi chose to read and tell them so much rather than let them participate and discover more truths for themselves.

**Nephi’s Teaching Topics and Techniques in 1 Nephi 15**

Nephi’s heavenly tutelage was very interactive. He and his heavenly teachers effectively used various levels of questioning to help him discover or understand many eternal truths. As a teacher of Laman and Lemuel, however, Nephi rarely chose to repeat this collaborative pattern. Once Nephi diagnosed Laman and Lemuel’s lack of faith and their unwillingness to ask the Lord for help, he abandoned the interactive teaching techniques with which he had begun. From that point forward, Nephi’s teaching became predominantly one-sided, relying heavily on telling them what everything meant. In 1 Nephi 15:9–20, Nephi asked seven questions, none of which Laman and Lemuel answered because they were all rhetorical in nature. Nephi hinted that his initial speech was much longer than the twelve verses we have in the record. He used phrases such as “I, Nephi, spake much unto them concerning these things” (v. 19) and “I did rehearse unto them the words of Isaiah. . . . I did speak many words unto my brethren” (v. 20). Rather than asking them what they understood, Nephi simply told them “this is what our father meaneth” (v. 17). Thankfully, even with students who struggle, an inspired teacher like Nephi can still have a positive impact. This is illustrated when Nephi wrote, “They were pacified and did humble themselves before the Lord” (v. 20). This pacified attitude led them to interact once again with Nephi in verse 21.

What might religious educators today learn from Nephi’s choice to deliver such lengthy, one-sided lectures? Ideally, his brothers would not have relied so heavily on him for their learning. They had the capacity to eventually experience the same vision he had received from heaven. However, Laman and Lemuel seemed unwilling to exercise their agency and faith to the required degree for that to happen. For them as learners, the first small step was to gain some humility and incrementally increase their faith. As we saw in verse 20, Nephi’s technique seems to have been successful in helping them take those first small steps as learners.

Building on their foundation of basic humility, Laman and Lemuel started to take some responsibility for their learning by asking specific questions about four of the objects in Lehi’s dream (vv. 21, 23, 26, and 31). In
responding to their questions, Nephi used the phrase “And I said unto them” (or some variation of it) seven times (vv. 22, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 32) and “I did exhort them” twice in verse 25. He finished with, “And thus I spake unto my brethren. Amen” (v. 36). Once again, Nephi clearly dominated the “talk time” and made most, if not all, of the symbolic connections for them. The one constant for them as learners seemed to be that they were willing to listen to Nephi at that time.

Chapter 16 opens with Laman and Lemuel’s reaction to all of Nephi’s words in the previous chapter. They were overwhelmed by his teachings in their initial response (see v. 1). After giving them two more verses of explanation, Nephi finished by saying he “did exhort [his] brethren, with all diligence, to keep the commandments of the Lord” (v. 4). The happy ending of this learning experience is that Laman and Lemuel “did humble themselves before the Lord” (v. 5). Unfortunately, their humility proved to be slowly gained and quickly lost.

Out of the “Classroom” of Chapter 15 and into the “Laboratories” of Chapter 16

The more traditional teacher-student interactions between Nephi and his brothers are replaced in the rest of chapter 16 with the family breaking camp to follow the directions of the Liahona through the wilderness. Even though there is very little direct dialogue recorded between Nephi and his brothers in this chapter, their responses to life lessons reveal a great deal about them as students. By analyzing how they responded in life’s “laboratory,” we can learn much about them that helps clarify and give context to their behavior in the more traditional learning settings with Nephi.

Laman and Lemuel’s approach to life repeatedly demonstrated a rash, reactionary mentality. If things were going well, then they were happy. When things got rough, however, they responded with murmuring and misplaced aggression rather than doing that which might have improved their situation. This “victim-by-choice” versus “agent” disparity between Nephi and his brothers was clearly revealed when things first got rough in the family’s journey. Nephi broke his bow in verse 18. Laman and Lemuel became “angry with [Nephi] because of the loss of [his] bow.” The unwritten implication is that they were completely relying on Nephi to provide food for the group since their bows had “lost their springs” (see v. 21), and he had let them down. Under normal circumstances, it would be reasonable to expect the older brothers to be the ones responsible for providing food for the family.
Rather than finding a solution to their problem or discussing their options, they chose to react with anger against Nephi. This “laboratory of life” crisis revealed another manifestation of their “victim-by-choice” mentality that seems consistent with their approach to learning in their “classroom” settings. In chapter 15 and most other formal gospel-learning settings, Laman and Lemuel consistently relied on Nephi to figure out the answers and then “feed them” what they needed spiritually.

Their murmuring intensified once they all returned to camp empty-handed: “Laman and Lemuel . . . did begin to murmur exceedingly, because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness; and also my father began to murmur against the Lord his God” (v. 20). Some of Nephi’s most powerful teaching took place by his example in that critical moment. He chose to act rather than passively wait for a solution to appear by complaining about their situation. He made a new bow and an arrow and then asked his father where he should go to find food. That was an outward manifestation of how Nephi repeatedly fulfilled his role as an active learner. He did all in his power to solve problems while trusting completely in the Lord, whether he was seeking revelation or seeking food.

Nephi’s faithful example and words of encouragement engendered a fresh humility in the entire group (see v. 24), even with unfulfilled hunger. When he finally returned with food, “how great was their joy!” (v. 32). Unfortunately, their teachability and gratitude only lasted until the next trial in their journey, when Ishmael died at Nahom (v. 34). This experience again revealed a major flaw in Laman and Lemuel as learners. They were turned inward so much that they never seemed to notice that Nephi was suffering through the same trials they were facing. He had likely been just as hungry as they were when his bow broke, and Ishmael was his father-in-law too. Laman and Lemuel’s self-absorbed approach to life reflects learners in formal classroom settings who harden their hearts and limit what a teacher can do.

After Ishmael’s death, Laman and Lemuel’s murmuring intensified to the point of their saying, “Let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren” (v. 37). What an ironic statement! Since they were unwilling to act for themselves, Nephi had been providing for them physically and spiritually. Only the voice of the Lord in verse 39 could subdue them to where they “did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish” (v. 39).
One of the potential bright spots for Laman and Lemuel was what Nephi mentioned as a time when they did “wade through much affliction in the wilderness” as well as “bear their journeyings without murmurings” (1 Nephi 17:1–2). Unfortunately, they spent eight years in that wilderness covering a distance that should have taken them far less time to travel. Alma gave us his thoughts on why the trip took so long: “Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions” (Alma 37:42). This same problem was manifest in their learning. Because of faithlessness and transgressions, Laman and Lemuel took much longer than necessary to learn the lessons the Lord had in store for them.

Ultimately, Laman and Lemuel’s periods of humility and faith decreased in power and frequency until the brothers grew completely hardened and plotted to kill Nephi (see 2 Nephi 4:13–14; 5:1–4). Rather than allowing them to kill him, Nephi chose to follow the promptings of the Lord. He took those who would follow him and permanently left his brothers (2 Nephi 5:5–6). He had done all he could for them as a brother and a teacher while still respecting their agency. Nephi had other, more receptive students to teach, whose willingness to learn allowed him to teach beyond rudimentary levels. As readers of his words in the latter days, we too are a part of Nephi’s “classroom.” If we fulfill our roles in learning, we will be blessed by Nephi’s powerful teachings that include some of the most sublime doctrines and principles ever recorded (see 2 Nephi 5–33).

Implications and Teaching Ideas for Religious Educators Today

Let us now analyze these stories in the broader context of the plan of salvation and look for implications, teaching approaches, and applications for us in our roles as learners and teachers today.

1. Knowing that the Book of Mormon was written for our day, it is important for us to recognize the powerful contrast between the learning and living approaches of Nephi and his brothers. As with all good people in the scriptures, Nephi provided us with a powerful type of the Savior, while Laman and Lemuel repeatedly exemplified the opposite. Jesus never murmured or waited for others to do his work for him. Conversely, Satan wanted all the rewards without paying the necessary price. Then, when things did not go his way, he chose the path of murmuring and feeling wronged rather than
Nephi modeled for us a wonderful example of not jumping to conclusions about students’ behavior until they have been given a chance to account for their own actions.
taking responsibility and making proper adjustments that could have led to his eternal happiness.

2. The contrast of learning roles carries many implications for religious educators today. Much of what teachers do in the classroom is determined by how well their students fulfill their roles. How frustrating it must have been for Nephi to have so much to share with his brothers and yet be forced to go back to the most elementary teachings while using the most basic of techniques! If we help students see these chapters as a handbook for becoming more like the Savior in their role as learners, they will be more likely to shun the temptation to shirk that role and less likely to follow the path taken by Laman and Lemuel as learners. Teachers can often activate the role of their students with simple reminders to consider whose example they want to follow. This will help invite greater revelation in their individual and collective learning, both in classroom settings and in the “laboratories” of their lives.

3. Laman and Lemuel repeatedly went back to feeling wronged or acted upon, both in their learning and their living. A simple object lesson that teachers could use to illustrate this approach to living and learning is a thermometer. If it is hot, the thermometer reacts by going up. When it is cold, the thermometer drops accordingly. Watching Laman and Lemuel throughout the story is much like watching a thermometer through changing climates. Conversely, an object that symbolizes Nephi’s approach to life and learning is a thermostat, which has the ability to read its surrounding conditions and cause desired changes on that environment. Nephi repeatedly recognized poor conditions around him and used his agency to try to improve the situation rather than feeling powerless and offended by it. This action-oriented approach was reflected in the examples of his life and in the way he tried to influence Laman and Lemuel for good in his teaching.

4. The end of the story for Nephi as a student of heavenly tutors and as a teacher of his people is quite remarkable. He began his life listening to his father and believing his words. He paid the price to be able to read and write scriptures in the Egyptian language. He learned to hear, recognize, and follow the voice of the Spirit guiding him throughout the beginning chapters of his story. He progressed to conversing directly with the Spirit and with an angel in chapters 11–14. Fast-forward to 2 Nephi 29 and we find Nephi acting as a scribe for the Lord. In 2 Nephi 31, he is hearing and recording not only the voice of the Son (vv. 12, 14) but also the voice of the Father (vv. 11, 15). What
a remarkable finish to a remarkable life as a learner and teacher to be tutored by the Savior and Heavenly Father directly!

Conclusion

All of us have the capacity to become more like Nephi in our roles as learners. Unfortunately, we also have the capacity to become more like Laman and Lemuel in that same role. Perhaps helping our students see this stark contrast might be enough for many to make improvements in the way they choose to learn in our classrooms and live their lives. Seeing Nephi’s faithful action as a symbol of the Savior’s perfection might be the motivation that some students need to stop sitting back and waiting for teachers to do all the work. At that point, they may choose to more fully engage in their study of the gospel with the help of the Holy Ghost and inspired teachers and thus progress in their appropriate use of agency. When more of our students do this, our abilities to more powerfully fulfill our teaching roles will increase.

Note

1. The exact nature of the “language” of all the texts written on the brass plates continues to be debated. Part of the challenge is that nowadays we differentiate between language and script. For example, a number of different European languages are written with the same Roman script. Recognizing and reading the script does not guarantee that one knows and understands the language. When Benjamin indicates that Lehi had “been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could read these engravings” (Mosiah 1:4), he is likely referring to both language and script. However, as Brian Stubbs has observed: “Whether it was the Egyptian language or Hebrew written in Egyptian script is again not clear. Egyptian was widely used in Lehi’s day, but because poetic writings are skewed in translation, because prophetic writings were generally esteemed as sacred, and because Hebrew was the language of the Israelites in the seventh century B.C., it would have been unusual for the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah—substantially preserved on the brass plates (1 Ne. 5:15; 19:23)—to have been translated from Hebrew into a foreign tongue at this early date. Thus, Hebrew portions written in Hebrew script, Egyptian portions in Egyptian script, and Hebrew portions in Egyptian script are all possibilities” for how various texts were represented on the brass plates. Brian D. Stubbs, “Book of Mormon Language,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:180.
During his discourse, King Benjamin tells the people that the knowledge he will share with them comes by revelation.
Preparing Students to Receive Revelation: Insights from the Book of Mormon

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How satisfying would it be to teach this year in a way that your students—even just a handful of them—are led to receive life-altering, revelatory knowledge and power directly from heaven? If there are specific scriptural approaches that increase the likelihood of the light of revelation being turned on in their eyes and in their lives, are you willing to spend the time to learn and implement those approaches? The Book of Mormon holds within its pages simple, straightforward pedagogical methods that can be employed to improve the likelihood of miraculous results in teaching.

While most read the Book of Mormon in order to better live the gospel, this sacred record also reveals how to effectively teach the gospel. The accounts of Book of Mormon “learners” should be read and pondered slowly, remembering the remarkable results that came from each of their learning experiences: Lehi, Nephi, the people of King Benjamin, Alma the Elder, Alma the Younger, the sons of Mosiah, Nephi the son of Helaman, the people taught directly by Jesus Christ, the brother of Jared, Mormon, and Moroni. While the methodology discussed below forms a pattern that weaves throughout each of these stories, this study will focus only on the learning experiences
of Nephi the son of Lehi (1 Nephi 11–14), the brother of Jared (Ether 1–4), and the people of King Benjamin (Mosiah 2–6). My purpose is to highlight the key role of desire in the learning process and the ways teachers can help sharpen the desires of learners to the degree that they are prepared to receive revelation.

**Helping Students Develop a Desire**

*Past experiences with the Lord.* The backgrounds of these three stories are strikingly similar, as the learners were each to some degree involved in journeys through the wilderness. Both Nephi and the brother of Jared were forced to gain new skills simply to survive and progress while on their journey to the promised land. The people of King Benjamin had fled to the land of Zarahemla under the direction of King Mosiah and were in the process of learning to adapt to their new environment, a process that included the efforts of the Nephites and Mulekites to adapt their different cultural backgrounds and become a united people. In all three stories, the learners were in a state of adaptation and were aware of their physical, mental, and emotional needs.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that each of these three groups of learners had undergone, each had already had experiences with the Lord that allowed them to sense his trusting care. Nephi’s heart had been softened by the Lord in response to his prayers early in his journey in the wilderness (see 1 Nephi 2:16), and he had already received revelation and guidance numerous times before the remarkable prophetic experience recorded in 1 Nephi 11–14. The brother of Jared had similarly received an answer to his prayers concerning the preservation of his family (see Ether 1:39–41) and knew that he had been led by the Lord through the wilderness. Although we do not have an explicit record of the previous experiences of the people of King Benjamin, we do know that these were the people who did “hearken unto the voice of the Lord” (Omni 1:12) and who were then miraculously guided under the hands of Mosiah I to the land of Zarahemla. They knew that the Lord was watching over them, and they had seen his blessings in their lives.

*In the classroom.* It is a vital key to success in the classroom for teachers to realize that their students do not come to them as blank slates. As Susan Ambrose and others state in *How Learning Works*, “When students can connect what they are learning to accurate and relevant prior knowledge, they learn and retain more. In essence, new knowledge ‘sticks’ better when it has prior knowledge to stick to. . . . Prior knowledge of a topic can help students
It is a vital key to success in the classroom for teachers to realize that their students do not come to them as blank slates.
integrate new information.”1 The Lord has not begun to work with students for the first time at the beginning of a semester, in a new course of study, or even before each class session. Nor should teachers ignore the wealth of experiences in the students that create hunger for the word and a sense of trust in the Lord that shows them he will respond. This is particularly true for students who are already baptized in the restored Church and have been offered the gift of the Holy Ghost by ordinance.2

When teachers begin a new course of study as if nothing has been accomplished previously, they essentially force the students to go back to the beginning of their learning. Instead, the teacher should be actively engaged in helping the students connect with and bring all their prior experiences and wisdom to bear in the new classroom setting so that it is possible to build from what they have already received. While some teachers encourage their students to “leave their problems at the door” so that they can focus on the lesson being taught, this may not be the most effective way to prepare students to receive revelation. Instead, students should be encouraged to bring an awareness of their problems with them to class, not in a way that distracts from the lesson but in a way that creates a deep sense of hunger and a desire to gain solutions that the gospel can provide. Nephi, the brother of Jared, and the people of Benjamin did not come to the classroom setting as empty buckets waiting to be filled, but rather came to learn because their past and current experiences showed them just how much they needed the Lord and showed that he was willing to help them as he had in the past.

How can a teacher help each student in a large class to connect with his or her own personal background and experiences?

- Verbally or in writing, students can be asked to ponder what their current needs are and why they have the deep necessity to seek after the Lord. This type of activity does not always need to take long but should be engaged in frequently. Students should also be encouraged to ponder, write about, and share evidences from the scriptures and from their own lives that the Lord is willing to answer their needs.
- Students can be frequently reminded that prophets such as Nephi, Alma, and Joseph Smith received inspiration when they came to the Lord in need of help, trusting that he was able to provide.
- Students can be encouraged to remember that the Lord is seeking to build on the things he is teaching them in their personal lives and to
request in the opening prayer and in their personal prayers that he will grant the revelation that they need and desire.

These overt reminders work as triggers that motivate the students to turn their minds to the Lord and to the reality of revelation. Just as Nephi, the brother of Jared, and King Benjamin’s people were aware of their lack and sought after the Lord diligently because of that lack, so must students in the classroom be encouraged to remember and focus their hearts and minds on the reality that they are in the midst of a quest for a promised land and that they have not yet arrived. This reminder can and should come at the beginning of the course of study but should also be considered to a certain degree in almost every hour of study. Students who do not remember their need and who are not prepared to seek after the Lord are not prepared to learn.3

Not only is it vital that the students remember their need and their past evidences of the Lord’s care, but it is essential for every teacher to remember daily that she or he is entering into a personally tailored course of study with each student that is already in progress. A lack of awareness of this fact will blind the teacher to the true nature of the learning opportunities. Students can be prepared to receive revelation because they have already gained valuable experience in the process.

**Inspiring Learners to Become Agents in the Learning Process**

*Nephi.* The two teachers in Nephi’s remarkable vision (first the Spirit of the Lord and then the angel) continue the process of helping Nephi sharpen his desires to “see, and hear, and know” (1 Nephi 10:17) by using questions and simple interaction. When the Spirit asks Nephi to respond to basic questions, he allows Nephi first to express his desires in a way that brings them into sharper focus for him and then to bear testimony of the things which he believes in a way that helps him decide how important those desires are. First, the Spirit asks, “What desirest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:2), allowing Nephi to organize his desires in his own mind in a way that he can express them clearly. The Spirit immediately follows that question with another question, “Believest thou?” (v. 4). This question confronts Nephi with the importance of his own choices with regard to what his father taught and with regard to his own desire. The importance of Nephi’s use of agency to express his own belief is demonstrated in the Spirit’s response to Nephi’s affirmation. The Spirit shouted “Hosanna” (v. 6), worshipping God for the choice that Nephi
made and praising his student, thereby reinforcing Nephi’s positive choice and teaching him just how important that use of agency was. Nephi is further rewarded when the Spirit shows him the tree and Nephi is able to see that which his father saw. However, the vision does not become one-sided at this point—the interaction continues in an upward spiral of choice and positive consequences. The Spirit commands Nephi to “Look!” (v. 8), and only when Nephi looks does he see. The Spirit again asks him in verse 10, “What desirest thou?” and now Nephi’s desires have changed and been more fully honed, and he wants to know more. Just as when he heard his father’s dream the first time, the new knowledge that has come to Nephi leaves him hungry for more. The Spirit emphasizes Nephi’s continued need to hunger and desire when he again asks what Nephi’s desire is (v. 10).

In verse 13, the Spirit disappears from Nephi’s presence and is replaced by an angel who continues to ask Nephi questions, although these questions are more cognitive in nature: “Knowest thou . . . ?” (vv. 16, 21). The questions seem designed with multiple purposes. First, they encourage Nephi to stay involved as an active learner. Second, they help Nephi to formulate that which he already knows clearly enough to be expressed. Third, the process of answering the angel’s questions forces Nephi to again see where his understanding is deficient and sharpens his desires to understand those areas better. The angel continues to command Nephi to “Look!” and to “Behold!” in ways that refocus his mind from time to time, and then rewards him for his appropriate use of agency. Eventually, Nephi’s mind seems to be prepared and focused to a level at which he can be taught continuously, without the need for constant reminders and interjections. Nephi had been lifted to a level at which he was prepared to exercise his faith, heart, and mind sufficiently to receive streams of revelation from the Lord.

*The brother of Jared.* A similar process occurs with the brother of Jared. He had arrived in a beautiful valley that tempted him to act as if the journey was over. The Lord had to strongly remind him (see Ether 2:14) that his quest was not complete and that there were greater heights to be reached. That chastening helped the brother of Jared to reset his sights on greater things and helped him to reengage his heart and mind in seeking for solutions. The Lord provided a challenge for the brother of Jared that required him to continue to be engaged as an active learner. The task of building boats to cross the great sea forced the brother of Jared to use all of his prior experience but still left him with unanswered questions. The Lord allowed the brother of Jared
to stay engaged not by supplying him with all of the answers immediately but instead by allowing him to choose how he would respond and what he would do in each case. The learning experience is again characterized by two-way communication between the learner and the teacher, allowing the learner to grow from experience to experience and allowing the teacher to gauge the preparedness of the learner.

The Lord later engages the brother of Jared in a way that connects the experience directly to the revelatory experience of Nephi. He asks the brother of Jared, “Sawest thou more than this [i.e., my finger]?” (Ether 3:9). The brother of Jared’s response allows him to express his desire: “Show thyself unto me” (v. 10). However, before the Lord will grant his desire, which has now been focused by the question and answer, he prepares the brother of Jared with the same question that the angel used with Nephi: “Believest thou . . . ?” (v. 11). When the brother of Jared chooses to exercise his agency to testify of his belief, then the Lord is able to show himself to him.

The people of King Benjamin. A similar process in which the teacher challenges his learners and continues to assess their preparedness to learn is evident in the teachings of King Benjamin. It appears that one of King Benjamin’s initial priorities in his teaching was to remind his people that—although they had successfully come through the wilderness to the land of Zarahemla—their spiritual quest was far from over. He reminds them that they are nothing without God, even less than the dust of the earth (see Mosiah 2:20–26). This reminder engages the hearts and minds of his students, encouraging them to see their lack and stimulating a desire to overcome their fallen state. There are two instances during Benjamin’s teaching in which he clearly assesses the level of his students’ understanding and belief, allowing them to choose to express their belief and desires in a way that will emphasize to them their own needs and their own belief. First, in Mosiah 4:1–3, King Benjamin “cast[s] his eyes round about on the multitude” and ascertains their belief and feelings because they have physically fallen to the ground from awe of the Lord. He then allows them to express their belief and desires. The combined expression of (1) desire and need and (2) belief perfectly mirrors Nephi’s responses to the Spirit’s questions, which also ascertained (1) desire and (2) belief. The people state, “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins . . . for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . who shall come down among the children of men” (Mosiah 4:2). After this affirmation of belief, the Spirit comes into their hearts and brings them to a new level
of preparedness to receive further revelation. Just as the angel urged Nephi to look and behold, King Benjamin encourages the people to continue to be engaged by calling their “attention” to “hear and understand” (Mosiah 4:4).

Before granting the final blessing of bestowing on the people the name of Christ, Benjamin again allows them to exercise their agency and express their belief in his message. “He sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them” (Mosiah 5:1). The people again respond with an affirmation of their belief and with an expressed desire to enter into a covenant. Although the scriptures do not describe the revelation of the people of Benjamin in the same terms as the visions of Nephi and the brother of Jared, it is interesting to note that the people state that through “the manifestations of his Spirit” they have had “great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, [they] could prophesy of all things” (v. 3). With this description of seeing that which is to come, it appears that the visionary experiences of these three groups may have been more similar than they first appear.

In the classroom. These three teaching experiences illustrate that religious learning should be goal oriented and that the goal should be to turn the hearts and minds of the students to an experience with personal revelation. The teacher must constantly assess where the students are to know where to spend time next. This type of assessment can happen in many ways: through writing, verbal responses, and nonverbal cues. One of the ways that the angel assessed Nephi’s readiness was to ask him to look and then to see if he looked or not. The Lord first recognized the brother of Jared’s readiness because he had physically “fallen to the earth” (Ether 3:7). King Benjamin also recognized his people’s readiness to learn because of their posture. Similarly, teachers can look at the eyes, listen to the responses, and watch the posture of their students to see whether or not they are prepared to progress.

Additionally, these examples demonstrate that teachers could spend more time asking students to express their desires, the hopes on which their hearts and minds are focused, and the level of their understanding and belief. These could come in the following forms:

- Students could be asked to explain what they understand about a certain topic. Their efforts to explain will both strengthen their understanding and reveal to them their need to learn more.
- More importantly, students can be asked why the topic has importance to them and to others. Many teachers use the “So what?” test
during lesson preparation to assess whether the concepts to be taught are of sufficient value. If the teacher cannot easily answer the question “So what?” regarding a certain concept, then the concept should be eliminated or refined in the lesson preparation.

- Students can be given quizzes, tests, or other evaluations in order to help them and the teacher become aware of that which they still do not know.
Students can be asked to share either verbal or written testimony of a specific topic or in general. Students can be asked to privately assess the level of their testimonies of a certain topic on a scale of 1–10.

These opportunities to respond do more than simply help to keep students awake. They are crucial opportunities for students to use their agency in the classroom in order to choose how to respond. As they formulate responses, they will strengthen their understanding of gospel concepts but will also see where their knowledge is still lacking, causing them to seek for more. In other words, the response does not simply allow the teacher to assess preparedness. The choice to respond causes the preparedness; the response itself changes the students and allows them to be ready for further revelation.

Since this type of interaction between the teacher and student allows the student to play an active role in the learning process, it influences what will be learned during the course of study. As Russell T. Osguthorpe, Sunday School general president, has stated, “I have discussed how questions of the heart emerge, capture us, and allow us to learn in ways that change us. Such questions can grow inside us only when we are free to choose what and how we will learn.” Such freedom to engage personally with the subject at hand seems to be precisely what scriptural teachers intended when they allowed their students to express their own desires and beliefs before proceeding with a lesson, content that it reflected those desires and beliefs.

**Moving Students beyond the Teacher and into a Direct Experience with the Lord**

Nephi. The efforts of the teacher to point Nephi to increased revelation rather than directing him only to the brilliance of the teacher is most powerfully represented in 1 Nephi 11:12. The Spirit commands Nephi to look, but Nephi states that “I looked as if to look upon him, and I saw him not; for he had gone from before my presence” (emphasis added). Nephi emphasizes that he was looking to the teacher as the source of his knowledge. Instead, the teacher purposefully disappeared in order to allow Nephi to see the beautiful image of the mother of God and to begin to understand the condescension of God. If the teacher had remained, then Nephi’s view would have been filled with the image of the teacher, and he would have missed the beautiful revelation that was available. Indeed, one explanation for the shift in 1 Nephi 11 from the Spirit to the angel might be that Nephi’s focus on Christ is being
reinforced, while his dependence on any one teacher as the source of his knowledge is being diminished. Since both teachers are pointing toward the same subject, in essence Nephi is being taught that it is the subject that has power and that the identity of the teacher lacks importance. The teachers are pointing away from themselves and toward the Savior.

The brother of Jared. The experience of the brother of Jared illustrates how a teacher can encourage a student that there is more to be gained if the student will seek with greater faith and earnestness. The Lord purposefully gives the brother of Jared a bit of knowledge and revelation at a time and then entices him with the indication that there is more. The Lord hints at the available increase of revelation when he discusses his full body and then asks, “Sawest thou more than this [my finger]?” (Ether 3:9). The brother of Jared immediately understands what the Lord is suggesting and pleads, “Nay; Lord, show thyself unto me” (v. 10). After ministering to the brother of Jared face-to-face, the Lord provides further instruction when he indicates that what the brother of Jared is about to see should not be revealed to others at the present time. It is apparently only after the brother of Jared knows that there is more to be revealed that his desire is strong enough to see the vision of “all the inhabitants of the earth which had been, and also all that would be . . . even unto the ends of the earth” (Ether 3:25). At this point in the account, Moroni reveals to latter-day readers that the Lord had provided the brother of Jared with an enticement at an earlier date, telling him that “if he would believe in him that he could show unto him all things” (Ether 3:26).

The people of King Benjamin. As in the experience of the brother of Jared, the people of King Benjamin are also prepared early on to know that great blessings and great revelation are available if they will prepare themselves for it. At the beginning of his speech, Benjamin focuses their minds on this possibility by encouraging them not to trifle with his words so “that the mysteries of God may be unfolded to your view” (Mosiah 2:9). He is promising more than an interesting discourse; he is declaring to them that heaven can speak to them if they will open their hearts and minds to receive it. Benjamin had earlier prepared his son for the remarkable opportunity that awaited his people and knew that the end goal of his discourse was not to convey information but was instead designed to “give [the] people a name,” the name of Christ (Mosiah 1:11). It is likely that Benjamin shared this goal with Mosiah so that he would in turn share it openly with the people.
During his discourse, Benjamin continues to point to the possibility of heavenly communication. Rather than simply teaching the concepts of the angel regarding Christ in Mosiah 3, he purposefully tells the people that the knowledge he will share with them comes by revelation from an angel of God. After the people have been led to feel the goodness of God and have given voice to their experience, Benjamin again encourages them that there is more for them to receive (see Mosiah 4:4). Possibly because of the enticement of this encouragement, the next time that the people speak, they reflect that their revelatory experience has included not only the initial joy of the Spirit but the opening of vision of things to come. Their declaration is exactly what King Benjamin had hoped (Mosiah 5:6), and he is able to give unto them the name of Christ.

In the classroom. How can teachers point their students to the revelation that is available to them? As Elder David A. Bednar has stated:

You and I are to act and be doers of the word and not simply hearers of the word. . . . A learner exercising agency by acting in accordance with correct principles opens his or her heart to the Holy Ghost—and invites His teaching, testifying power, and confirming witness. Learning by faith requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception. It is in the sincerity and consistency of our faith-inspired action that we indicate to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our willingness to learn and receive instruction from the Holy Ghost. Thus, learning by faith involves the exercise of moral agency to act upon the assurance of things hoped for and invites the evidence of things not seen from the only true teacher, the Spirit of the Lord.6

First, as stated early in this study, teachers need to have a clear vision in their own minds that this is the goal and to exercise their faith that revelation from the Spirit of the Lord is possible. As a fruit of that faith, there are many things that teachers can do to encourage their students to seek further:

- Teachers can give frequent verbal reminders that there is more for them than the teacher is able to offer. The students must be verbally encouraged to look beyond the teacher and discover the heavenly messages that God has in store for them. This would include the admission that the importance of the identity of the teacher pales in comparison to the importance of the message and its true source.
- As in Nephi’s vision, the admission that the teacher is not the final source of knowledge might lead teachers to encourage students to learn from other teachers when the opportunity is available.
• Teachers can point students toward scriptures, such as those analyzed in this study, and to quotations from modern prophets, such as the quote from Joseph Smith found in the conclusion of this article, that emphasize God’s willingness to grant revelation. Teachers can then remind the students that these statements and stories exist in order to encourage them to obtain revelation for themselves.

• The teacher can provide frequent verbal reminders such as “Remember that the Spirit can testify truth to you,” “If the Spirit speaks to you, make sure to write those promptings down,” “Imagine in your heart how you will feel,” “Imagine how this would look,” “Invite the Spirit as you read these scriptures,” and so on. These verbal cues express to the student the deeper purpose of religious education and emphasize that the information being conveyed by the teacher—while important—is not the final end.

Students can and should be challenged to seek after the Lord in real ways inside and outside of class, and then the teacher should send forth, as did Benjamin, to ascertain and assess what the experiences of the students have been so that they can be encouraged to continue upward.

**Teaching the Reality of Revelation**

*Belief in revelation.* The writers of the Book of Mormon appear to be deeply focused on convincing modern-day students and teachers that it is possible to receive revelation. By the end of the three learning experiences in this study, Nephi saw a vision of the future history of the world until its end; the brother of Jared had a similar opportunity, seeing and learning things that were so precious that he was commanded not to share them at the present time; and the people of Mosiah obtained a mighty change of heart as a result of their learning experience, coming to know personally the forgiving goodness of the Lord, being redeemed of their sins, and feeling the saving power that can be offered by only the Lord, in addition to having “great views of that which is to come” (Mosiah 5:3). As M. Catherine Thomas described the effects for the people of Benjamin, “Perhaps this was the first time among all the people brought out from the land of Jerusalem that a king and priest . . . had succeeded in bringing his people to this point of transformation: he had caused them as a community actually to receive the name of Christ.”
Although the results of the learning process come at the end of each story, the teacher from the beginning must engage in all aspects of preparation and of teaching with faith in the possibility of those results. That faith will motivate how the teacher chooses to spend time in the classroom and on which topics the teacher chooses to focus. It will inform everything that the teacher says and does in the classroom, providing an added degree of sincerity, fervor, and commitment to each action and statement. The importance of this faith-based approach to teaching cannot be overstated. If the angel had not clearly understood the kind of revelation that was available to Nephi, it would have subtly but significantly changed his teaching methods in a way that would have impeded Nephi’s ability to have the heavens opened to him. Instead, the angel understood the possibilities and worked in each moment to prepare Nephi for success. The same can be said for the teaching preparation and approaches of King Benjamin with his people and of the Lord with the brother of Jared.

In the classroom. Of course, this type of faith seems easy to the missionary who is not yet in the mission field or to the seminary teacher who has not yet been confronted by rows of sleepy faces or to the Gospel Doctrine teacher who has not yet had to deal with a sprawling, disconnected response from a student. Once in the classroom, face-to-face with students who exert agency of their own, many teachers lose sight of the possibility of powerful revelation and simply seek to survive. However, even in the face of opposition, teachers can exercise faith in the reality of revelation by

- praying daily and particularly before lesson preparation to see the divine capabilities of their students and to teach to those capabilities;
- before class, and where possible during class, looking into the faces of students, working to see them as the Lord sees them, full of the divine potential to receive revelation; and
- in moments of doubt, asking the Lord to reveal the true capabilities of the students and then writing what the Spirit prompts.

Although these steps are not revolutionary, they have the power to alter teaching in ways that will help lead students to personal revelation.

Conclusion

The experiences of Nephi, the brother of Jared, and the people of King Benjamin exhibit remarkable parallels in the methods used by the teachers to
encourage their students to receive revelation. These methods center on helping to sharpen the desires of the students to learn more than the teacher has to offer. As the Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.”

Joseph's message is also one of the primary messages of the Book of Mormon. All who truly seek can receive revelation directly from the heavens. Teachers can learn simple and specific ways in which they can help prepare their students to receive revelation and can thereby be tools in the Lord’s hands to point their students toward the true purposes of religious education.

Notes

1. Susan A. Ambrose and others, How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 15–16.

2. See J. Reuben Clark Jr., “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” in Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1965–75), 6:48–49. “These students hunger and thirst, as did their fathers before them, for a testimony of the things of the Spirit and of the hereafter; and knowing that you cannot rationalize eternity, they seek faith, and the knowledge which follows faith. They sense by the Spirit they have that the testimony they seek is engendered and nurtured by the testimony of others and that to gain this testimony which they seek for—one living, burning, honest testimony of a righteous God-fearing person that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph was God's prophet—is worth a thousand books and lectures aimed at debasing the gospel to a system of ethics or seeking to rationalize infinity. . . . These students, born under the covenant, can understand that age and maturity and intellectual training are not in any way or to any degree necessary to communion with the Lord and his Spirit.”

3. This appears to be the criticism that the Lord levels against the Pharisees in Luke 15. Because they believed they were already “found” and did not sense their need for the Lord, they were unable to learn from him and were thus truly lost.

4. Modern educational studies support the importance of frequent assessment in the classroom. See, for example, Linda Suskie, Assessing Student Learning (Boston: Anker, 2004), 3–17.


7. See, for example, Alma 26:22, in which Ammon provides a formula that will enable a gospel learner to “reveal things which never have been revealed.” Both Mormon (Mormon 9) and Moroni (Moroni 10:4–5) express the same goals. A similar case could be made for Nephi (1 Nephi 11), Jacob (Jacob 4), Alma (Alma 12:10–11; Alma 32), and others.


Effective gospel teachers have studied, prepared, and worked to know their subject well; they are lifelong learners who communicate their understanding to their students.
Attributes and Approaches of Effective Gospel Teachers

KENDEL CHRISTENSEN AND LLOYD D. NEWELL

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Lloyd D. Newell (lloyd_newell@byu.edu) is a professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU.

[As teachers], we are appointed—
1. To teach the principles of the gospel,
2. Out of the standard works,
3. By the power of the Holy Ghost,
4. Always applying the teachings to our needs, and
5. To testify that what we have taught is true.

—Elder Bruce R. McConkie

Gospel teachers have a unique charge: “A teacher’s goal is greater than just delivering a lecture about truth. It is to invite the Spirit and use techniques that will enhance the possibility that the learner will discover the truth [and] be motivated to apply it.” But how do we best invite the Spirit so that our students are inspired to apply truth in their lives? Which techniques and approaches to teaching are ideal for each learner? What are the attributes of highly effective gospel teachers? Many of us read student evaluations or receive peer reviews of our teaching, but what would students say if asked to describe an ideal gospel teacher? These and other questions
prompted us to survey almost six hundred seminary, institute, and religion students at Brigham Young University–Provo to find out which attributes and approaches of gospel teachers were most important to them.3

Our research findings led us to highlight five attributes and approaches to effective gospel teaching: inviting the Spirit, enthusiasm, knowledge, personal relevance, and preparation. The authors acknowledge that there are many other aspects of effective gospel teaching and that entire books could be dedicated to each. This study focuses on what one sampling of students reported to be most significant and offers the results for readers to consider. It serves as an affirmation of the attributes and approaches to effective gospel teaching that most of us already know are important but that perhaps merit a more intentional reminder in our efforts to incorporate them. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, “We need to be reminded more than we need to be instructed.”4

Methodology

Each student surveyed has experience listening to and being taught by gospel teachers. Each student has a sense of what works in the classroom and what doesn’t; each has insight and perspective to give those who aspire to teach the gospel effectively. As teachers, we often energetically forge ahead with our goals, our lesson plans, our style and approach; and in our zeal, we sometimes too quickly assume that we know exactly what our students need and how they want to be taught. Our objective in this study was to get feedback directly from students regarding what they considered to be the ideal attributes of effective gospel teachers. We also wanted to explore whether these attributes and qualities change or remain stable over the different demographics of seminary, institute, and university students.

After receiving feedback and approval from the Education Research Committee of Seminaries & Institutes of Religion for our study, we began distributing our survey.5 We sent 250 printed surveys to seminaries in Utah County,6 250 surveys to ten institute classes at the University of Utah institute,7 and invitations to twenty randomly selected BYU classes for an online survey that asked identical questions. The authors acknowledge that this sample group isn’t necessarily representative of the diverse group of students with whom the readers of this publication across the country interact. Though we recognize the limitations of our study,8 we believe the data collected from
students will provide meaningful general principles and insight to anyone trying to improve his or her teaching methods.

The first page of the anonymous survey asked about standard demographics (age, grade, gender, GPA) and asked two free-response questions: “In your opinion, what are the three most important attributes or characteristics that a gospel teacher should have in order to teach the gospel effectively?” and “Describe a memorable lesson that left a profound impression on you. What did the teacher do that made the lesson stand out among other lessons?”

Page 2 of the survey asked students to rate the following attributes of gospel teachers on a five-point Likert Scale (from 1, “Not Important,” to 5, “Most Important”): humble, enthusiastic, prepared, gives the class time to just think, invites the Spirit, knows my name, friendly, funny, bears testimony often, eloquent, allows me to share my true feelings, happy, personal righteousness, tells stories, cares about me, depth of knowledge, encourages class participation, asks us questions, holds class discussions, explains difficult concepts, makes me feel loved, uses object lessons, and is bold. After analyzing the data,9 we extracted results that merit consideration by all gospel teachers.

Results

Seminary (Grades 9–12).10 Table 1 shows the top ten attributes for seminary students, as reported by counting the number of times each attribute was mentioned on the open-ended portion of the survey.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal relevance12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimony</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invites the Spirit</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows the quantitative portion for seminary students who rated the following attributes as most important (out of a high of 5):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invites the Spirit</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains difficult concepts</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows my name</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal righteousness</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of knowledge</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares about me</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institute. Table 3 shows the responses to the open-ended portion for institute students, who responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the Spirit</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal relevance</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimony</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 shows the quantitative portion for institute students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invites the Spirit</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of knowledge</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal righteousness</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains difficult concepts</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks questions</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BYU students.\(^{16}\) Table 5 shows the free-response data for the BYU survey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the Spirit</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal relevance</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimony</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 is the quantitative results for BYU students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invites the Spirit</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains difficult concepts</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of knowledge</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal righteousness</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bears testimony</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other results. Other interesting findings include the following:

- “Funny” was ranked in the bottom five in the quantitative portion for all three groups (with scores of 3.91, 2.90, and 3.07, respectively), but was in the top ten answers for the open-response questions for both seminary (twenty-five mentions) and institute (ten mentions).
- “Eloquent” was universally rated low in the quantitative portion by all three groups (last for seminary, third to last for institute, and fourth to last by BYU students).
- “Object lessons” and “giving the class time to just think” also rated low in the quantitative portion (bottom third by all three groups).
- “Knows my name” was rated the eighth most important attribute in the quantitative portion by seminary students but was rated in the bottom third by institute students and last by BYU students.
- “Preparation” scored in the top six in all three lists for the quantitative portion (second for institute and third for BYU students).
- Females rated inviting the Spirit, being friendly, bearing testimony, class participation, and “makes me feel loved” at a statistically significantly higher level than males (4.83 vs. 4.73, 4.21 vs. 4.06, 4.05 vs. 3.86, 3.91 vs. 3.69, and 3.80 vs. 3.64, respectively). Males scored “boldness” statistically significantly higher than did females (3.66 vs. 3.35).
• Eloquence, “allows me to share my true feelings,” and class participation were rated significantly higher\textsuperscript{21} for those with the highest GPA rating\textsuperscript{22} when compared to all the other GPA groups.\textsuperscript{23} Eloquence scored 3.63 by the highest GPA group vs. a range of 2.77 to 3.1 for all other GPA groups, “allows me to share my true feelings” scored 4.13 vs. a range of 3.2 to 3.62 for all other GPA groups, and class participation was rated 4.18 vs. a range of 3.5 to 3.77 for all other GPA groups.

• BYU students mention “teaches doctrine, not opinion” as the most important attribute eight times in the free-response section. It is not mentioned once in either of the other groups.

• Students seem to perceive “has the Spirit” and “spiritual” as somewhat different qualities. From what students said in the free-response section of the survey, we understand “spiritual” to be a description of a teacher’s nature, way of life, character, and sense of commitment to the gospel and spiritual things. “Has the Spirit” is taken to mean that when he or she teaches, the Spirit is present and that the Holy Ghost testifies to hearts that what is taught is true.

Looking at both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the results, five attributes stood out as the most frequently mentioned or highest rated among all groups: invites the Spirit, enthusiasm, knowledgeable, personal relevance, and preparation.

“Invites the Spirit”

{
\textit{It is the Spirit that matters most.}

—President Ezra Taft Benson\textsuperscript{24}

When all three groups of students were combined, the Spirit was mentioned over ninety times (16 percent of all surveys)\textsuperscript{25} on the free-response portion of the survey and was rated the highest of all attributes on the quantitative portion—an impressive 4.72 out of 5 (combining all groups). From such a response, it is evident that students are intimately aware of the power and importance of the Spirit and that they truly yearn for it in their gospel classes. Rightly so, as Elder David A. Bednar has taught, “The Holy Ghost is . . . the teacher and witness of all truth.”\textsuperscript{26}

Effective gospel teachers give primacy to having the Spirit with them and seeking the Spirit as they teach. Elder Gene R. Cook said, “Who will do the teaching? The Comforter. Be sure you don’t believe you are the ‘true teacher.’
That is a serious mistake. . . . Be careful you do not get in the way. The major role of a teacher is to prepare the way such that the people will have a spiritual experience with the Lord. You are an instrument, not the teacher. The Lord is the One who knows the needs of those being taught. He is the One who can impress someone’s heart and cause them to change.”

This influence of the Spirit became clear and compelling in our data. One tenth-grader, when describing a lesson that stood out to him, recalls, “Our teacher was telling us a story about God’s will being greater than our will. He told us a story about his daughter getting very bad pneumonia. Long story short, he finally realized he thought he knew better than God and changed his attitude. The Spirit was so powerful that ¼–½ of the class was crying. Teaching by the Spirit is by far what made it incredible.”

One BYU senior, when answering the same question, wrote, “He taught truth from his heart, not knowledge from his brain.” The statement is reminiscent of something President Boyd K. Packer taught: “We can become teachers, very good ones, but we cannot teach moral and spiritual values with only an [intellectual or] academic approach. There must be spirit in it.”

Another tenth-grader echoed this sentiment when he said, “Teaching with the Holy Ghost is better than from a book.” Truly, we must always remember, as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “Most people don’t come to church looking merely for a few new gospel facts or to see old friends, though all of that is important. They come seeking a spiritual experience. . . . They want . . . to be strengthened by the powers of heaven. Those of us who are called upon to speak or teach or lead have an obligation to help provide that, as best we possibly can.” In the words of one BYU freshman, his preferred method of being taught is by “not just factual stuff . . . [but] a way of teaching that allows the Spirit to be present.” The Spirit is the key to all we do as religious educators. As Elder Gérald Caussé of the Seventy reminds us: “For you teachers of the Church, the principal goal of your lessons is the conversion of hearts. The quality of a lesson is not measured by the number of new pieces of information that you give your students. It comes from your capacity to invite the presence of the Spirit and to motivate your students to make commitments. It is by exercising their faith by putting into practice the lessons taught that they will increase their spiritual knowledge.”
Enthusiasm

Part of what may be lacking, at times, in the decent teacher is a freshening personal excitement over the gospel which could prove highly contagious.
—Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Enthusiasm was mentioned 114 times as an important attribute for an effective gospel teacher (21 percent of all students surveyed). When we averaged the ratings of enthusiasm quantitatively, it scored 4.30 out of 5. From this, we conclude that students crave energy and full engagement from their teachers. Indeed, one BYU junior, when asked to list three of the most important attributes for an effective gospel teacher, simply listed two—“have a passion for the gospel” and “being able to transfer that passion to the students.” A high school senior concurs that what is most important is to “be creative and outgoing in teaching (no monotone . . . no one likes ‘dry’ talk).” The same student says that he is the most engaged when a teacher is “lively and into the lesson.” This is precisely what is admonished in Teaching, No Greater Call: “Nurture your own enthusiasm for studying the scriptures and the teachings of latter-day prophets. Your enthusiasm may inspire those you teach to follow your example.” Likewise, President Henry B. Eyring taught, “You need to exemplify optimism. . . . Your students will then feel your faith, and that will bolster theirs.” And a BYU sophomore wrote, “The teachers that have the most memorable lessons are the passionate ones, who live and love what they teach.”

Many of us have experienced the boost that comes from an enthusiastic teacher. Whenever we see someone teach or speak with energy, we perk up—we ask ourselves whether we are placing sufficient importance on the subject. We each have an innate sense of wanting to listen to someone who speaks with conviction just as we subconsciously tune out (or perhaps, in our digital age, iTune out) anyone who seems to be merely going through the motions. Effective gospel teachers should be on guard to avoid falling into a colorless, lifeless routine. David M. McConkie of the general Sunday School presidency recently stated, “Successful gospel teachers love the gospel. They are excited about it. And because they love their students, they want them to feel as they feel and to experience what they have experienced. To teach the gospel is to share your love of the gospel. Brothers and sisters, a teacher’s attitude is not taught; it’s caught.”
Students radiate this desire to have teachers who are excited about the gospel. Among the survey responses to “the most important attribute in a gospel teacher” were “a love of teaching” (graduate student), an “engaging personality” (junior in college), “positive and excited” (tenth-grader), “animated” (eleventh-grader), a “passion for the gospel” (BYU freshman), and “a large love for teaching” (eleventh-grader). A BYU senior stated, “[The class that left the greatest] impression on me was from a teacher who taught with enthusiasm, the Spirit, and with urgency. He also spoke from the heart. He told stories that related to the principles he was teaching to help us stay focused. He motivated us to be better and to improve. I left enlightened, inspired, and uplifted.” Likewise, the most impactful lesson in the life of one BYU sophomore was “a lesson we had on Christ’s suffering in the garden of Gethsemane. The teacher was just very passionate about the topic and was really able to stress the importance of it in all of our lives.” Truly, “a teacher with spontaneous humor and enthusiasm can raise a class of twenty average students to unlimited heights as doers and teachers of truth.”

Knowledge

The more knowledge of truth we have, the better we can progress spiritually.

—President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Knowledge was mentioned as the top attribute for gospel teachers—148 times on the free-response portion of our survey (27 percent of all students)—and received a combined average of 4.12 out of 5 for importance in the quantitative portion. Students admire teachers who have sacrificed time to learn the gospel well. They yearn for the wisdom and truth that they sense the gospel contains but that they themselves are too inexperienced to yet possess. Likely, students are attracted to knowledgeable teachers because, as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “Knowledge does away with darkness, suspense and doubt; for these cannot exist where knowledge is.” As one institute senior said about his most memorable gospel lesson, the “teacher was able to answer a difficult question with both history and cross-referencing scriptures.” The world our students live in is permeated with darkness and doubt, but the moment they walk into a gospel classroom, something is different. Something should be very different. The atmosphere is hopeful. The teacher is not cynical. He or she talks about things that the media and world at large ignore or belittle, yet the teacher speaks with authority. The authority is simply the power
of the word, well understood, lived, and experienced, and thus powerfully conveyed. Effective gospel teachers are gospel scholars; they have studied, prepared, and worked to know their subject well; they are lifelong learners who communicate their understanding to their students. President Henry B. Eyring taught, “You can study the word of God, not for yourself alone but to be an emissary of the Lord Jesus Christ to all the world. When you increase your power to teach the gospel, you are qualifying to help Heavenly Father in gathering His children.”

Often we are tempted to play to our strengths as gospel teachers and ignore small details that might give added context and power to our teaching. As one institute student stated, “I like when instructors briefly go over the background of the scriptures covered, the culture, and other pertinent events of the time, etc.” But our students deserve to have a teacher that, as one eleventh-grade student expressed, “knows what he is talking about.” Treasuring up the word continually is the best way to respond to this most important calling.

**Personal Relevance**

*Gospel learning, or religious education, could be defined as the process through which, with the influence of the Holy Ghost, a person acquires gospel knowledge, chooses how to respond to that knowledge, and uses that knowledge in his or her own life.*

Because we realized the significance of this attribute only after administering our study, we did not include a measure of importance in the quantitative portion of our survey for what we are calling “personal relevance,” but the students mentioned it ninety-four times when asked to list the three most important attributes that a gospel teacher should possess (17 percent of all students). In addition, there was no other single attribute that the students wrote more about when describing lessons that left a lasting impression on them. One high school senior described the gospel teacher that most inspired him: “He asked us a powerful question that applied to a recent local tragedy; it made us think to ourselves. He directly connected things to us.” An institute student offers a similar sentiment: “He made the lesson real. It applied to my life, but not only mine. It applied to all of us in the class.”

Helping students see how the gospel relates to their individual lives transforms their religion from merely “an extra chair in the room which
[students] acknowledge as something that has always been in their lives, but cannot describe its importance to the centerpiece—a masterpiece proudly displayed in their “room of life” as something cherished. As Elder David A. Bednar instructed: “As parents and gospel instructors, you and I are not in the business of distributing fish; rather, our work is to help individuals learn to ‘fish’ and to become spiritually self-reliant. This important objective is best accomplished as we encourage and facilitate learners acting in accordance with correct principles—as we help them to learn by doing. ‘If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God’ (John 7:17).”
Learning by doing requires courage, and it is vital for every gospel learner. The miracle is that students want to be challenged and stretched by their teachers. One tenth-grader said, “I am very thankful when a teacher is frank and honest.” An institute sophomore said, “Lessons that stand out are ones that make me want to change something in my life and give me specific ways to do so.” One BYU senior said, “When the teacher has sincerely invited me to change is when I have had the most profound impressions in class. I have felt that several of the invitations I have received are answers to my prayers.” And an institute student adds, “I love lessons that take gospel stories and relate them to my life. The gospel story is no longer just a story but a lesson with important doctrines.” Truly, as President J. Reuben Clark wisely stated in his classic 1938 talk “The Charted Course,” “The youth of the Church are hungry for things of the Spirit; they are eager to learn the gospel, and they want it straight, undiluted.” More recently, President Eyring reiterated, “I can promise you some things [about your students]. . . . They will respond when you treat them as honest seekers who want to believe.”

Because of this eagerness, our time in class should be directly connected to the teaching of life-changing principles and doctrines. Students in effective classes can become better acquainted with the mind and will of the Father so that they can better obey his will in their individual lives. We assist our students by striving to make relevant connections with their personal lives, current challenges, and events in the media and culture. One institute student wants his teachers to “help apply scriptures to everyday life.” Another college student says that the most memorable lessons are when “the teacher applied the lesson directly to what I was dealing with (e.g. dating, school, work, etc.).” A graduate student at institute described his most impactful lessons as “the ones that teach on a personal level. They share personal stories and experiences. They tailor their lessons to the audience and they think about the audience on an individual level.” Facilitating students to think and seriously ponder about individual application follows a divine pattern. Again we learn from Elder Bednar: “Consider the question posed by Heavenly Father to Adam in the Garden of Eden: ‘Where art thou?’ (Genesis 3:9). The Father knew where Adam was hiding, but He nonetheless asked the question. Why? A wise and loving Father enabled His child to act in the learning process and not merely be acted upon. There was no one-way lecture to a disobedient child, as perhaps many of us might be inclined to deliver. Rather, the Father helped Adam as a learner to act as an agent and appropriately exercise his agency.”
Preparation

The difference between focusing on the learner and focusing on teaching or on the teacher is illustrated by the difference in a teacher who says, “What shall I do in class today?” and one who says, “What will my students do in class today?” or “What will I teach today?” and “How will I help my students discover what they need to know?”

Preparation was mentioned thirty-two times as the most important attribute in an effective gospel teacher (6 percent of all students) and received an overall rating of 4.27 out of 5 when averaged among all three groups. Robust preparation is at the heart of effective teaching, and there are no effective shortcuts. Students sense if their gospel teachers have paid the price to know the subject, if they study and plan for each class, if they walk into the room spiritually and mentally prepared. Serious preparation leads to deep conviction. One BYU junior recounts: “I had a teacher who unabashedly taught the doctrine found in the scriptures, without mincing words. . . . He never taught anything that couldn’t be substantiated by ample scripture references or quotes of general authorities, and of which he didn’t have a burning testimony. There were no ‘near truths’ or ‘Sunday School’ stories of an apocryphal nature, as there often are in the church—everything was word for word what the scriptures said. As a result, this often forced us to re-evaluate what it was the scriptures really did say, and recommit ourselves to study the gospel.” This ability to bring the scriptural truths or the whats and whys into the minds and hearts of our students—such that they have a burning desire to pray and study the scriptures more on their own—is what effective gospel teachers strive for.

Students can discern when we really “know what we are talking about” or when we merely arrive to class to “spend the time,” not having prepared for that specific day. One institute student said that he likes it when a teacher knows the material so well that he or she can “switch it up” at any time, according to the Spirit. Preparation both precedes and carries power, and, for our students, it can mean the difference between leaving our class nourished and renewed or walking away with merely a “theological Twinkie” with which to survive the day. The best teachers are prepared, as one tenth-grader said, so they “really teach, they don’t just talk.” One ninth-grader was so impressed with her teacher’s preparation that she expressed that “you could tell she really believed in what she was talking about.” That conviction—the conviction that is so readily seen in a dedicated and prepared teacher—is worth the
time, hard work, and investment for the gospel teacher whose goal is to edify and educate hearts and minds.

Conclusion

This study focused on the meaningful attributes and approaches that students felt were most important in effective gospel teachers. The quantitative and qualitative nature of the research generated rich data providing valuable insights for those who desire to improve their gospel teaching. All of this is only a starting point, however. Benefit could be obtained from a more extensive study, perhaps one that undertook to catalog a full gamut of teaching attributes and approaches, that researched more fully the fluctuations among individual grade levels, or that went beyond Utah and the Wasatch Front to cross-cultural samples in various locations throughout the world. At the very least, any follow-up study should attempt to more fully measure the widely described “personal relevance” characteristic. If we were to do the study again, we would ask students to rate a quality such as “makes lessons applicable to my life.”

Ongoing research is needed on the subject of gospel pedagogy, but we hope that this article in some way has inspired what President Boyd K. Packer and Elder L. Tom Perry admonished in the 2007 worldwide leadership training meeting: “All of us—leaders, teachers, missionaries, and parents—have a lifelong challenge from the Lord to both teach and learn the doctrines of the gospel as they have been revealed to us.” Part of effectively teaching and learning the doctrine includes taking a serious look at our teaching attributes and approaches and seeking improvement, as well as striving to conform our lives to what the Brethren, as well as our students, are asking of us.

Notes


2. Teaching, No Greater Call, 61.

3. This study was conducted during winter semester 2010 at BYU as a faculty-mentored student project. We express appreciation to Kenneth Plummer, manager of research, evaluation, and assessment for Seminaries & Institutes of Religion; Dennis Eggett, director of the BYU Center for Collaborative Research and Statistical Consulting; the Education Research Committee of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion; Sandee M. P. Muñoz of the BYU Office of Research and Creative Activities; BYU Religious Education and Religious Education faculty support; and the seminary, institute, and BYU religion students and teachers who participated in the study.

5. The authors acknowledge that many of the questions we sought to answer might be better gained by personal interviews but were constrained by the time and resources that process would require.

6. We determined selection by whole class. From all the seminary classes with students enrolled in Utah County, we selected classes at random until we reached 250 enrolled students. It resulted in ten classes from Lehi, Lone Peak, Mountain View, Orem, Pleasant Grove, Springville, and Timpview High Schools.

7. Also selected at random, by whole class.

8. The authors would have liked to survey a much broader group of students, including those outside of Utah but were constrained by time and the logistics it would have required. As a result, any time that statistical significance is referred to, it is in reference to the group sampled (e.g., seminaries in Utah county), not the entire population of seminary students that CES serves.

9. The methods used were standard tallying and grouping, as well as chi-squared tests.

10. All seminary grades were grouped together. Of the 250 surveys, 207 were completed and included in the data.

11. The data was collected from counting each attribute mentioned when students responded to the question “In your opinion, what are the three most important attributes or characteristics that a gospel teacher should have in order to teach the gospel effectively? (List 3.)”

12. That is, “what is taught relates to my life.”

13. Averaged out of a high score of 5, rounded to the nearest hundredth.

14. 123 students responded.

15. Averaged out of a high score of 5, rounded to the nearest hundredth.

16. 218 students responded.

17. Averaged out of a high score of 5, rounded to the nearest hundredth.

18. All scores are out of a possible of 5. If every respondent rated something “most important,” it would receive a score of 5.00.

19. To the p<0.001 level.

20. To the p<0.001 level.

21. Statistically significant at the p<0.001 level.

22. Those that scored 3.9–4.0 on a 4.0 GPA scale.

23. The other GPA groups were “below 2.74,” “2.75–3.24,” “3.25–3.64,” and “3.65–3.89.”


27. Gene R. Cook (address delivered to religious educators, September 1, 1989), quoted in Teaching, No Greater Call, 41.

28. All comments from students quoted in this paper are in possession of authors.


33. Teaching, No Greater Call, 62.

37. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Truth Restored” (devotional address, Education Week, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, August 22, 2006).
40. See D&C 84:85.
42. Personal notes, from Christian Smith, “Soul Searching: Understanding the Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers—Findings from the National Study of Youth & Religion” (Marjorie Pay Hinckley Endowed Chair Lecture, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, February 2008). Also of interest, Dr. Smith noted that Latter-day Saint teenagers could articulate their religious belief better than the average religiously affiliated teenager in the United States.
45. Eyring, To Draw Closer to God, 154–55.
47. Teaching the Gospel, 13.
48. See D&C 38:30.
“And he [the brother of Jared, after seeing the finger of the Lord] had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting.”
Faith as a Holy Embrace

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“I am crucified with Christ.”

—Paul to the Churches of Galatia

The Mystery of Faith

Because the fourth article of faith explicitly identifies faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the first principle of the gospel, it is easy to think of faith as an elementary concept and therefore as something simple to understand. But as every serious student of the gospel has discovered, that is far from the truth. Despite its importance, and despite the fact that we hear and read of faith so frequently, faith in the Lord is actually a complex and highly elusive subject. When we study it with care, we are often surprised by what the scriptures actually teach. Consider, for example, these two passages from the Book of Mormon:

- “And he [the brother of Jared, after seeing the finger of the Lord] had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting” (Ether 3:19).
• “Our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea” (Jacob 4:6).

The difference between these passages is striking. The first contrasts faith with knowledge, and we learn from it that faith actually comes to an end once it is replaced by knowledge. Here, faith is only a stepping-stone to something better, to something more complete and certain.

The second passage, on the other hand, equates faith with power. Far from ever ceasing, we learn that such faith actually grows over time until it becomes “unshaken,” permitting the possessor to perform all manner of miracles. This sense of faith is underscored when we read in Hebrews that “through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Hebrews 11:3)—indicating, as described in the Lectures on Faith, that God himself “framed the worlds by faith, that it is by faith that he exercises power over them, and that faith is the principle of power.” Here we are told that God, who has all knowledge, also has faith and that he operates by it as a matter of course.

There is clearly a wide difference, then, in how these two passages use the word faith. The idea that God has both all knowledge and faith makes no sense at all when read in light of the first scriptural passage, but it makes perfect sense when read in light of the second. This example alone suggests the complexity involved in the concept of faith: different scriptural passages use the word in different ways, and that makes faith a large topic. Despite our frequent reference to it, faith is actually one of the mysteries of God.

In this essay, I want to examine one of the most profound ways the word faith is used in scripture. To do so, I will start by showing that faith and belief are essentially synonymous in the standard works. This is important to appreciate since an understanding of the relationship between these two terms is necessary in discussing faith-related teachings and episodes. I will then identify one familiar way that the concept of faith appears in scripture and contrast it with another: a concept of faith that, although exceedingly important and profound, may be the one that we as general members actually understand and articulate the least. Finally, I will suggest that appreciating these two uses of the term faith illuminates passages of scripture that otherwise would seem confusing; these include Paul’s teachings on faith and salvation and James’s apparent contradiction of Paul on the relationship between faith and works.
The Relationship between *Faith* and *Belief*

In ordinary discourse, English speakers often use the words *faith* and *belief* in roughly synonymous ways. Both terms, for example, suggest a mental assent or an acceptance that something is true, despite the absence of rigorous proof. On such matters, at least in common usage, we “accept,” we “are persuaded,” we “are of the opinion”—but all of this in the absence of anything that could be called proof.

But there are also clear differences in how we use the words in English. For example, the term *faith* often implies a more actively spiritual meaning than does *belief.* The word *faith* also suggests both trust and hope. On these matters, the difference in connotation between these two words is wide and could be examined at length. It is important to recognize this because our day-to-day experience with such linguistic differences may lead us to assume that *faith* and *belief* are also used differently in scripture. Indeed, I think that is what most readers would assume. Interestingly, that is not the case: in contrast to ordinary discourse, in scripture the terms *faith* and *belief* are effectively synonymous.

*Examples from the New Testament.* Note first how *faith* and *belief* are used in the New Testament. Consider these examples:

- The verb *pisteuō*, meaning to be persuaded or to place confidence in, is translated in the King James Version as *believe.* Indeed, this Greek term appears 248 times in the New Testament and is translated as some form of *believe* in 239 of them.
- However, *pisteuō* itself comes from the Greek noun *pistis*, which is predominantly translated in the King James Version as *faith.* This Greek term appears 244 times in the New Testament and is translated as *faith* in 239 of them. The noun *belief* occurs only once in the entire King James Bible, in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, and is translated from the Greek *pistei*, a form of the noun *pistis*—which, as just mentioned, is primarily translated as *faith* throughout the King James Version.
- In contrast, the verb form *believe* occurs nearly 300 times in the New Testament, sometimes translated from the Greek *peithō* but most often from *pisteuō.* *Pistis* itself comes from the Greek verb *peithō*, which also means to be persuaded, to believe, or to have faith.
So an examination of the Greek original and of the English translation shows a tight connection between these terms. Notice, for instance, the interchangeability of \textit{believe} and \textit{faith} in these two brief passages from Paul:

- “But to him that worketh not, but \textit{believeth} \([\text{pisteuonti}]\) on him that justifieth the ungodly, his \textit{faith} \([\text{pistis}]\) is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5).
- “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the \textit{faith} \([\text{pisteōs}]\) of Jesus Christ, even we have \textit{believed} \([\text{episteusamen}]\) in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the \textit{faith} \([\text{pisteōs}]\) of Christ” (Galatians 2:16).

In these passages, Paul interchanges the terms seamlessly. Here is another example: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by \textit{faith} \([\text{pisteōs}]\) of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that \textit{believe} \([\text{pisteuontas}]\)” (Romans 3:21–22).

In the following passage, the Greek \textit{pisteōs} appears twice, and the text alternates between \textit{faith} and \textit{believe}: “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through \textit{faith} \([\text{pisteōs}]\) in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which \textit{believeth} \([\text{pisteōs}]\) in Jesus” (Romans 3:24–26). In these contexts, faith equals belief, and belief equals faith.

\textit{Examples from Restoration scripture.} Scriptures of the Restoration present a similar picture. Note, for instance, how \textit{believe} and \textit{faith} are used in these passages to repeat a point.

- “And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their \textit{faith}; wherefore they first \textit{believed} in the Son of God” (Ether 12:18).
- “But, behold, \textit{faith} cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that \textit{believe}” (D&C 63:9).6

In this connection, observe how Jacob uses both \textit{faith} and \textit{believe} to identify the conditions required for salvation. “And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect \textit{faith} in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And if they will not repent and \textit{believe} in his name, and be baptized in his name, and
endure to the end, they must be damned” (2 Nephi 9:23–24). The two sentences are repetitive; Jacob simply uses faith in the first sentence and believe in the second to identify one of the requirements for salvation.

Owing to the first article of faith, we usually think of faith as the first requirement for salvation, and passages like this come to mind: “Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and remember that they shall have faith in me or they can in nowise be saved” (D&C 33:12). But just as often the term believe is used in exactly the same way.

• “Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God . . . and they that believe in him shall be saved” (2 Nephi 2:9).
• “And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned” (2 Nephi 9:24).7
• “In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name” (Ether 3:14).

And note how believing is used to define faith in these passages:

• “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask in faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it” (Enos 1:15).
• “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you” (Moroni 7:26).8

We find the same synonymy in other contexts. Mormon, for example, uses the terms interchangeably in his great discourse on faith in Moroni chapter 7. He says that it is “by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men,” but adds that if these things have ceased, “it is because of unbelief.” And in the next verse he repeats the point, this time saying that if these things have ceased, “then has faith ceased also” (Moroni 7:37–38).

The Lord himself uses the terms interchangeably. During one of his appearances to the Nephites following his resurrection, he remarks: “So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews; wherefore I could not show unto them so great miracles, because of their unbelief.” And in the next verse he repeats the point, this time saying that if these things have ceased, “then has faith ceased also” (3 Nephi 19:35). He does the same in his account of the brother of Jared in the book of Ether. He says the brother of Jared had been able to see the Lord’s finger “because of [his] faith,” and adds, “Never has man come before me with such exceeding faith as
thou hast” (Ether 3:9). In verse 15 the Lord repeats the observation, but this time says, “Never has man 
believed in me as thou hast.” Then in Ether 4:7 the Lord explains that the record of the brother of Jared will be withheld until the Gentiles “shall exercise 
faithe in me.” But then in verse 14 the Lord says that this record is withheld “because of 
unbelief” and again in verse 15 that it is due to the “veil of unbelief.”

More examples could be given, but these should suffice to demonstrate that, at least in scripture, the terms 
belief and faith are effectively synonymous. This alone helps us clear up some of our uncertainty concerning the concept of faith: in the same contexts, faith and belief have the same meaning.

Faith as Assent: Accepting the Truth Based on the Spirit

One very familiar scriptural meaning of faith is roughly synonymous with mental assent. It is a “persuasion of mind” that Christ is divine, the Son of God, or, more generally, that the gospel is true. Alma uses this general sense of the term in his famous discourse on planting the seed of faith: “But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words” (Alma 32:27).

As he explains further about this experiment on his words and its spiritual consequences, Alma says, “Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge” (Alma 32:29). This is similar to his question in an earlier verse regarding the relationship between knowledge and faith: “Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it” (Alma 32:18). And he says a few verses later, “And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true” (v. 21).9

In this discourse, then, in addition to treating faith and belief synonymously, Alma specifically contrasts faith with knowledge. We get the idea of a continuum of epistemological certainty, stretching from nonbelief, to belief, to the replacement of belief with certain knowledge. The same sense is indicated by passages like these:

- “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).
• “And he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting” (Ether 3:19).

Faith in the sense referred to in these passages leads to knowledge, and knowledge eventually replaces it. Although faith of this sort is not certain knowledge, it is of course far from belief without reason. This is because the mental assent of faith, in the scriptural sense, is always in response to the Spirit. Far from belief without reason, it is belief based on spiritual reasons. From a scriptural standpoint, then, this kind of faith is a state of spiritual responsiveness, and it is the very heart of learning the things of God. As Paul says, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Faith as a Holy Embrace: Living Worshipfully toward the Lord

Faith as a mental acceptance of Christ, based on the Spirit, is highly familiar. In contrast, a second sense of faith can be easy to overlook and takes a little more explanation.

A surprising verse in the Book of Mormon. The best way to introduce this sense of faith is to consider the experiences of the multitude gathered at the temple in 3 Nephi chapter 11. In sequence, here is what occurred:

• The multitude first heard the voice of the Father declaring the Son (vv. 3–7).
• They saw Christ descend out of heaven and, once among them, testify by his own voice, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (vv. 8–10).
• They went forward, one by one, feeling the nail prints in the Lord’s hands and feet (vv. 14–17).
• Finally, the multitude watched as Jesus gave instructions to Nephi and the other members of the twelve (vv. 21–41).

Then, in chapter 12, Jesus again addresses the multitude. In verse 1, he charges them to give heed to the twelve (the first beatitude, by the way) and then speaks of baptism and the Holy Ghost. He then says, “Therefore blessed are ye if ye shall believe in me and be baptized, after that ye have seen me and know that I am.” I think this is one of the most surprising passages in the Book of Mormon. Notice what the Lord is saying: “Now that you have seen
me, heard me, and have actually felt the nail prints in my hands and feet—in other words, now that you know that I am—you will enjoy divine favor and approbation if you believe in me.”

If we think of faith or belief in the first sense that we have discussed above—in the sense of mental assent, or acceptance—the passage is startling. How can we talk of believing after we already know?

We encounter the same situation in 3 Nephi chapter 19 in the account of Jesus praying to the Father. The twelve disciples are praying at this time to Jesus himself (who is present), “calling him their Lord and their God” (v. 18). It is in this context that Jesus then says to the Father, “Thou seest that they believe in me” (v. 22).

Again, this is surprising. Consider that these are the same twelve who had already

- witnessed the Lord descend gradually from heaven in glory,
- felt the prints of the nails in his hand and feet,
- been taught by the Lord face-to-face,
- observed the Lord heal many who were “afflicted in any manner” (3 Nephi 17:7–10),
- witnessed angels descend from heaven and minister unto the little children who were present (3 Nephi 17:23–25),
- been baptized and “encircled about as if it were by fire” (3 Nephi 19:14),
- been ministered to by angels after their baptism (3 Nephi 19:14), and
- been ministered to by Jesus himself, who appeared to them and “came and stood in the midst” (3 Nephi 19:15).

It was after all of these events that Jesus commanded the twelve to pray, and it was at this time that Jesus observed to the Father, “thou seest that they believe in me” (3 Nephi 19:22).

Again, we have the same surprise. Surely if we could describe anyone as possessing a perfect knowledge of the Lord, it would be these people. Yet the Lord refers to their condition as one of belief and not of knowledge at all. So this is clearly different from the first sense of faith.

Living worshipfully. So what does faith or belief mean in these contexts? If it is not a nascent but growing assent to the reality and divinity of the Lord, what then is it?
The heart of the answer is given by Nephi: “And now behold, I say unto you that the right way is to believe in Christ, . . . wherefore ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul” (2 Nephi 25:29). Here Nephi tells us not only to believe in Christ; he tells us what it means to believe in Christ: it is to bow down before him and to worship him with all of our might, mind, and strength and “our whole souls.” Thus to believe in Christ—to have faith in him—is to worship him.15

This makes sense of the incidents we have just seen in 3 Nephi. In each of these cases we observe people who are not merely assenting to the reality of Christ; we observe people who are expending all the energy of their souls in revering, venerating, and adoring the Lord. In the most profound sense imaginable, they are abandoning themselves and embracing him. It is a sacred and moving act of utter devotion and worship. Precisely the same relationship occurs in 3 Nephi chapter 17. There we are told that the multitude bowed at the feet of the Lord “and did worship him” (v. 10). This followed the Lord’s healing of all who were sick among them and throughout his ineffable prayer to the Father. It was in response to this attitude of the multitude that the Lord said to them, “Blessed are ye because of your faith” (v. 20). Again, the concept of faith is used not to suggest anything resembling mere mental acceptance of the Lord, but instead—and explicitly—to capture a deep and holy attitude of worship toward him.

Such worship is not a one-time act, of course. In a profound revelation on the topic, the Doctrine and Covenants tells us that the way we worship the Lord is specifically by living like him: to worship him is to follow him—to abandon our own path and to adopt his. It is, in short, to live worshipfully—in daily devotion and emulation of him.16

Christō synestaurōmai (“I am crucified with Christ”). I believe that this sense of worship is perfectly captured in Paul’s autobiographical description, “I am crucified with Christ.” To live worshipfully toward the Lord is to give ourselves to him. It is to surrender worldly, selfish concerns and to embrace his. Indeed, it is to abandon ourselves. We give up “our old man” (Romans 6:6) and “put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9). In the Lord’s own words, we offer unto him “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20),17 and in the words of one Book of Mormon figure, we “offer [our] whole souls as an offering unto him” (Omni 1:26). It is in this spirit that Paul speaks of the Lord as the one “for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and
do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8). He says further that “they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them” (2 Corinthians 5:15). Coming unto Christ means living unto Christ.

I know of no better statement on this topic than the following from a modern Apostle. After imploring us to be “changed for Christ,” President Ezra Taft Benson said:

Men changed for Christ will be captained by Christ. . . . Men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ. . . . They have Christ on their minds, as they look unto Him in every thought. They have Christ in their hearts as their affections are placed on Him forever. . . . In Book of Mormon language, they “feast upon the words of Christ,” “talk of Christ,” “rejoice in Christ,” “are made alive in Christ,” and “glory in [their] Jesus.” In short, they lose themselves in the Lord, and find eternal life.18

In the same spirit, another modern Apostle advised that we “fall in love with the Lord.” He reported of his own desires that “I would like to fall in love with Christ, and live and believe and think and do, insofar as possible, as he did.”19

With this in mind, note the words of the angel to Nephi that it is those with faith in the Lamb whose garments “are made white in his blood” (1 Nephi 12:10–11): certainly it is not mere mental acceptance that qualifies one for such sanctification. Note, too, Mormon’s quotation from the Lord: “Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved” (Moroni 7:34). This sequence (repentance–baptism–faith) does not seem accidental—and yet it makes no sense if, for example, the Lord is speaking here of faith as mental assent. The sequence makes perfect sense, on the other hand, if he is speaking of faith as ongoing devotion and worship. Alma speaks in the same way: “Now I say unto you that ye must repent, and be born again; for the Spirit saith if ye are not born again ye cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness” (Alma 7:14). Alma speaks here of a faith that comes after repentance; indeed, he says that we are baptized unto repentance so that we can have this kind of faith. This seems to me an example of the faith of ongoing worship, the faith of daily embrace. In Luther’s felicitous phrase, it is “the yes of the heart” as we respond to the Lord with devotion and humility.20
This worshipful response to the Lord is captured perfectly in Luke’s account of the woman (“a sinner,” we are told) who, in the home of Simon the Pharisee, bathed Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with oil. In response to Simon’s protest and challenge at the display of one so unworthy, Jesus said:

Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. (Luke 7:44–47)

At this point, the Lord identifies the love and devotion this woman has shown him as faith. “Thy sins are forgiven,” he says to her. “Thy faith hath saved thee” (vv. 48, 50).

Worshipping in the way identified and recorded by Nephi, Mormon, Alma, Luke, and others is what it means to have faith in the second sense. It is a yielding, surrendering, worshipful devotion to the Lord.

Understanding Paul

When reading the scriptures, it helps immeasurably to have these different meanings of faith in mind. One of the most significant ways it helps is in our understanding of Paul, for Paul focuses almost exclusively on the second type of faith, and if we do not understand this, we will simply not understand him. Notice, for example, Paul’s statement to the Galatians which we glanced at earlier: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

This passage, I think, is Paul’s seminal statement on faith. I believe it is his clearest, deepest declaration of what it means to come unto Christ and to have faith in him. And notice that it is a faith that begins with our willing submission to and worship of the Lord—our “crucifixion with Christ,” as he puts it. Knowing that this is what Paul means by faith is crucial to understanding Paul himself and illuminates everything else he utters on practically every subject. I will consider just two: Paul’s concept of the relationship between
faith and salvation, and Paul’s and James’s approaches to the relationship between faith and works.

**Paul’s Concept of Salvation by Faith**

Paul explains in Ephesians that “by grace are ye saved through faith [pisteōs]; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Now, understanding Paul’s general conception of faith as described in Galatians, we do not think for a moment that he means by this statement that salvation comes by mentally assenting to Christ. We know he is speaking instead of faith as a deep and wholehearted embrace of the Lord and explaining that it is through this faith that we are saved. We cannot be saved by works—the works of the Mosaic law (or any other works, for that matter)—that are separate from this embrace. And even then, it is not the works that save us but the embrace itself—of which the works are but a manifestation.

That is why we are not surprised when Paul goes on to speak explicitly of this: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). In our worshipful embrace of the Lord, we become the workmanship of God’s hands, and whatever goodness is found in us is born of this devotion. Moreover, our righteousness consists in this act of worship. Salvation, Paul is telling us, is based not on works of the law but on the act of faith in which we embrace the Lord and give ourselves to him. The works we perform in consequence of this devotion are the works of worship; that is why they are righteous.21 As he explains elsewhere, goodness and righteousness are “the fruit of the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:9), which, of course, is the same relationship that Mormon identifies when he explains that the source of any apparently good act determines whether it is actually good or not.22

Consider also Paul’s definition to the Romans of “the word of faith” and its relationship to salvation: “If thou shalt confess [homologēsēs] with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe [pisteusēs] in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Again, understanding Paul’s conception of faith, we know he is not talking here of mere mental assent and of mere verbal expression. We know he is speaking instead of belief as worship of the Lord. That is why we are not surprised when he goes on to say, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever
believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 10:8–11). The idea here is simply that faith entails both righteousness and outward expression. By definition, one engaged in Paul’s kind of faith is living worshipfully—and obviously, no one engaged in this kind of faith will either fail to live righteously (such faith consists in worshipful living, after all) or be ashamed to confess Christ to others, even under threat of persecution. Faith in this passage has little to do with a mental assent to the Lord and everything to do with a devoted worship of him.

The same deep meaning of faith is found in this passage: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith [pisteōs] of Jesus Christ, even we have believed [episteusamen] in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith [pisteōs] of Christ” (Galatians 2:16). Here Paul is simply saying that salvation can be found not in the works of the law of Moses but only in living worshipfully toward the Lord—and that is why the Saints live in this way. Again, it is not faith of the first sort Paul is referring to, but faith of the second.

Paul’s concept of righteousness. All of this is related to Paul’s concept of righteousness. He says in Romans 10:3, “For they [the Jews] being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” Paul tells us what he means by “the righteousness of God” earlier in Romans (Romans 4:11–13), where he speaks of the “righteousness of faith.” He explains that this is the righteousness which Abraham possessed and which he obviously possessed without the works of the law—since Abraham lived centuries prior to Moses and thus to the institution of the Mosaic system. Abraham’s righteousness consisted instead in his willing submission to the Lord: that is the righteousness of faith, not of the law, and it is the righteousness of God. So Paul’s worry in Romans 10 is that the Jews were trying to establish their own righteousness through living the law of Moses—they “trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (Luke 18:9)—whereas they should have been submitting themselves to the righteousness of God, which is simply the righteousness of faith: embracing Christ and living worshipfully toward him.

Thus, when Paul speaks of the righteousness of faith, he is not saying that we are to mentally assent to Christ and then be righteous in addition; he is saying that righteousness is the reality and the expression of this worshipful embrace of Christ and of all that it entails: keeping the commandments, loving and serving others, and the like. This is why Paul is able to say of some who
profess to know God that they actually deny him in their works (Titus 1:16). The state of knowing God is the state not of professing a certain way but of living a certain way. That is the righteousness of faith, and our goodness in this state is an expression of this state of faith and of nothing else. This is the consistent theme in Paul’s writings.

For Paul, then, the phrase “saved by faith” means “saved by being in a state of devotion to Christ.” Those who are in this condition are in a state of righteousness and in a state of salvation. There is no difference between them. That is why Paul can speak so confidently of “us which are saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Those who possess such faith—because it is so profound in all the dimensions of discipleship that it assumes—are indeed in a condition of salvation. We can leave this condition, of course, and we do so by leaving this state of faith. But as long as we are in one, we are in the other.

Salvation-by-faith in Restoration scripture. Paul is not alone, of course, in teaching that salvation comes through this dimension of faith. Consider Mormon’s statement about faith and salvation in his great discourse in Moroni chapter 7: “And after that he [Christ] came men also were saved by faith in his name; and by faith, they become the sons of God” (Moroni 7:26). Note these similar passages:

- “Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God . . . and they that believe in him shall be saved” (2 Nephi 2:9).
- “And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 9:23).
- “And we know that all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ, and worship the Father in his name, and endure in faith on his name to the end, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (D&C 20:29).
- “In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters” (Ether 3:14).
- “And as many as believed in the Son, and repented of their sins, should be saved; and as many as believed not and repented not, should be damned” (Moses 5:15).

All of these passages say what Paul says and mean what Paul means. They presuppose a certain conception of faith and then say that salvation is a
function of that faith. That is why, again, Paul is able to speak of “us which are saved” (1 Corinthians 1:18). To be in this state of faith is to be in the condition of salvation, and we remain in this condition of salvation as long as we remain in this state of faith.26

In both ancient and modern times, then, when the scriptures speak of the faith that is required for eternal life, this is the faith that is meant. Indeed, this kind of faith is equivalent to what the Lord himself identified as the condition for salvation—to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself” (Luke 10:27). The second type of faith—faith as a holy embrace—is simply a shorthand way to refer to this condition of soul.

Paul and James on Faith and Works

Understanding this sense of faith helps us understand Paul’s and James’s teachings on the relationship between faith and works—a matter that has long been a source of worry to theologians. It has been frequently noted that James’s insistence that “faith without works is dead” seems to contradict Paul’s apparent dismissal of works and his emphasis on faith alone. Indeed, Roland Bainton—biographer of Martin Luther—reports Luther as saying that he “would give his doctor’s beret to anyone who could reconcile James and Paul.”27

Luther himself, of course, read the entire New Testament through Pauline eyes. His exclamation “S. Paulus aber ist ein man!” (“St. Paul is the man!”) is priceless and descriptive.28 This commitment to Paul decisively influenced Luther’s view not only of all other biblical books but also of what constitutes apostolic teaching in the first place—regardless of who the author might be.29 In particular, while Luther had some praise for the book of James, he regarded it as thoroughly nonapostolic in character, arguing that it is “flatly against Paul and all the rest of Scripture,” and, at least in his earlier writings, that James actually “mangles the Scriptures.”30

But Luther was not without his own efforts to reconcile faith and works, sounding at times very much like James. “Both of these articles—that of faith as well as that of works—must be diligently taught and urged, but in such a way that each remains within its bounds. Otherwise, if men teach only works, as they do in the papacy, faith is lost; if they teach only faith, carnal men promptly dream that works are not necessary.”31 In another place, he observes that faith “is a living, restless thing. It cannot be inoperative. We are not saved by works; but if there be no works, there must be something amiss
with faith,” and in still another that “if faith is of the right sort, it cannot be without good works.”

So Luther, like others, wrestled with the matter, wondering exactly how to describe the relationship between faith and works and how to reconcile the words of James with the words of Paul. But it seems to me that we are helped immeasurably in this task—and in large part through Restoration scripture—simply by recognizing that faith itself does not appear as a single concept in the standard works; that is, the word faith is used in different ways at different times by different scriptural authors. Noting this, we can easily see the primary distinction between Paul and James: they are simply talking about different kinds of faith.

James, for his part, talks about faith specifically in terms of mental assent. He says, for instance, that “thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). Here James equates mortals’ believing with devils’ believing—but obviously the only belief that devils can possibly claim is the mental recognition of God. Certainly it cannot imply anything that could be called worship. So, at most, James is speaking of the first type of faith, and, without righteousness, such faith obviously is dead, just as he emphatically declares it to be.

But Paul, as we have seen, is writing in his letters about a different dimension of faith altogether. The kind of faith he has in mind—faith as worship—just as obviously entails works of righteousness—works that spring from a holy embrace of the Lord and that in their very nature exclaim a resounding yes to him. It is a living faith, and it is not hard to describe how one lives who feels this kind of devotion. For this reason, Paul does not need to emphasize works in the same way that James does, because he is not talking about the same kind of faith that James is. Nor is he talking to the same audience. James writes “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1), whose issues he can know and address only generally. On the other hand, Paul not only writes to specific audiences but does so against the background of his intimate acquaintance with Jewish life and with Jewish converts’ difficulty in converting to Christianity—a difficulty born of their long commitment, both individually and culturally, to the observances of the Mosaic law. Aware of the confusions they harbored about the role of such works, Paul’s burden is to disabuse any and all of whatever misconception they might hold of this sort. He is eager that no one repeat the Jews’ mistakes about what constitutes righteousness and what qualifies one for salvation. In
preaching faith, Paul wants his readers to understand deeply and emphatically that salvation is in Christ alone and that the only genuine righteousness is the righteousness of devotion to him and all that flows from it. In short, the faith Paul has in mind is not dissociable from righteousness; it actually encompasses and defines what righteousness means.35

The doctrinal situation with Paul and James, then, is like the situation in which we ask what color results when all of the colors are present. If we consider this question in terms of light, we know the answer is white. But if we consider the same question in terms of an artist’s oil paints, the answer is not white at all, but black. So the two answers that result are not only different but opposite, and yet both are thoroughly correct. The only reason for the distinction between them lies in the framework in which the question itself is posed. Do we assume paint or light to be the subject matter of the query?

So it is with Paul and James on the matter of faith and works. The two are not in conflict; they simply take the framework of the question in different ways. James assumes one kind of faith as the subject matter of the query, Paul another. What James says is true of the type of faith he has in mind, and what Paul says is true of the type of faith he has in mind. The difference between them is a difference not in doctrine but in subject matter. It is not surprising that in addressing dissimilar subjects, they say dissimilar things.36

Conclusion

When we carefully examine the concept of faith, one discovery we make is the interchangeability of the terms faith and belief in the scriptural canon: episodes and teachings about belief are inherently episodes and teachings about faith. In scripture, they are the same.

Another discovery we make is that the standard works actually use the terms in different ways in different passages. We have looked at two of these usages (though there are others): (1) faith as mental assent—as accepting the truth based on the Spirit, and (2) faith as a holy embrace of the Lord—as living worshipfully toward him.

This second sense of faith includes every dimension of loving devotion and discipleship toward the Lord. It is the sense of faith captured in various important passages of Restoration scripture, and it is the sense of faith that Paul emphasizes in his letters. Appreciating this helps illuminate Paul’s teachings on important topics, including his view of the relationship between faith and salvation and of the relationship between faith and works. To fail
to understand this sense of faith is to fail to understand Paul: for him, faith is rooted in the adoring and willing submission of our will—indeed, of ourselves—to the Lord, and in nothing else. To have the faith of Paul is thus to utter the words of Paul: Christō synestaurōmai. This is the essence of faith in the second sense; it is faith as a holy embrace.

Notes

1. Galatians 2:20. Throughout, wherever emphasis appears in scriptural quotations, the emphasis is mine.


3. Other than illustrating the wide meaning of the word faith, however, I will not address this sense of the word, since God's faith is obviously different from our own. Whereas our faith is always dependent by nature—we have faith in Christ, for example—God's faith is obviously not dependent on another being in this way. As Lectures on Faith notes, because God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, and because he possesses "all fullness," the principle of faith exists in him independently. Lectures on Faith, 9, 21. My interest here is in the ways that faith operates for mortals—that is, dependently, not independently, as it operates for God.

4. I believe the scriptures speak of faith in four distinct senses; in this essay I am restricting my discussion to just two of them.

5. On spiritual implications, note that if we begin a sentence with "I have faith," listeners will typically anticipate a spiritual ending, while if we begin a sentence with "I believe," listeners will typically expect nothing that wouldn't follow from "I think" (for example, "it will rain," "the Celtics will win," etc.). On hope and trust, note that it would sound unusual to say "I have faith that the universe is expanding" (which implies a degree of both hope and trust that this is true), while it would not sound unusual to say "I believe that the universe is expanding" (which does not imply any degree of either hope or trust). Much more, of course, could be said. A virtually inexhaustible source for studying the connotations and typical usages of English words is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). This corpus contains more than four hundred million words of text drawn from spoken English, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. The corpus can be accessed online at http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/. One way to examine the relationship between two words is to examine their respective semantic ranges (i.e., the other words with which each is typically associated across a variety of contexts). To the extent these associated words are the same, the semantic ranges of the two words are similar, and vice versa. Such a study helps us appreciate the nuances in usage of words that, though related, are also different.

6. An identical relationship is found in 3 Nephi 26:9. Note also the chiastic structure of D&C 63:9, which further supports the synonymy of faith and belief.

7. Ether 3:14 and Moses 5:15 use believe in this way, too.

8. Similar expressions are found in D&C 11:14; 14:8; and 18:8.

9. Alma continues the contrast between faith and what he calls "perfect knowledge" in verses 26, 29, and 34. He uses this expression to suggest that such knowledge is complete or comprehensive (as opposed to knowledge about a single matter—see Alma 32:26, 29, 34). Moroni also uses the expression, and in a way that is closely (though not in a simple way)
related to the experience of actually seeing the Lord (see Ether 3:19–20). To avoid both connotations, I will speak simply of this far end of the continuum as certain knowledge—a knowledge that is absolutely sure through the Spirit but that implies neither comprehensiveness nor visionary experience.

10. The same sense is at work in President Boyd K. Packer’s report that “He lives now, directing personally the operations of His Church upon the earth and manifesting Himself personally to His servants, that belief might be swallowed up in knowledge.” See Boyd K. Packer, Church News, November 28, 2009, 10 (first presented as “The Light of Thy Childhood Again,” Brigham Young University devotional address, December 19, 1962).

11. This is why President Packer was able to say, “If all you know is what you read or what you can hear, you will not know very much.” See Boyd K. Packer, “The Twenty-Mark Note” (Brigham Young University—Idaho devotional address, March 12, 2002).

12. I take use of the term blessed here to suggest something like “divinely approved.” In the New Testament version of the Sermon on the Mount, where the word blessed also occurs repeatedly, the term is translated from the Greek makarioi. This term, in all its forms, appears forty-nine times in the New Testament and is translated forty-four times as blessed and five times as happy (John 13:17; Acts 26:2; Romans 14:22; and 1 Peter 3:14; 4:14). In the usual case, as here in the Beatitudes, the implication is that persons identified as “blessed” are not merely happy but that they are fortunate and actually enjoy divine approval or favor. In this respect, their happiness is a kind of divine felicity—a happiness born of union and favor with God. Twice Paul also uses the term to describe Deity, referring to “the blessed God” (1 Timothy 1:11) and “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). Here the term clearly suggests someone holy, or someone worthy of adoration or worship, and thus implies far more than merely being happy. Indeed, in every case where makarioi is translated as happy in the New Testament, I think blessed actually captures the meaning more fully.

13. We know this because 3 Nephi 12:1 tells us that the twelve disciples were chosen from among the multitude.

14. Some of this teaching was to them personally (see 3 Nephi 13:25–34).

15. Thus John reports of the man who was blind from birth and who was given sight by the Lord—and who then heard Christ testify of himself as the Son of God: “Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him” (John 9:38).

16. This occurs in section 93 where the Lord gives us John’s record of how Jesus advanced from “grace to grace” in receiving the “fulness of the glory of the Father” (vv. 13, 16). He tells us that Jesus did not receive a fulness of the Father “at the first” but that he received “grace for grace” (v. 12), suggesting that Christ received endowments of grace from the Father as he himself served with perfect devotion and love and gave “grace” to others. John then tells us that Christ grew by degrees—that he continued from “grace to grace” until he finally “received a fulness of the glory of the Father” (vv. 13, 16); he explains that Christ then “received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him” (v. 17). At this point, the Lord tells us why he has given us this record. It is “that ye may understand and know how to worship. . . . that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness” just as Jesus himself had. He then says, “For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father.” He adds, “Therefore, I say unto you, you [too] shall receive grace for grace” (vv. 19–20). In short, just as Christ did, we are to keep the commandments, extend “grace” or righteous service to others, and grow by degrees until we are
finally endowed with the fullness of the Father through Christ. We thus worship Christ by following the path of Christ. Worship, as defined here, is the worship of daily devotion and emulation. It is identical to Nephi's imploring his readers to keep the commandments and to endure to the end in their "steadfastness in Christ," that is, in "following the example of the Son of the living God" (2 Nephi 31:10–20).

17. This is perhaps the most common way of putting the matter. See, for example, Psalms 34:18; 51:17; 2 Nephi 2:7; 3 Nephi 9:20; 12:19; Ether 4:15; Moroni 6:2.


21. An additional dimension of this verse is its emphasis on salvation as a gift (dōron), based on God's grace (charis). Paul says that we are saved by grace through faith. The idea is that, while possession of this kind of faith is the condition the Lord has established for us to qualify for salvation, even this by itself could not save us: we still require God's grace. John Gee very helpfully identifies the wide range of meanings of the word grace dating from ancient times. Indeed, its earliest meaning was "good works," and in the Gospels and in the Book of Mormon, such grace always comes as a result of individuals' actions. See John Gee, "The Grace of Christ," FARMS Review 22, no. 1 (2010): 247–59. Despite this, however, the grace we receive is still a gift—an offering from the Lord we could not earn, even through the kind of faith Paul has in mind. Here is why: the Lord has established the conditions for our salvation (i.e., our devoted embrace of him), but nothing other than his own love and devotion obligated him to make salvation possible for us to begin with. That is why salvation is a pure gift: it is granted on conditions that the Lord has identified and that we have to satisfy, but they are conditions that he didn't have to establish for us in the first place.

22. See Moroni 7:6–11. Martin Luther expresses a similar sentiment: "It is not right to judge a man merely by the kind of works he does; one should judge him on the basis of why he does them . . . on the spring and fountain whence they flow." Luther, in What Luther Says, vol. 3, 1511.

23. The same type of entailment is found in Samuel the Lamanite's teaching that "if ye believe on his [Christ's] name ye will repent of all your sins" (Helaman 14:13). Belief of this sort entails repentance; if we don't repent, then, by definition, we simply don't believe in the way that Samuel means.

24. Precisely the same sentiment is found in this passage: "And be found in him [Christ], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

25. See Moroni 7:58 and D&C 20:25 and 33:12 for similar statement about faith and salvation. Two of the passages quoted in the text identify faith as a necessary condition for salvation (2 Nephi 9:23 and D&C 20:29), two of them identify faith as a sufficient condition for salvation (2 Nephi 2:9 and Ether 3:14), and the last identifies faith as both a necessary and a sufficient condition for salvation (Moses 5:15). This wide range of passages connecting salvation to faith indicates that faith-as-embrace is meant. That is the only meaning of faith that is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for salvation, as both the Pauline and Restoration passages show.

26. We are told in the Doctrine and Covenants, for example, that the key to our salvation is our endurance to the end "in faith on his name" (D&C 20:29).

28. The original German is found in *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Weimar, Tischreden 3, no. 3862, 666; this English translation is that found in *What Luther Says*, vol. 2, 1027.

29. He says, for example, that “whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic [note: in editions prior to 1530 Luther did not include the word ‘yet’], even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.” Martin Luther, in *Luther's Works, Volume 35: Word and Sacrament, I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachman (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg, 1960), 396. *Luther's Works* is the fifty-five-volume American edition of Martin Luther’s writings, based in large part on the mammoth Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke*), which produces Luther in German and Latin.

30. Luther, in *Luther's Works*, 396, 397 (note 54). After 1530, Luther no longer included this assertion about “mangling,” but he continued in the view that (1) the book was not apostolic in character (nor apostolic in fact, for that matter, holding as he did time-honored reservations about the authenticity of the book), (2) that it contradicted Paul, and (3) that it could not be included among the chief books of the Bible.

31. Luther, in *What Luther Says*, vol. 3, 1515.


33. Luther, in *What Luther Says*, vol. 3, 1517.

34. In the case of devils, faith of the first type is obviously based on their recollection of God from the pre-earth existence rather than—as with mortals—on any spiritual impressions they receive.

35. A secondary difference between Paul and James is that Paul focuses principally on the works of the Mosaic law (often using circumcision as a point of reference for the whole system of observances), while James is more concerned with works of goodness broadly considered.

36. It’s a pity that Luther never explicitly identified this distinction in types of faith, though he certainly had something like it in mind from time to time. One example is this observation from him: “The story is told of a doctor of theology who once met a collier [a carrier or seller of coal] on the bridge at Prague and, moved to compassion by the fact that the fellow was a poor layman, asked: My good man, what do you believe? The collier answered: I believe what the church believes. — The doctor: But what does the church believe? — The collier: The church believes what I believe. — Later, when the doctor was about to die, the devil so severely troubled him concerning his faith that he did not know which way to turn and found no rest until he said: I believe what the collier believes. — A similar story is told of the great Thomas Aquinas. It is said that as his end came on, he could not hold his own against the devil until he said: I believe what stands recorded in this Book. He was holding the Bible in his arms. But God grant us very little of that sort of faith; for if they had no other faith than this, both the doctor and the collier believed themselves into the abyss of hell.” Luther, in *What Luther Says*, vol. 1, 469. Luther’s conclusion is influenced by mistaken doctrines he holds—doctrines that, naturally, are uninformed by the Restoration—but he does grant the possibility of something called faith that is not the same as the dynamic spiritual devotion he has in mind when speaking of faith.
The lesson my grandpa had first shared with me at eight was that through the power of the Holy Ghost, I could discern truth from error.
In my eighth-grade English class, we had to write an “I am” poem: this particular style provides a rather simple formula for composing self-reflective verse. In the first line, for example, the author lists two personal characteristics; they are followed by the identification of desires, dreams, beliefs, hopes, and so forth.

At the risk of revealing my lack of literary genius, as well as my inherent nerdiness, I will confess that my composition began as follows: “I am a Mormon girl who hates to be late.”

While my peers talked about being dancers, singers, athletes, and friends, I saw my religiosity and my precision as central to my identity. The subsequent lines revealed my love of reading and writing and hinted at my explicit and implicit academic goals. As a thirteen-year-old girl, I had woven believing and thinking, the sacred and the secular, into a single worldview.
Five years later, as I entered the academy, I was introduced to the dichotomies of intellectual and spiritual life: many proposed either/or scenarios. Was I going to stand on the fringes of scholarship or on the fringes of belief? Although determined to cultivate academic and spiritual integrity, I had to wrestle with whether or not a woman of faith could also be a rigorous scholar.¹

Mormon Historiography

As Mormons, we believe, first and foremost, in the atoning sacrifice of the Savior, and we recognize our need to submit to his grace. But we also believe that Joseph Smith—a prophetic figure—had visions, restored gospel truths, and translated a sacred text by the power of God. Consequently, doctrine seeps into our understanding of history, and history is intertwined with our doctrinal perspectives.

Such convictions are a fundamental part of Mormon testimony. “Coming into possession of the truths that pertain to external realities . . . about institutions and historical persons,” while also laying “claim to certain, divinely revealed knowledge of things,” Terryl Givens explains, has been considered an essential component of conversion since the LDS Church’s inception.² As believers, we proclaim that the events of the Restoration go hand in hand with the doctrines God revealed to a new prophet, and we know the Holy Ghost can and will confirm the truth of all of these things to earnest seekers. Consequently, reverence and trust, rather than skepticism and doubt, dominate LDS views of the past.

Broadly speaking, Church members are aware of and interested in our history because we consider it sacred and inspired, indeed, providential. Our personal conversion experiences, and the testimonies that result, are laced with historical convictions: events as well as doctrines are declared true. As a result, how our history is narrated and interpreted matters to us. We believe sacred stories should promote faith—that the continuation of the conversion process is nurtured as the Holy Ghost witnesses that particular events and situations were inspired by God. How history is written and interpreted, then, is important to us as a people of faith.

Over the years, Mormon historiography, like all historiography, has undergone a series of transitions: the partisan views of the 1800s, defined by faith claims or polemics, evolved at the turn of the century as trained historians relied upon scholarly methods to interpret their work. By 1968, Moses Rischin, then a Fulbright professor of history at the University of Uppsala
in Sweden, suggested that the writing of Mormon history had become less rigid and more nuanced, and thus the story was becoming more accessible to the non-Mormon world. He titled this development the New Mormon History. Almost immediately, debates sparked: In what ways might the lenses of secular training detract from the divine origins of the LDS past? And what was true Mormon history—the devotional writings of the devout, or the academic and contextualized interpretations of the trained (some devout and some not) historians? Could the latter also be the former? Was the work that was produced during the nineteenth century more faithful, more exact, and more prone to acknowledge God’s influence? Indeed, what characterized Mormon history, and should and could that change? Could truth really be viewed from different angles without being discredited by secular leanings?

Early Mormon historiography, specifically that written and compiled in the nineteenth century, is riveted to stark interpretations about historical and religious truth. Two groups, LDS writers of providential history and non-Mormon antagonists, made opposing claims in the attempt to prove or disprove the legitimacy of Mormonism. Believers defended while those in opposition sought to destroy. Each group selected sources that allowed them to use “history” to their own advantage. Agenda, rather than scholarly inquiry, shaped many works—and the misconception that historians could prove or disprove truth dominated the field (we know that is the job of the Holy Ghost, not scholars).

Believing Mormons wrote with conviction; they wanted it to be clear that this is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30) and that we have the responsibility to share this message with others in preparation for Jesus Christ’s Second Coming. Such providential or faithful leanings are akin to Old Testament and Puritan descriptions of a chosen people. Interpretation and analysis, albeit scarce and simplified in a context dominated by antiquarians, were focused on truth claims. The miraculous nature of Mormon historical events, followers believed, proved the truthfulness of God’s message as revealed to Joseph Smith. Those authors saw themselves as tools in God’s hands: they believed that the writing of history, and the records themselves, could serve as testaments of faith.

In some of Joseph Smith’s early revelations (one actually received on the very day the Church was organized, on April 6, 1830) the Lord commanded him to keep a record (D&C 21:1; 47:1). In response to these commands, the office of Church Historian and Recorder was organized. Unpublished
manuscripts were produced, and newspapers and pamphlets emphasized historical experiences as well as current events and theology. Orson Pratt, for example, wrote a pamphlet titled *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*; this text was the first narrative history that detailed the events associated with Joseph Smith’s First Vision and thus influenced the shape of later LDS-authored works. Pratt not only related the events; he bore personal witness of them.

Non-Mormon writers disagreed with the providential interpretations of believers. Consequently, they broached a different vantage point: they wanted to use historical evidence to prove that Mormonism was not true. Often, these compilers of history consisted of rival Christian ministers, apostate Mormons, or others who opposed the faith. Eber D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unvailed*, published in 1834, for example, became a seminal work in the genre of anti-Mormonism. He discredited Smith’s character and was one of the first to propose an alternative hypothesis about the origins of the Book of Mormon. Several years following the dissemination of Howe’s work, other books similar in tone and content were published. By the mid-nineteenth century, tell-all books about the horrors of polygamy, the power of the Mormon theocracy, and the threat Mormonism posed to national institutions had become quite popular. Calling Mormon character into question remained a predominant theme in all the varieties that anti-Mormon works assumed.

By the turn of the century, some suggest, the writing of LDS history had begun to “mature.” Rather than simply quoting and compiling materials, several historians began to synthesize and even offered new interpretations. Nonetheless, old divides—“the two opposing camps that argued the merits of Mormonism rather than seeking an understanding of the individuals involved”—continued to plague new developments.

And yet, as Mormonism itself continued to mature, and as the Church became increasingly Americanized, “the emerging history also was characterized by a less provincial and more national mood.” As professional training became more common, methodologies were defined and interdisciplinary approaches utilized. One important contribution during this period was the completion of B. H. Roberts’s *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Although critics complained that it was extremely Mormon in tone and limited to hierarchical, male, and political topics, its value was impossible to ignore. For the first time, the Mormon past was chronicled in great detail, and, to his credit, Roberts did not gloss over
imperfections. He was, as Ron Walker, David Whittaker, and James Allen noted, “a partisan, not an unquestioning apologist.”

Later in the twentieth century, a number of Mormons who pursued careers in academia focused their research on Mormon history. Rather than being driven by the desire to legitimate their faith or by the quest to discover and share religious truth, they sought neutrality, or objectivity. Drawing on the tools of the social sciences, they reexamined nineteenth-century Mormon pioneering. The result was a series of works that reflected something unfamiliar to the Mormon believer: religious detachment. An emphasis on natural causes, rather than divine origins, was uncomfortable to many people. The products did not seem like their story—at least as they knew it. The approach such scholars brought to Mormon history reflected their own personal sense of faith: some were not committed believers. As a result, Mormon scholars of this era were dubbed the “lost generation of intellectuals”—for believers, their works cultivated doubts about academia. It seemed that succeeding in one area meant surrendering in another.

By the second half of the twentieth century, Mormon history experienced another shift. Those engaged in the New Mormon History did not want to attack or defend LDS truth claims: rather, they wanted to use the tools of the trained historian—secular or naturalistic analysis—to explore a variety of topics, some relevant to questions about truth and some not. Perhaps most important, the divisions of the past, Mormon versus non-Mormon interpretations of history, became less stark. Both sought to attain middle ground.

In 1972, Leonard Arrington, a key figure in the New Mormon History movement, received the position of LDS Church historian. Under his direction, a number of important projects got under way, such as those focused on creating professional narrative histories of the LDS Church. Eventually, Arrington’s group was transferred to BYU to form the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, where they continued to produce articles and books. Their works reshaped the historical landscape, and the people involved influenced many budding scholars. They sought to align faith and history in their various scholastic endeavors.

Unfortunately, the evolution of Mormon historiography resulted in division rather than unity. Debates about devotional and professional history seeped into discussions about Mormon history and even led to some retrenchment from the study of our past. Young scholars were warned away from rather than being encouraged to pursue such studies—and thus
Latter-day Saints trained as professional historians sometimes became less apt to study Mormon history than those outside of the Church.

New Mormon History Becomes Old

As an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University, I became aware of the nuances of Mormon historiography and the different conceptions of faith and history that spanned over one hundred and seventy years of interpreting the LDS past. While I had helpful and essential conversations with various mentors, ones for which I will be ever grateful, I will confess that I often found myself perplexed by the divisions I personally sensed: did I have to choose between intellect and faith? Some implied that objectivity—to the point of ignoring faith claims—was ideal. They believed scholars could not approach questions of faith. But that didn’t work for me. Others seemed to suggest that interpretation and analysis were secular tools and that historical narrative should be used only to convince others that the Church is true, and that every experience recounted should be positive. I wondered if claims of human perfection could really promote faith. That didn’t work for me either. How could I claim a history that did not require a Savior? That was not LDS doctrine—and thus it seemed essential not to write a history that seemed to cross that line. As I continued to reflect on my choice to be a historian, I concluded that I wanted to be both intellectual and faithful. But I didn’t want to define intellect or faith in the ways they were being presented to me—it seemed important to learn from and then improve upon past approaches.

As I attended graduate school and became increasingly capable of utilizing the historian’s craft, it became more clear to me that history alone cannot prove or disprove truth (my essay, which follows, will describe how I came to understand this) and that interpretations of the past will vary depending on the evidence one uses, the theoretical tools one embraces, and the particular biases one employs. To be afraid of sharpening my own academic abilities, to somehow assume faith and history cannot coexist, to be unprepared or unwilling to enter scholarly conversations, or to limit my own reading habits is to surrender the Church’s past to others and to suggest, rather implicitly, that we have something to be afraid of. I have learned that I must be willing and able and prepared to engage in historiographical discussions—I have to know how to speak the dual language of scholarship and faith. To assume that the division is the norm—that I must choose to be either scholarly or
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faithful—is to question the words of modern prophets and apostles, as well as the very premise of the Church Educational System.

Fortunately, I have discovered that being a historian of religion more generally—and of Mormonism specifically—has never been more exciting! Overly secularized interpretations are being revised; examining religiosity is more likely to be considered legitimate scholarship by the academy than it was years ago. New lenses and interpretations are being employed, and deeper and richer publications are resulting. In an LDS context, the Church Historical Department seems to be expanding at an unprecedented rate. Important topics are being explored both thoroughly and openly, and many significant works are resulting. In addition, many believing scholars throughout the Christian community have become increasingly committed to discussions about faith and history over time; such individuals are grappling with ways in which their faith can enrich their professional work. LDS historians are just beginning to enter such conversations in the broader academic context—we could and should be more involved. For this reason, I have invited several faithful historians to share their views, experiences, observations, or theoretical approaches to the subject of faith and history. Some of the pieces included are autobiographical, while others are more historiographical or philosophical in their analysis. And yet despite differences, a common unity emerges. The goal of this article is not to be exhaustive, but rather to begin and hopefully encourage future conversations on this topic with colleagues and students, as well as with those of other faiths.

“By the Power of the Holy Ghost, Ye May Know the Truth of All Things”

RACHEL COPE

Our life stories—meaning our personal histories—are drawn from collections of memories; the autobiographies we share reflect the circumstances we have remembered as well as those we have forgotten. As participants in the mortal experience, it is important that we recognize that humans are fallible and that each history, whether shared textually or orally, provides one interpretation of a life that has been lived or an event that has been experienced. While the past does not change, our understandings of it certainly do.

As I reflect upon my own history, I find that some memories are clear while others seem to be a bit muddled. On occasion, a side detail actually overshadows the main event. In fact, many of my most precious memories stem from the ordinary rather than the spectacular. Such is the case with my
baptism—a short conversation with my grandfather following the performance of this ordinance has become the most memorable, indeed, the most life-changing part of that important experience.

When I think back to that brisk March day, I remember that before my hair had even dried, my grandpa, his eyes twinkling as they were wont to do, asked me to bring my Book of Mormon to him. As I did so, he led me into the living room and summoned me to sit beside him on the couch. Grandpa talked to me about the importance of the Book of Mormon and bore a powerful testimony of this sacred text. He then removed a red pencil from his suit pocket, opened the book to Moroni 10:4–5, and marked this well-known passage with straight, even lines.

While handing the book back to me, he asked, “Rachel, can you read the verses I just underlined?”

I did so eagerly. As I finished, he looked into my eyes with the most loving of expressions and explained Moroni’s exhortation, and then he challenged me to memorize this passage and to act on its promise. I can’t remember all of the particulars that followed; I just know that I earnestly began to work toward both goals that very night and that the feelings I felt as we shared that special moment together will never be forgotten.

For years, I have described this experience as a moment in which an essential part of my spiritual foundation was first laid—I became committed to reading the Book of Mormon, and I gained a testimony of its message, just as Grandpa had encouraged me to do. Time, however, has enabled me to see additional meanings in this particular story (in other words, I interpret parts of my own history rather differently now). Quite simply, I see a message within the message my grandfather had so wisely shared with me. Yes, he was encouraging me to read the Book of Mormon, but he was also teaching me what it means to receive the Holy Ghost. Perhaps no other lesson could have been more important than that one—developing the ability to discern and recognize truth—for a young girl who as an adult would pursue a PhD in religious history in a secular environment.

As a very young college student, I felt most comfortable reading religious history books (including LDS history) that promoted and supported what I will call faithful views; I was slightly afraid of interpretations of Church history that had a more secular tone. I had heard stories about people losing their faith, and I feared falling into that trap. I wanted to remain on the believing side of the academic line. As I continued to pursue my study of history—as I
started to bud into a historian—I came to recognize that historiography (the work of historians) is composed of various sets of evidence and interpretations (just as our own personal histories are). Each scholar draws upon the evidence available to him or her and then interprets it through the particular lens that he or she (probably wittingly and unwittingly) decides to use; this combination shapes the story that the scholar tells. It is then up to the readers to determine (we could also use the word discern) the legitimacy of the sources and the approach. This realization helped me recognize that the study of history did not have to challenge my faith per se but rather could teach me how to challenge (in a scholarly way) those things that dismissed faith. Faith and reason could indeed be combined.

This became ever clearer to me as I was reading section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants, a revelation that resulted from the Prophet Joseph asking if he should translate the Apocrypha. In previous readings of this section, I had focused on the statement that said “it is not needful that the Apocrypha should be translated” (D&C 91:3). By so doing, I had missed the heart of the message—a message that teaches historians (and other scholars) how to combine study and faith: “Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; and whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom; and whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited” (D&C 91:4–6).

It is important to note that the Lord did not say we should not read texts that employ various viewpoints; rather, he said we should read a plethora of materials with the influence of the Spirit as our guide. For the first time, I truly understood what it means to be a historian of faith. I did not need to fear “unfaithful history”—I needed to apply the lesson my grandpa had first shared with me when I was eight. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, I could discern truth from error; I could glean the useful from the unuseful. I could think critically and faithfully.

I suppose no one leaves graduate school unscathed in some way or another (we could all swap stories!), but the valuable lessons I have described did enable me to withstand various challenges and maintain my faith in a rigorous PhD program. These are lessons I continue to draw upon as I pursue my own scholarly endeavors; they are also skills I hope to teach my students to develop. As a teacher of scripture and religious history, I want those who enter my classroom to understand that testimonies should not be made or broken because of interpretations of the past—historians (including faithful
Building the Kingdom: Pioneering Historians within the Church Educational System

BRIAN Q. CANNON

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Professionally trained historians have contributed significantly to the Church Educational System for the better part of a century. This article highlights the pioneering contributions of early historians in CES. Two specialists in LDS history holding history PhDs taught at the Logan Institute of Religion before World War II. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a second cadre of history PhDs joined BYU’s religious education faculty. By treating historical research and teaching as religious endeavors, these scholars nurtured students spiritually and intellectually, demonstrating the usefulness of historical approaches in religious education.

Thomas C. Romney (PhD, Berkeley, 1929) and Milton R. Hunter (PhD, Berkeley, 1935) began teaching at the Logan Institute of Religion during the Great Depression. Both helped to develop productive relations between the campus community and the institute and demonstrated the compatibility of faith and careful historical scholarship in their research and writing. Hunter’s revised dissertation, published as Brigham Young the Colonizer, and Romney’s The Mormon Colonies in Mexico nurtured LDS readers’ faith while fostering outsiders’ appreciation for Mormonism.8

Soon after Romney became director of the Logan Institute, several Church educators pursued PhDs at the University of Chicago Divinity School, following the lead of Sidney B. Sperry. Some, including Daryl Chase and Russel B. Swensen, wrote their dissertations on historical topics, but they were supervised and trained primarily by theologians rather than professional historians.9 The first PhD in history to join the religious education program at BYU was Hugh Nibley (PhD, Berkeley, 1938), who came to Provo in 1946
at the encouragement of Elder John A. Widtsoe. Those with PhDs in history who would focus their teaching and research primarily upon Mormon history came to BYU’s religious education program close to the time that the College of Religious Instruction was created in 1959: they included G. Byron Done (PhD, USC, 1939), who had been an institute director in southern California for twenty years before coming to BYU; Milton Backman (PhD, University of Pennsylvania, 1959); Richard Cowan (PhD, Stanford, 1961); Richard Anderson (PhD, Harvard, 1962); James Allen (PhD, USC, 1963; transferred to the history department in 1964); and Spencer Palmer (PhD, Berkeley, 1964). At roughly the same time, T. Edgar Lyon, a faculty member at the Salt Lake Institute of Religion, completed his PhD in history. By teaching substantial, intellectually rigorous, and spiritually engaging classes, these and other teacher-scholars nurtured students’ faith.

Many in this cohort who spent their careers in religious education at BYU viewed their historical teaching and writing as a religious mission. As Richard L. Anderson reflected in 2006, “I think I prayed every day that I would work on something pleasing to the Lord.” By engaging in careful historical research they were able to respond credibly and responsibly to the Church’s critics. For instance, Backman studied and wrote about the historical setting of the First Vision to counter scholarly critics such as Wesley Walters.10

Much of these scholars’ work entailed collecting, editing, and publishing primary documents related to the Restoration. For instance, Backman authored Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration, and Palmer and his wife, Shirley, wrote and edited The Korean Saints: Personal Stories of Trial and Triumph. At least some of these historians focused upon editing and publishing historical documents because they believed that the most honest and revealing portraits of figures in Church history came from their own pens. As Anderson explained in 2005, “When I started studying history, I learned that you need to let the sources speak for themselves.” Backman recognized he could not prove the divinity of Joseph Smith’s calling through historical research and editing. “We have to be careful with the use of the word ‘evidence’ because religious or spiritual things are not based on evidence,” he explained. But he wisely saw in the contextual evidence and first-person accounts “something to support” faith claims.11

In 1967, the Institute of Mormon Studies within the College of Religious Instruction began to send historians to archives in search of new documents regarding the Restoration. As the institute’s director, Truman Madsen,
explained, they hoped to use historical research to answer two key questions: first, “what is the [documentary] evidence for these [sacred] events?” Having gathered the evidence, they would be better able to broach a second, deeper question about religious truth: “what are the events evidence for?”

What were the results of these professional historians’ labor? They are legion, but among them is a better understanding of the richness of the First Vision and the multilayered meaning it held for Joseph Smith as a result of Backman’s and Allen’s work. We understand the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the enduring testimony of the Book of Mormon witnesses more fully thanks to Anderson’s meticulous research. We understand the ways that sacrifice and continuing revelation have shaped missionary efforts, international growth, and the proliferation of temples over the past century as a result of Cowan’s work. And we understand the faith of recent converts in Africa and Asia and the possibilities for common ground and cooperation between Mormons and Muslims thanks to Palmer’s pioneering scholarship.

Many Latter-day Saint students, including me, benefited from the teaching or writing of these scholars: I appreciated their humility, their careful scholarship, and their honesty in the face of a morally complex past. I appreciated the fact that they eschewed facile interpretations, responded respectfully and responsibly to tough questions, and deftly harmonized faith and reason. By their historical scholarship and teaching, they demonstrated a high standard of faith. Their example convinced me that the Baptist historian Robert H. Handy was right when he observed, “The knowledge that comes through the application of historical method may be inconvenient and even painful, but to resist it or turn from it may give evidence of our lack of faith; for an unblinking facing of the reality that is disclosed by this method . . . may help us learn more about the ways of the Creator, the creation, and the creatures.”

The Supernatural and the Boundaries of the Discipline

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The first lesson all historians should learn is how radically true it is that all histories are a reflection of presuppositions driven so deeply that it is impossible to recognize them all. The sort of history today written by historians from Richard Bushman to Eric Foner to David McCullough, for instance, is based upon the principle that the reader might track down all the evidence quoted
and footnoted and judge for herself how accurate the author’s interpretation is. But, like all history, these assumptions are actually projections of our beliefs about human nature and how one lives in the world. Footnote-driven history is based upon the Enlightenment’s presupposition that humanity has the capacity to understand ourselves and that our decisions and the evidence we leave of them are, at the base, those things which drive history forward. Therefore, the more we understand ourselves, the greater our capacity to make correct decisions, to progress, and to make our world a better place. As David Hume put it, the purpose of history is to “instruct us in the principles of human nature and regulate our future conduct.” This history is based, finally, on the faith that human choices matter.

Here is the beginning of the challenge of opening that past to the supernatural. The great Protestant theologian Jonathan Edwards was distressed that people like Edward Gibbon seemed to understand history as a series of causes springing from discoverable human effects, the temporal manifestation of human decision making, something of our own creation. For Edwards, theology and history were inseparable, and he called his great History of the Work of Redemption a “body of divinity . . . thrown into the form of a history.” There was no moment in time that was not in some sense a projection of God’s will, and therefore, should we want to understand how history works, we should try to understand not necessarily the ways human decisions function but rather the will of God. For Edwards, the most important story about the past—indeed, the entire reason the past existed—was to work out God’s saving mercy and to illustrate it in ways humans could understand. Therefore, historians that dwelt on the role of human choices were necessarily blind to the real forces that drove the universe forward. This providential history should not be unfamiliar to Latter-day Saints; it is the way that the Biblical authors understood the past, and moreover, it is quite clearly the form of history told in the Book of Mormon.

For scholars trained in the form of history written in America today, Edwards’s view of the past is terribly problematic. To concede supernatural influence in the past is not only to allot agency to something which by its nature cannot be footnoted but also to compromise whatever coherence assumptions of human agency give the stories we tell about ourselves. Edwards, with iron nerve, might well assent to that. But for modern Americans, it is harder. Historians want to communicate with each other, and the footnote is the thread which allows us to do so.
But increasingly, scholars like the Catholic Robert Orsi are struggling to find ways to acknowledge that, for the vast majority of the human subjects we write about, the supernatural does in fact have historical agency. Many adopt a phenomenological approach, which seeks only to judge the effects of religious belief on human behavior rather than passing primary judgment upon the reality of the supernatural. This has going for it modesty: it seeks to understand the sure providentialism of Edwards but also acknowledges that the historian is not equipped to make such judgments on her own. But in other ways, it is limited: it treats the supernatural as a second-order phenomenon, observed in its effects rather than in its presence.

What, then, can historians do? The answer may be, so long as we remain bound by the rules of our discipline, not much. There are, however, scholars who seek to grasp more fully the experience of the religious life. Robert Orsi has argued strenuously that to grasp the role the supernatural plays in the lives of our subjects, historians must take steps toward granting the supernatural historical agency, acknowledging that visions and mystical encounters do in fact sometimes drive forward human behavior. Such an approach also encompasses the growing historical school of “lived religion,” which seeks to understand how religious people live their lives, the roles and motivations it gives them, and to treat these as equivalent to secular motivations like poverty or political beliefs. Thanks to these scholars, religion has been rid of its status as an epiphenomenon, a manifestation of something else, like social marginalization or political repression. The simple boundaries of the discipline mean that the sort of history Edwards might be happy with may never be written in the academy, but if scholars are willing to continue to push them, the presences within the past may become increasingly tangible.

Faith and History, Old Testament–Style

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Some wonder why we as Latter-day Saints bother devoting one out of every four years in the Sunday School curriculum to the Old Testament. Other than a superficial acknowledgment that it is scripture—and thus prima facie deserves our attention—it seems to me there are plenty of legitimate reasons why we should spend our time elsewhere. Many of our ward-level Gospel Doctrine teachers have not even read the whole book; even fewer really know
anything about ancient Hebrew culture, history, or religion. Class sessions are filled with complaints about how hard it is to understand the Old Testament (Isaiah, alas, being the most frequent whipping boy), so the discussion typically centers on a handful of accessible stories known from childhood or carefully chosen proof texts that seem to confirm what we already know about the gospel. Even on a strictly doctrinal basis, most of the topics we cover during our Old Testament study are addressed in equal and often superior depth, richness, and clarity in one of the other standard works. In short, some might ask, how much would we lose by replacing the Old Testament with more in-depth study of, say, the Gospels or the Book of Mormon?

I don’t pretend to be an Old Testament scholar; indeed, I know hardly anything about ancient Hebrew culture, history, or religion. But it seems to me that rather than tossing the book in the can, a more robust engagement with the Old Testament would do much to help us see our notion of humans as historical agents and the complicated relationship between faith and history in a different light.

The Old Testament is easily the most human of sacred texts accepted by Latter-day Saints as scripture. There are few angels here (among the mortals), and even the men and women who are the heroes of the various stories are deeply, and often tragically, human. Adam and Eve fall, Noah gets drunk, Abraham lies, Sarah gets jealous, Jacob deceives, Moses kills, Joshua and Saul commit genocide, David commits adultery, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are social outcasts—and these are the good guys! One can hardly walk away from the Old Testament without a sense that, as Reinhold Niebuhr was fond of saying, “the doctrine of original [or universal] sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.”

The stunning thing to me is that this was the narrative that was preserved and held sacred by the Jews and then adopted by Christians as a meaningful and faithful record of humanity’s relationship to God. Indeed, if there was ever a history written with “warts and all,” the Old Testament is it.

In his companion essay, Matthew Bowman (channeling Jonathan Edwards) shows that one powerful way of reading the Bible is as a narrative of God’s inscrutable agency and sovereignty—what he calls “providential history.” Another, less Calvinist, reading emphasizes both the integrity and real consequences of human action as a response, on both individual and communal levels, to a reality perceived as sacred. God is no doubt a principal actor on the stage, but that does not mean that humans are reduced to the level of
bit players or even marionettes. At times, God is shuttled off the stage altogether, as sacred reality is either misperceived or generally neglected. Some books, such as Chronicles, have a kind of proto-secular historical orientation, whereas others, such as Ecclesiastes, are only vaguely theistic in their articulation of wisdom. It would be a misreading of the text to think the Old Testament presents a post-Enlightenment view of human individualism, but we do similar violence to the text when we deny its often surprising affirmation of the variety of human experience, from the depraved to the saintly.

In his classic essay “Faithful History,” Richard Bushman noted that the narrative structure of Church history often takes one of two forms: “The fundamental dramatic tension can be between the Church and the world, or it can be between God and the Church.” The first model has attracted most Latter-day Saint historians who wish to defend the faith and demonstrate it to be a pearl of great price in the midst of a wicked and characteristically hostile world. In the second model, Bushman observed, “the Lord tries to establish his kingdom, but the stubborn people whom He favors with revelation ignore him much of the time and must be brought up short. . . . The prophets mourn the declension of faith within the Church itself more than they laud the righteousness of the Saints.” In the first model, “the Saints are heroes and the world villains. In the second, the world is wicked, but so are the Saints much of the time.”

While the Book of Mormon, and to a lesser extent the Doctrine and Covenants, contains elements of the second model (alongside the first), the Old Testament is the paradigmatic example of the “Saints versus God” genre. The warts of fallen humankind’s history are not presented to embarrass the prophets and other figures who are simultaneously portrayed as spiritual exemplars. Rather, an acknowledgment of frailty and sin provides far more insight into the human condition than an airbrushed bit of propaganda ever could. In this, the authors point to God as the only reliable anchor of hope and salvation. Any portrait of the covenant people as inherently righteous—even at their best—is not only dishonest but borderline idolatrous.

Faithful history operates under the assumption that “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Mark 10:18). Even Mormonism’s theology of our divine nature and potential does not alter the sin-stained reality of human existence. If we can learn from the Old Testament that the compassionate recounting of human frailty does not undercut faithful history but in fact can enhance it, then all those Sunday School lessons will have been well worth it.
“Obtain a Knowledge of History”

STEVEN C. HARPER

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In 1985, Mark Hofmann killed two innocent people and nearly himself trying to cover his string of forged documents, many of which were calculated to cast Church history in a suspicious, less than faithful light. Earlier that year (May 1985), the Church published one of the forged documents in the Church News, a purported letter from Joseph to Josiah Stowell about using a fresh hazel rod to find buried treasure guarded by a clever spirit. At age fourteen, I read the letter in the Church News at the breakfast table and thought seriously about it. My father helped me to do so. Now, years later, I look back on that experience and recognize that I had a historian inside me early on, though I hardly knew it then. What teenage boy dreams of becoming a historian?

Another awakening to my calling came near the end of my mission. I had begun to think about what I should do after my mission to prepare me for my life’s work. In one of those magical moments where a passage of scripture speaks to me here, now, as powerfully as it did to them there, then, words originally given to the First Presidency in 1833 were revealed anew to me: “It is my will,” the Lord said, “that you should . . . obtain a knowledge of history” (D&C 93:53). The ways for me to obtain that knowledge subsequently opened, and one of them is best described by narrating another slice of history.

At the time of the bombings in 1985, Hofmann had rumored that he could acquire documents created by controversial early Apostle William McLellin if he could get funding. In June 1985, as part of his plot to defraud, Hofmann offered to donate the collection to the Church. Ironically, the Church had acquired many of McLellin’s papers in 1908. Leaders and archivists who knew of the acquisition had passed away, and the Church had lost consciousness of the documents. In March 1986, in the legal fallout following the bombings, archivists discovered letters that mentioned acquisition of McLellin’s papers, which led to the discovery of these original papers. Rumors spread, meanwhile, that the Church would suppress the McLellin documents. Instead, Church leaders invited Jan Shipps, a renowned non-Mormon scholar of the Saints, to edit McLellin’s papers for publication by an academic press. She in turn collaborated with John W. Welch, editor in chief of BYU Studies, where I was working as an editorial assistant. I was assigned to help the editors compare McLellin’s original holograph journals to typescripts to ensure
the accuracy of The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836. I read those journals closely. They are evidence for Richard Bushman’s informed observation: “The closer you get to Joseph Smith in the sources, the stronger he will appear, rather than the reverse, as is so often assumed by critics.” That is my experience. And that is why my life’s work is to bring my students closer to Joseph Smith in the best sources—the rawest forms of his revelations, histories, and letters.

In the last dispensation, the Lord called a first and a second elder, then a bishop, and then a historian. On the day he organized the Church, the Lord said, “There shall be a record kept among you.” To record is to remember. To remember is sacramental; to remember is to commune with God. What is history but remembering? What is history but one way of communing with God?

Some separate history and doctrine, but I can’t find the seam where one ends and the other begins. Our doctrine is historical. We don’t have theological classes on philosophical creeds; we have history and doctrine classes where we talk about the nature of God being revealed in time and space. We tell the stories of historical events. We can because the stories were recorded in historical documents that must be understood in order to understand our doctrine. The revelations that contain our doctrine are historical and cannot be well understood without historical knowledge (see Explanatory Introduction to the D&C).

The plan of salvation is historical. We explain our present life in terms of our premortal past. Without such history, our existence is meaningless.

Testimonies are often historical. They are based on experiences in our past, or in the pasts of others: Jesus Christ, Moroni, Joseph Smith—individuals whose pasts have come to bear on ours because they were recorded in historical documents and thereby made available and memorable, and therefore sacramental, to us. One cannot, for instance, have a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet without knowing about Joseph Smith and his experiences, and one cannot know about him or his experiences without history. We remember President J. Reuben Clark’s charge to teach the Savior’s Atonement and Joseph’s First Vision. We would not know a thing about either if not for historians like Luke, Benjamin, Mormon, and Joseph himself, who was much more diligent in documenting his vision than his followers have been in studying his documents of it.
Our history is doctrinal. The commandment to keep a history came the day the Church was organized. It motivates the enormous expenditures of human and material resources spent acquiring, preserving, and making accessible our historical sources. The Lord revealed instructions for the Church historian and a rationale for them that linked the past, present, and future. He was commanded to “continue in writing and making a history of all the important things which he shall observe and know concerning my church,” and this “for the good of the church, and for the rising generations” (D&C 69:8). The First Presidency (and I) were commanded to “obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion” (D&C 93:53). Sister Julie B. Beck, former Relief Society general president, spoke about the importance of Church history, especially Relief Society history, in her address to the sisters on September 25, 2010. “We study our history to learn who we are,” she said. “Studying and applying the history of Relief Society gives definition and expression to who we are as disciples and followers of our Savior Jesus Christ.” She then illustrated this truth by teaching the history of D&C 25.

There is no restored doctrine without history, and history without restored doctrine would be bleak indeed. History is truth, the particular kind of truth that is knowledge of things “as they were.” Such truth is of God and ought to be obtained until it is all known (D&C 93:24–28). For that reason, I am thankful that a loving God invited me to obtain a knowledge of history and positioned me to share it with others, “and all this for the salvation of Zion” (D&C 93:53).

Mormon History and the Rules of the Academic Game

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As a graduate student at the University of Notre Dame, I became part of a vibrant community of religious historians in both senses of the words—historians who studied the influence of religion in the past and many of whom adhered to some sort of faith commitment themselves. Catholics were, of course, well represented, but the history department also contained a large number of evangelical Christians who had come to study with George Marsden and Mark Noll, leading historians of evangelicalism and American religious history. A small sprinkling of Mormons and Mennonites added to
the mix. We engaged in vigorous discussions about the relationship between personal belief and the academic study of history.

In his book *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, George Marsden, who was my PhD adviser, argued that historians could bring their religiously informed perspectives into the academy, just like a Marxist historian or a feminist historian would bring his or her own distinct viewpoint, as long as they abided by the “rules of the academic game.” In other words, they need to study history through professional research methodologies which other academics can accept. I am convinced that believing Latter-day Saint historians greatly benefit for both theological and practical reasons when they keep in mind Marsden’s counsel.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the Apostle Paul taught, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” I believe that God intervenes in history. But, in most instances in mortality, “we see through a glass, darkly.” In other words, in our professional research and writing, we need to be humble in our approach about explicitly identifying God’s working in history. In Isaiah 55:8, the Lord declared, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” Certainly, we can through the Spirit sense many of the ways that God has dealt with his people in history. But we are always wise to remember the limits our understanding in mortality.

In addition, by adhering to academic standards, by pursuing graduate degrees and by engaging with the cutting-edge scholarship of our field, we increase our credibility with scholars and others not of our faith. This credibility is crucial if we want to participate in shaping how Latter-day Saint history is understood by the broader public and how it is taught by academics in university settings. We enhance our credibility by participating in scholarly conferences, by publishing with academic presses, by networking with other historians, and by generally participating in the academic conversations. Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church historian and recorder, has said, “The scholarship of incisive, faithful Mormon historians needs to be injected into the marketplace of ideas. Truth always does very well in that setting.”

Playing by the rules of the academic game allows us to enter into that marketplace.

The recent direction of the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which I joined in late 2010 after I graduated from Notre Dame and taught for about five years at universities in Indiana, demonstrates the belief that academic training and approaches are
not only compatible with but can be fully supportive of a faithful approach. For instance, the large-scale investigation during the past decade into the Mountain Meadows Massacre, performed by scholars employed by or associated with the Church History Department, resulted in the publication of *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* by Oxford University Press, with two other books on that crime still in preparation.25 *The Joseph Smith Papers*, published by the Church Historian’s Press and a part of the Church History Department, adheres to the most exacting standards of the documentary editing community, ensuring that present and future scholars and students of Joseph Smith must grapple with the documents he produced. Hiring patterns also indicate the belief that academically rigorous training enhances a truthful pursuit of history. Within the past two years, the Church History Department has hired ten scholars with PhDs in history or related fields.

Witnessing these trends, historian Richard Bushman recently declared, “I believe we are in a golden age of Mormon history.” He continued, “We do not need to conceal our history. It will be more convincing, more engaging and more true if we tell it as it is.”26 Those of us living in this “golden age” should, of course, maintain a deep sense of humility in this as well. But we should also recognize the opportunities that can come to the study of the Latter-day Saint past as we engage with the broader professional historical community.

**What Is So Sacred about History?**

**TONA HANGEN**

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Mormons are inherently concerned with history; its fabric enfolds the Mormon experience. Mormons invoke history each time the “Joseph Smith story” is retold (as if it were a singular thing), and we reenact it in youth pioneer treks. We trace its geographic span with pilgrimage tourism to Church history sites in the US and Canada, “Book of Mormon” tours to Central America, and journeys to the Holy Land in the Middle East. Mormons inscribe themselves in history with books of remembrance, multigeneration pedigree charts, scrapbooks, ward histories, and, increasingly, blogs and websites of all kinds. Mormons create history by testifying to personal, true stories about the past in testimonies, talks, and lessons. We sing of angels who serve as miraculous, mysterious archivists in heaven, “silent notes taking of
every action.” We reverently pass down artifacts and shore up the walls of crumbling buildings to preserve a tangible record of our collective past.

Yet most Mormons are not professionally trained historians, and those that are might, like myself, experience some cognitive dissonance. Trained historians resist bending historical narratives along preordained patterns or attributing historical events to divine causes—actions that are acceptable and encouraged, indeed, utterly unproblematic in Mormon settings. Where sacred history diverges from academic and scholarly history is in the former’s discomfort with the latter’s insistence of contingency as a central principle. For academic historians, history has no definite endpoint, no future dénouement toward which the lines of human experience will inescapably converge. History has causality but not inevitability. It follows no predetermined trajectory, although one can (in retrospect only) trace an arc backward from antecedent to precedent. Academic history glories in complexity, rejecting the notion of simple universal laws or moral lessons. These days, it tries to steer between the Scylla of declension narratives or jeremiads and the Charybdis of triumphant progress, down the enlightened center that celebrates not a story’s didactic value but its verisimilitude.

In other words, academic history deliberately places itself at odds with—in fact, as a protest movement in reaction to—religious perspectives on the past. Christianity had imposed upon the past an overlay, a transparency, of sacred metahistory upon the march of time. Writing in History: A Very Short Introduction, John H. Arnold puts it this way: “Christian belief did not depend upon the wheel of fate; instead it saw the world moving inexorably between two fixed points, the Creation and the Apocalypse.” Mormons further refine this by seeing the self as a soul moving along a predefined one-way trajectory: from premortal existence to mortality to eternity. And Mormons take a dispensational view of human time, assigning people and civilizations and history to prophetic epochs according to degrees of fullness of the kingdom of God. We orient ourselves within this sacred codex as it unfolds, with a clear sense of both heritage and destiny.

In explaining what history is for, Arnold proposes three reasons for doing history: for simple enjoyment, as a tool (“something with which to think about ourselves”), and to be made aware of the possibility of doing things differently. One would think that Mormons would be especially enthused about the third reason because it celebrates human agency, choice, and accountability as a core reality of human existence. We apply divine approbation to
those capabilities; we have a theology in which agency is central to the success of the plan of salvation. But this idea is dangerous, too, because it radically assaults the supposition of intentionality that underlies nonscholarly ways of constructing the Mormon sense of the past. Finding God’s hand in human affairs, seeing his tender mercies evident in one’s life, and drawing universal human lessons from stories about our pasts strengthen our sense of connection with a loving and powerful God, but somewhere along the path they part ways with historical scholarship. The two can never be fully reconciled.

However, creative tension is productive. Inquiry lives in the gap between irreconcilables. Silences and discontinuities are necessary; they produce questions.

When I look back on my graduate studies, perhaps the most important lesson I learned was something Morton (Mickey) Keller, an eminent legal historian, used to say while evoking Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. In the short story “Silver Blaze,” Holmes quizzes a Scotland Yard detective on the disappearance of a racehorse, directing him to “the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.” The Scotland Yard man observes that “the dog did nothing in the night-time,” to which Holmes replies, “That was the curious incident.” Keller would often ask, pointedly, what dogs were not barking in a particular line of research inquiry. What are you not asking? What sources do you not have? He trained me to look for what is absent, what has been silenced, that which others have overlooked, dismissed, or suppressed. And as history has converged with literary and textual studies in recent years, scholars have proven wonderfully inventive in reading into the gaps, lacunas, and fragments in the historical record, ciphering sources with new attentiveness to those absent from them. The recent edited volume *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* marshals brilliant examples of these techniques, driven by scholars’ concern with people whose presence in the historical record had been masked, obscured, or excised.

In the celebration of the ordinary, the left-behind, and the fragmentary—in other words, in the methods and the aims of what we might call the new new social history—I find a deep religious connection which halloWS even my “secular” work as a professional historian. Every child of God is significant; God is no respecter of persons. No one is undeserving of having her or his story told; no one is beneath a careful historian’s interest. In being trained to listen for the silences, I found that God was not in the loud wind or the earthquake but in a still, small voice. I do not see the unfolding of a
grand design in the course of human history (although I respect those who do). Instead, I see his love enfolding human history on the smallest and most mundane levels, a constant thrumming behind the tapestry of history, a faithful dog not barking—if we choose to listen for it.

**History, Philosophy, and Natural Law**

**PAUL E. KERRY**

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A historian who has religious commitments can play by the rules of the game, as George Marsden puts it, and be a resident alien, a believer who is the best historian possible, by the standards of the profession. This view, of course, implies that believing historians should not be rejected by the academy for holding private, non-naturalistic views of history. Such a position is seen by some professional historians as a cheat, an artificial split in the reasoning of a scholar that may well disqualify the believing historian on grounds of being disingenuous or simply mad for holding supernatural views privately while professing only naturalistic explanations as a scholar. Accepting that others see one’s beliefs as foolishness is par for the course in Herbert Butterfield’s view—just as it was to profess Christianity in the ancient pagan world.

David Bebbington put forward that one’s research insights can be molded by the acknowledgment of God’s hand—not so easily discerned—in historical events. Yet he also points out that a believing historian must be aware of his or her audience, which might mean not stating overtly one’s belief in God’s hand for a professional stance. Several historians in *Seeing Things Their Way* (2009) have argued that religion must be understood on its own terms. It is not merely an epiphenomenon that sheds light on economic or sociological or other social science theories, but is a category in itself and is central to the lives of those who have lived in the past. Strangely, some have downplayed analyzing religion as if it would be least likely to play a role in historical periods when it is most evident. Historical empathy, an approach that has long fallen out of favor, is experiencing a recrudescence in historical writing and may be particularly productive in analyzing religious history.

Believing historians sometimes put themselves at a disadvantage by cleaving too closely to the notion that all of secular history must be fitted into a providential narrative, like Cinderella’s stepsister attempting to force her foot into the glass slipper. Professional history has entailments, of course. It must work through its own biases (including false objectivity) and is often blind
to its own philosophical assumptions. Do the historical actors posited by professional historians possess a moral personality? What motivates human action—is it merely passion, or can human beings discern intelligible goods through reason? Are we able to pass ethical judgments on historical events and actors—if so, by what standard? How can and should we learn from the past and teach our students to do so?

Several prominent historians have called for a deeper philosophical grounding in historical writing, including James Tracy and Brad Gregory. This is a highly serious consideration, as the dignity of human life is being increasingly called into question, and human beings are seen, from the materialist perspective, as mere points on an ecological continuum. Jacques Maritain recognized a productive relationship in the interpenetration of the philosophy of history and moral philosophy (which may be informed by theology). Similarly, Josef Pieper argued that the “end of history,” in the philosophical sense of its proper aim and the theological sense of eschatology, transcends merely factual history (which is still a necessity) as questions of meaning arise. Happily, there is a recent volume, Confessing History (2010), in which historians suggest how philosophical approaches strengthen and make more relevant teaching and writing history: through “virtue ethics” (T. A. Howard), understanding history as a “vocation” (W. Katerberg), exercising “sympathetic understanding” (B. J. Gundlach), and recuperating misunderstood Enlightenment historiographic techniques, including a rehabilitation of moral philosophy (M. Kugler).

Another way forward is to learn how insights from natural law may strengthen the project of history. This would help to shore up the philosophical foundations of a profession that invests so much in the cult of the archive but might be accused of paying little heed to the philosophical cohesion of its animating assumptions. Although the roots of natural law go back to antiquity and in particular Aristotle, there is a strong Judeo-Christian contribution to natural law theory, contained not only in the Decalogue but in, for example, Romans 2:14–15: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” Latter-day Saints could plumb the rich depths of Alma’s profound statement to Korihor, who sought a sign to prove God’s existence, in the light of natural law: “The scriptures are laid
before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44). In this verse are contained what Jean Porter calls the “three traditional loci for Christian moral reflection [for scholastics]—namely, nature, reason, and Scripture.”

Natural law was developed by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*. Here is one of its most famous formulations: “It is manifest that all things participate to some degree in the eternal law, insofar, that is to say, as they have from its impression inclinations to their own acts and ends. Among the others, however, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way, insofar as it is itself made a participant in providence, being provident for itself and others. Hence there is in it a participation in the eternal reason, through which it has a natural inclination towards a due act and end. And such participation in the eternal law by the rational creature is called the natural law.” Aquinas also “described the function of the natural law as ‘the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and evil.’” Although there are various definitions of natural law, the philosopher Ralph McInerny provides one of the broadest: “Natural law—the theory—maintains that there is a common fund of knowledge, truths we can assume that everyone—anyone—already knows.” Alasdair MacIntyre puts it this way: “Every account of natural law, no matter how minimal, makes at least two claims [the first only will interest us here]: first, that our human nature is such that, as rational beings, we cannot but recognize that obedience to some particular set of precepts is required, if we are to achieve our good or goods.” Robert P. George maintains that natural law “consists of three sets of principles [again, the first will suffice for our purpose here]. First, and most fundamentally, a set of principles directing human choice and action toward intelligible purposes, i.e., basic human goods that, as intrinsic aspects of human well-being and fulfillment, constitute reasons for action whose intelligibility as reasons does not depend on any more fundamental reasons.”

Natural law was taken up as a legal theory by various philosophers including Grotius, Pufendorf, and Locke and is nested in several of the founding texts of the United States, not least the Declaration of Independence, which uses the language of the “laws of nature and nature’s God.” The political philosopher Leo Strauss quoted from the Declaration in his University of Chicago lectures: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are
created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable
Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. Strauss opens his lecture with the insight that developments in the discipline
of history since the eighteenth century have made it impossible to “derive
any norms from history,” and as universal principles were discredited, his-
tory became its own highest authority. He opines that eighteenth-century
philosophy failed to remain concerned about “the humanizing quest for
the eternal order” and therefore gave way to the full flowering of universal
history, often with its attendant celebration of progress, as, for example, in
the universal histories of Bodin, Schlözer, and Schiller. Strauss points out
that these views collapsed and that even Hegelian history could work only
by positing the end of history. Other nineteenth-century efforts (not exclud-
ing those by the so-called father of modern history, Ranke) to retain some
modicum of universal or providential history, by the likes of Chateaubriand,
Guizot, Motley, and Bancroft, failed to establish themselves. History would
become rooted in relativity to the point that some contemporary histori-
ans, for example, profess that history is indistinguishable from fiction, or so
contingent or idiosyncratic as to render learning from the past an impossibil-
ity. More recent critiques see historical narratives as a tool to direct political
power, thus reducing history to an instrumentalized narrative in the service
of an ideological agenda.

In 1789, Friedrich Schiller gave his inaugural lecture as a historian at
the University of Jena, “What Is Universal History and to What End Is It
Studied?” He argued there that history encompassed “the entire moral
world.” What is that moral world? The nature of reality—is it secular and
relativistic, or is there an objective moral reality?—is of particular, if not cru-
cial, importance to all historians, including believing historians and students.
Historians and students of faith understand divine law through their revealed
religions and are taught the positive law that governs their societies. The cur-
rent “rules of the profession” seem to be that believing historians must accept
secular and relativistic assumptions and keep religious insights into human
nature or the nature of reality private, if not secret, to avoid being marginal-
ized. In this setting, natural law theory could provide historians and students
of history with a way to understand human nature, the common good, and
an objective moral reality that reason can discern without the necessity of
drawing directly on theology.
Conclusion

RACHEL COPE

As the writing of Mormon history continues to move forward, I suspect that the stories of our past will be enriched and that a sense of what faith and history meant and means will become more evident. In order for this to happen, we must look through the lenses of faith and scholarship more frequently, and we must let those lenses shape the types of questions we ask. More importantly, we must teach our students how to do this so they can learn ways to reconcile faith and reason before entering more secular settings.

Although I certainly did not know it at the age of thirteen, my “I am” poem was also an “I will be” poem. Indeed, the things I proclaimed still hold true: I am a Mormon, I am a woman, I am a scholar, and, perhaps less importantly, yes, I still hate lateness. Throughout my academic journey, I have discovered that the two aspects of my own consciousness, that of the believer and that of the scholar, have finally fused (despite the suggestions that such was not possible). Nonetheless, I recognize that I can and should do a better job of addressing faith and history, theoretically as well as practically. My teaching and my scholarship will become better if I make this a priority, as so many of my Christian friends do. As believers, we cannot do otherwise.

Notes

1. I also shared this story at http://mormonscholarstestify.org/2128/rachel-cope.
7. This institute was disbanded in 2005; many of the scholars it employed transferred to the Church Historical Department and have continued working on The Joseph Smith Papers and other projects.


37. I address this topic in “Reflections on Reconciling Religious Belief and the Historian’s Craft,” *Fides et Historia* 43, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2011): 41–52.


(Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2004), 306. This has resonances with D&C 88:11 and 13: “And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; . . . the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.”


45. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Theories of Natural Law in the Culture of Advanced Modernity,” in Common Truths, 94.


47. It is important not to confuse a philosophical approach to historical assumptions with what David Bebbington calls the “positivist school,” as opposed to the “idealist” (Patterns in History, 142–67).


49. Strauss, Natural Right and History, 17.

50. Strauss, Natural Right and History, 34.


52. The title of Schiller’s lecture was “Was heist und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?” and the original German of “the entire moral world” is “die ganze moralische Welt.” Friedrich Schiller, Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden, Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. Otto Dann and others (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988–2004), VI: Historische Schriften und Erzählungen (2000), FA 6, 211–12.
Joseph modeled how to be cheerful regardless of persecution, personal sorrow, or extreme trials. If anyone ever had legitimate reasons to be discouraged, it was Joseph Smith.
We live at a time when calamity abounds. Collectively, we are surrounded by economic turmoil, terrorism, wars, gangs, sexual perversion, pollution, hunger, famine, poverty, and the disintegration of the family. Moreover, on an individual level, many contemporary households deal with disease, divorce, financial distress, unemployment, and a host of other critical issues. Years ago, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland jested, “I watch an early morning news broadcast while I shave, and then read a daily newspaper. That is enough to ruin anyone’s day, and by then it’s only 6:30 in the morning.” More recently, Bishop Richard C. Edgley observed:

We live in a world today of isms—agnosticism, secularism, atheism, pessimism, and other isms. And today we certainly live in a time of great pessimism and concern. We face challenges both economically and spiritually. The stock market, a rather reliable index of public sentiment, has had distressing declines in value. The unemployment rate has risen from the comfortable levels we enjoyed in the past. Homes are foreclosing at an alarming rate, unusually high energy costs are affecting all of us, and so forth. . . . Perhaps most alarming is a retreat toward a godless society as more people are moving away from faith in Deity and the establishment of basic

**Joseph Smith and the Spirit of Optimism**

**MARK D. OGLETREE**

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moral values that have become the basis of a righteous life and are challenging our religious beliefs and our lifestyle.

The evidence of the decline in moral values is readily available as we see the continued rise of pornography, the rampant use of illegal drugs, cohabitating outside of marriage, and every other degenerate practice known to man.2

Certainly, such news does not give us much to cheer about these days; in fact, it would be rather easy to become a professional pessimist. Today, there are many who seek for peace but cannot find it. Consequently, a host of individuals in our society suffer from anxiety, depression, and stress. We live in a day in which the love of many has waxed cold (see Matthew 24:12) and men’s hearts are failing them due to fear (see Luke 21:26). Without the perspective of the gospel of Jesus Christ, life could be overwhelming and devastating to most individuals.

The Example of Joseph Smith

Even though the Prophet Joseph Smith was born over two hundred years ago, he too faced many of life’s stresses, trials, heartaches, and difficulties. Shortly after the Church was organized, the Lord counseled Joseph to “be firm in keeping the commandments wherewith I have commanded you; and if you do this, behold I grant unto you eternal life, even if you should be slain” (D&C 5:22; emphasis added). In addition, the Lord told Joseph, “Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many” (D&C 24:8; emphasis added). Such declarations would not bring peace to the soul of a fair-weather follower of Christ. In fact, for most individuals, such “warnings” would cause extreme stress and worry. A quick review of his struggles reveals that Joseph had more trials than most individuals will ever face. He once declared, “Deep water is what I am wont to swim in. It all has become a second nature to me.”3 Joseph did not merely survive his trials; he bore his difficulties with patience, long-suffering, and meekness. Through opposition, he learned to develop godly attributes. Joseph declared, “I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain... knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty.”4 The trials and challenges that Joseph faced molded him into a Saint. The following are some of the tests he faced:

• His leg was operated on at age seven. Not only was there a long recovery time but Joseph walked with a limp the rest of his life.
• He was mobbed, assaulted, and tarred and feathered at the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, resulting not only in immediate pain and difficulty but also in back pains for the remainder of his days.
• As the leader of the Church, Joseph spent much time hiding from false accusers, keeping him away from his family and loved ones.
• His tooth was broken when wicked men tried to shove a vial of poison down his throat. From that day forward, Joseph spoke with a lisp.
• Joseph was beaten on his hips with guns, leaving bruises on each side over eighteen inches in diameter.
• Of Joseph’s eleven children, only five lived to adulthood. Four of his children died the same day they were born, and two other children died within their first year.5
• Emma was often sick as a result of pregnancies or emotional stress.
• At one time, Joseph had over forty-six lawsuits filed against him.
• On numerous occasions, Joseph was imprisoned falsely and had to deal with the burden of contrived legal, or sometimes illegal, charges.
• He had to cope with the venom of apostates and often heard reports of the murder, rape, and torture of his beloved Saints.6
• Joseph lived in a state of constant financial struggle and poverty. It wasn’t until he and Emma moved to Nauvoo that they lived in a home they could call their own.
• Joseph was constantly hounded, driven, persecuted, harassed, and threatened by mobs.

During the height of the persecutions, the Prophet wrote, “My family was kept in a continual state of alarm, not knowing, when I went from home, that I should ever return again; or what would befall me from day to day.”7 Any of these challenges would have tested the most faithful Saint to the core. Imagine dealing with the death of several of your own children, having over forty lawsuits issued against you, or having your life threatened on a regular basis. Joseph reached a point in his spiritual development where he was able to say that such trials were “second nature”! For most of us, it is difficult to handle life when enemies or even good friends are merely angry with us. How difficult would it be to keep believing, building, and preaching while bullets are flying over your head and wicked men are conspiring to kill you? Indeed, Joseph Smith was no ordinary man.

Most people would crumble under the pressure of one or two of these major difficulties. It is mind-boggling to realize that Joseph suffered trials of
such magnitude his entire life. As contemporary Latter-day Saints, we can learn much from Joseph Smith as we deal with our own challenges. Joseph modeled how to be cheerful regardless of world conditions, persecution, personal sorrow, or extreme trials. If anyone ever had a legitimate reason, or reasons, to be discouraged, it was Joseph Smith. Yet most of the time he was happy and optimistic. Some would argue that Joseph was happier than he should have been! Indeed, Joseph Smith serves as an example of a Saint filled with faith and hope—something all of us can look to as we seek to survive in this treacherous world.

Dr. Martin Seligman, a prominent psychologist and one of the major proponents of positive thinking, explained: “Life inflicts the same setbacks and tragedies on the optimist as on the pessimist, but the optimist weathers them better. As we have seen, the optimist bounces back from defeat, and, with his life somewhat poorer, he picks up and starts again. The pessimist gives up and falls into depression. Because of his resilience, the optimist achieves more at work, at school, and on the playing field. . . . Americans want optimists to lead them.”

Most certainly, Joseph Smith was an effective leader. He seemed to always bounce back from defeat. He never did give up; defeat was not part of his vocabulary. Because of his resilience, he accomplished so much more than the average man. The Saints adored Joseph because of his leadership, faith, and hope. In fact, many Saints learned to be happy as they followed his example. Because of his own rock-solid faith, Joseph instilled courage and hope into the hearts of his followers.

The Purpose of Our Existence

The Prophet Joseph taught:

Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God. But we cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, and we cannot expect to know all, or more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received. . . .

In obedience there is joy and peace unspotted, unalloyed; and as God has designed our happiness—and the happiness of all His creatures, he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his law and ordinances.
Joseph understood that happiness is the purpose of our existence—it is why we are here on earth. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have a perspective that allows us to deal with stress, difficulty, and strain—and yet be full of faith. Joseph Smith had that mindset. It is disheartening today to look around in many of our Latter-day Saint congregations and realize that some of the most faithful members are downright miserable and discouraged. Yes, there are sore trials to face, and most of us have been weighed down by many of them. But once again, because we view life through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we should be the happiest people on earth! Joseph Smith, regardless of his terrible, heart-wrenching trials, seemed to model happiness almost daily. It is one thing to be happy when life seems to be going well but an entirely different matter to choose happiness when there is not much to smile about. One of Joseph’s great gifts was his ability to take courage and choose happiness, regardless of the circumstances.

A great secret to happiness is gratitude. One author wrote, “All happy people are grateful, and ungrateful people cannot be happy. . . . Because gratitude is the key to happiness, anything that undermines gratitude must undermine happiness.” Truly, Joseph Smith was happy because he was grateful. He often counted his many blessings and was occasionally reminded that his circumstances could have been much worse. For example, as Joseph began the year 1836, he reflected: “This being the beginning of a new year, my heart is filled with gratitude to God that He has preserved my life, and the lives of my family, while another year has passed away. We have been sustained and upheld in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, although exposed to all the afflictions, temptations, and misery that are incident to human life; for this I feel to humble myself in dust and ashes, as it were, before the Lord.”

Furthermore, Joseph understood that happiness is correlated with keeping the commandments of God and that our Father in Heaven gives us commands so that we will have joy not just in eternity, but right here, right now, on earth. Sadly, many who are not happy lack faith. They do not believe in Heavenly Father’s promises to them or his assurances to all Saints who will keep the commandments and live the gospel. For example, in Joseph’s case, he knew that his life would not be taken until he accomplished the work God had sent him to do. President Brigham Young declared that he often heard Joseph say, “I shall not live until I am forty years of age.” Meanwhile, Joseph stated with confidence, “God will always protect me until my mission is fulfilled.” With that perspective, Joseph took great comfort in knowing
that he would be preserved until his mission was completed. When nineteen-year-old William Taylor asked Joseph, “Don’t you get frightened when all those hounding wolves are after you?” Joseph simply responded, “No, I am not afraid; the Lord said he would protect me, and I have full confidence in his word.”

A more detailed example of Joseph’s complete faith and trust in such promises is preserved in Sarah Stoddard’s journal account. Sarah had a son named Charles, who was fourteen years old at the time and served as a houseboy to William Law. One day after Charles cleaned Mr. Law’s gun, Law bragged to his young apprentice that he would kill the Prophet Joseph Smith with one shot. Law sent Charles to invite Joseph over to his home. Charles was mortified. Would he go down into the annals of history as the boy who cleaned the gun that killed Joseph Smith? Instead of extending an invitation, Charles ran down the streets of Nauvoo as fast as possible to warn the Prophet of impending danger. He begged the Prophet not to visit Mr. Law. Calmly, Joseph assured Charles that no harm would come to him—at least not on that day. In Sarah Stoddard’s words,

The Prophet in a final attempt to calm my dear son uttered the fateful words, “Mr. Law may someday kill me, Charles, but it won’t be today.”

As they approached their destination, Mr. Law came staggering out of the house [he was drunk] shouting what he intended to do.

The Prophet said kindly and unafraid, “You sent for me, Mr. Law?” to which Mr. Law replied with oaths that now he was doing the whole a favor by disposing of the Prophet with one shot.

Calmly the Prophet unbuttoned his shirt and bared his chest, then said, “I’m ready now, Mr. Law.” Charles said at this point he nearly fainted. Sick fear strangled him until he was speechless and paralyzed, unable to move a muscle.

Mr. Law paced a few steps, turned, aimed, and pressed the trigger. There was complete silence. Then the air rang with profanity, and Mr. Law turned on Charles, accusing him of fixing the gun so it would not go off and threatening to kill even Charles—my innocent, frightened, but faithful son.

The Prophet, to divert Mr. Law’s blame of Charles, suggested that a can be placed on a fence post for Mr. Law to take a practice shot. Relieved, Charles ran for a can and laid it on its side on the post. Mr. Law paced back, took aim, and fired. His “one shot” streaked through the exact center of the can.

Even Mr. Law was quiet, as if stunned.

The Prophet buttoned up his shirt, gave Charles a meaningful look, and then said, “If you are finished with me now, Mr. Law, I have other things needing to be done. Good morning.”

When the Lord told Joseph that his life would not be taken until his mission was completed, Joseph believed and had faith and complete trust in that
promise. He knew that God would not lie; such promises allowed Joseph to exercise faith, act in confidence, and be happy and full of hope.

**Joseph’s Affable and Cheerful Nature**

Joseph was described by his contemporaries as being happy and cheerful. In the 1838 account of the First Vision, Joseph mentioned that he had a “native cheery temperament” (Joseph Smith—History 1:28). Similarly, a neighbor described Joseph as “a real clever, jovial boy.” His cheerful temperament and jovial nature proved a great blessing in his life and enabled him to pass through many difficult situations. His smile was “frequent” and “agreeable,” and his “countenance was ever mild, affable, beaming with intelligence and benevolence; mingled with a look of interest and an unconscious smile, or cheerfulness, and entirely free from all restraint or affectation of gravity.” Joseph Smith was a good-natured model of sociability. Mosiah Hancock reported that he “always had a smile for his friends and was always cheerful,” while Lyman O. Littlefield added that Joseph was “social, conversational and often indulged in harmless jokes.” The late Truman G. Madsen said that the Prophet Joseph was “easily inclined to laughter, sociable, animated, the life of the party, and colorful in his use of language.” Consequently, Joseph Smith III recalled that his father’s home in Nauvoo was “generally overrun with visitors.”

One of the challenges Joseph faced was the backgrounds and baggage new converts often brought with them from previous religious experiences. For example, during the 1800s, the Puritan influence loomed large. Therefore, Christians during this period were taught that “one’s focus should be on strictly spiritual concerns and that most forms of recreation, play, popular music, and other ‘worldly’ concerns were to be engaged in at the peril of their eternal souls.” For example, one minister of Joseph’s day preached, “Hell stands open to receive you, and devils stand ready to drag you into everlasting fire. . . Why be careless? Why be merry?” Such was the tenor and sentiment of puritanical religiosity in the early 1800s. President Brigham Young was a product of such strict Puritan beliefs: “When I was young [he said], I was kept within very strict bounds, and was not allowed to walk more than half-an-hour on Sunday for exercise. The proper and necessary gambols of youth [were] denied me. . . I had not a chance to dance when I was young, and never heard the enchanting tones of the violin, until I was eleven years of age;
and then I thought I was on the high way to hell, if I suffered myself to linger and listen to it.”

President Young explained that parents of his day whipped their children for reading novels, refused to let them attend the theater, and would not allow them to play or associate with other children who held lesser standards or values. In fact, it was his belief that when such children finally were old enough to leave home and escape the rigorous training of their parents, “they are more fit for companions to devils, than to be the children of such religious parents.” One of Joseph’s most pressing challenges was helping the converts with such prudish beliefs to understand that religion, happiness, and fun can be in harmony.

Latter-day Saint historian Leonard J. Arrington further explained: “It was common for these descendants of the Puritans to see displays of humor as a mark of insincerity, for humor suggested that nothing really mattered and that life was basically comic. To be overly humorous, they thought, was to be cynical toward life. But Joseph Smith saw humor and religion as quite reconcilable. As he saw it, once one acknowledges that there is something beyond laughter—a core of life that is solemn, serious, and tender—there is still plenty of room for jesting. At least, that is the way he was—‘a jolly good fellow,’ as one contemporary described him.”

Many of these new members struggled with Joseph’s jovial nature. In their mind, a prophet was someone directly from the pages of the Old Testament, complete with a long, flowing robe, beard, and somber nature. In fact, Rachel Ridgeway Grant felt that Hyrum seemed more like a prophet than Joseph, for he was “more sedate, more serious.” When these new members witnessed Joseph’s jovial and playful attitude, they were often caught off guard. Unfortunately, some even left the Church soon after their conversion. According to Elder George A. Smith, one convert family apostatized soon after they arrived in Kirtland when they saw Joseph come downstairs from the room “where he had been translating by the gift and power of God” and romp and play with his children.

The somber, pharisaic, holy attitude that was common among many religious leaders of the day did not set well with Joseph. The Prophet was a man of integrity—there was no pretense about him. It was not his nature to participate in shams or the false drama that “holy men” of his day had created. Moreover, despite the fact that he had seen God the Father and Jesus Christ, had entertained angels and other heavenly personages from the Book
of Mormon and Bible, Joseph never put himself above others. In fact, the Prophet was always down to earth and did not take himself too seriously. For instance, once when he was wrestling with Sidney Rigdon, Joseph accidentally tore a hole in his own pants. Those of a more holy bent might have been upset or embarrassed. However, Joseph simply had a good laugh over it. Joseph said, “There was one good man and his name was Jesus. . . . I do not want you to think that I am very righteous, for I am not.”

In the 1820s, there was a prevailing belief that the more dramatic the display of spirituality, the holier the person. Joseph Smith viewed the ministers of his day as sanctimonious, histrionic, and often phony. He tried to convince new converts who were weighed down with such beliefs to purge them. For example, on one occasion, a man who had developed a falsetto approached Joseph. In preaching without microphones, ministers learned to pitch their voices high so that they could be heard from great distances. Moreover, such a speaking technique added much flare and drama to their oratory. “One man with exactly that tone came and said, with a kind of supercilious reverence, ‘Is it possible that I now flash my optics upon a Prophet?’ ‘Yes,’ the Prophet replied, ‘I don’t know but you do; would not you like to wrestle with me?’ The man was shocked.” Perhaps Joseph was not as interested in wrestling the minister as he was in teaching a principle—that preachers of religion need not be theatrical. Jedediah M. Grant, who knew the Prophet well, underscored this point when he declared that Joseph Smith preached against the “super-abundant stock of sanctimoniousness” that characterized contemporary religion.

Joseph also knew how to use humor to relieve tense situations. Often, after heated discussions with preachers and pastors, he was prone to say, “Gentleman, let’s lay the scriptures aside for a moment and I’ll challenge you to jump at the mark with me.” It was not that Joseph loved beating ministers in jumping competitions. His challenges most often eased tension, brought humor to tense situations, and exposed a “holier-than-thou” attitude.

On another occasion, with the opportunity to blend some humor with a true principle, Joseph dressed in ragged clothes and rode his horse down to meet a group of Saints who had just landed on the dock from England. The son of Edwin Rushton shared this account:

Father was very anxious to find the members of his family already established there, and hurried towards the town in search of them. He had gone only a short distance
when he met a man riding a beautiful black horse. The man accosted him, saying, “Hey, Bub, is that a company of Mormons just landed?”

In much surprise, Father answered, “Yes sir.”

“Are you a Mormon?” the stranger continued.

“Yes, sir,” Father again answered.

“What do you know about old Joe Smith?” the stranger asked.

“I know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God,” said Father.

“I suppose you are looking for an old man with a long, gray beard. What would you think if I told you I was Joseph Smith?” the man continued.

“If you are Joseph Smith,” said Father, “I know you are a prophet of God.”

In a gentle voice, the man explained, “I am Joseph Smith. I came to meet those people, dressed as I am in rough clothes and speaking in this manner, to see if their faith is strong enough to stand the things they must meet. If not, they should turn back right now.” 34

Joseph’s warmth and kindness proved a blessing to him when he was accosted by his enemies. Elder Parley P. Pratt explained that Joseph “possessed a noble boldness and independence of character; his manner was easy and familiar, . . . his benevolence unbounded as the ocean. . . . Even his most bitter enemies were generally overcome, if he could once get their ears.” 35 Years afterward, Moses Wilson said, “Joseph Smith was a most remarkable man. I carried him a prisoner in chains to my house in Independence, Missouri, and he hadn’t been there two hours before my wife loved him better than she loved me.” 36 Joseph appears to have had not only charisma but also human warmth and gentleness that drew his fellow men to him.

Another great example of Joseph’s gentility comes from Joseph’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith. While in Missouri, Joseph was at the home of his mother, engaged in writing a letter and transacting some Church business when a mob of eight men came to the door and asked for him. They made it clear that they were there to kill Joseph Smith and all Mormons. After Joseph greeted the men, resolved their concerns, and smoothed over some ill feelings, they insisted on walking him home and protecting him from any harm and danger. These men were sent to assassinate the Prophet, not escort him home. 37 Joseph was able to win over the hearts of these men with his kindness and warmth.

**Fun and Humor**

Joseph liked to have a good time. He enjoyed socializing with friends and neighbors, and he certainly enjoyed games and contests. Joseph was certainly
a “people person” in every sense of that phrase. One of his close friends, Benjamin Johnson, said of Joseph:

The Prophet often came to our town, but after my arrival, he lodged in no house but mine, and I was proud of his partiality and took great delight in his society and friendship. When with us, there was no lack of amusement; for with jokes, games, etc., he was always ready to provoke merriment, one phase of which was matching couplets in rhyme, by which we were at times in rivalry; and his fraternal feeling, in great degree did away with the disparity of age or greatness of his calling.38

Not only did Joseph Smith have many adult friends but he also had the gift of understanding young people. For instance, he knew that by engaging in physical activities with young men, he could develop a friendship and strengthen the bonds of love. Elder Lorenzo Snow related an occasion when Joseph played ball with some children. Hyrum, who possessed a more serious nature, chastised Joseph, calling the behavior inappropriate for the Lord’s anointed. The Prophet then explained to Hyrum the reason for his conduct: “Brother Hyrum, my mingling with the boys in a harmless sport like this does not injure me in any way, but on the other hand it makes them happy and draws their hearts nearer to mine; and who knows but there may be young men among them who may sometime lay down their lives for me!”39

When Joseph was with the young men, he played baseball and quoits, a ring-toss game played with an iron ring. He was known to create his own games, complete with prizes. When the games were completed, Joseph would often encourage the youth in Nauvoo to come with him to build a cabin, chop wood, or engage in some other physical labor. At other times, Joseph would return home and get back to work, a signal that the young men should return to their homes as well.

On one occasion, several young men got into some mischief by throwing a wooden ball on top of a neighbor’s roof. The owner of the home rebuked the young men for the damage they had done. When Joseph came upon the scene, instead of joining in the chastisement or urging the young men to somewhere else to play, Joseph distracted them. He thought of a new game that all of the young men could participate in: “He first took the children over to a carpenter’s shop and had the proprietor make each of them a small wooden ball on his lathe, while he fashioned paddles for each child out of some extra scraps of wood. He then showed the youngsters how to strike the ball with the paddle. Then, he taught them the object of the game. They were to hit the ball with their paddles, run to it and hit it again until they had knocked it to
a distant goal. The narrator of this incident stated that this activity ‘gave them good exercise, tested their muscular skills, and kept them busy for an hour or two, thereby keeping them out of mischief.’40

One day a bully from LaHarpe, Illinois, challenged Joseph to a wrestling match. The intimidator had soundly beaten every challenger that day. A hat was passed around the crowd, and whatever money was tossed in would go to the winner. If Joseph won, he would be able to post bail for his good friend Orrin Porter Rockwell, who was imprisoned in Missouri. “The man was eager to have a tussle with the Prophet, so Joseph stepped forward and took hold of the man. The first pass he made, Joseph whirled him around and took him by the collar and seat of his trousers and walked out to a ditch and threw him in it. Then, taking him by the arm, helped him up and patted him on the back and said, ‘You must not mind this. When I am with the boys I make all the fun I can for them.’”41

When Joseph sent Jacob Gates on a mission, he said, “Go and fill your mission, and we will wrestle after you come back.”42 It probably wasn’t Joseph’s intent to wrestle Brother Gates. Instead, Joseph’s invitation appears to be a way to lighten an emotional moment. At the time, Jacob gates was quite physically ill and was about to embark on his fifth mission, leaving behind his wife and children for an undetermined amount of time.43 Joseph knew how to relieve burdens and often used humor to do it.

Consider another example. Shortly after James Henry Rollins was assigned by Joseph to work at his store in Nauvoo, the Prophet walked up, then raised his leg and laid it on the shoulder of young Brother Rollins. Shortly after, Joseph removed his leg and said, “I thought to break you down with the heft of my leg, but you are stiffer than I thought you were.”44 Joseph’s joke on Rollins was his way of connecting with him and forging a friendship. Joseph’s closest associates knew that he played jokes and teased those he admired.

On another occasion, Joseph and several other brethren sought refuge from a mob in the Joseph and Isabella Horne home in Quincy, Illinois. Sister Horne noted that Joseph was in the “best of spirits.” After some food and good company, Joseph laughingly said, “Sister Horne, if I had a wife as small as you, when trouble came I would put her in my pocket and run.”45

A few days earlier, a man in the community of Kirtland had sold his wife for a bulls-eye pocket watch. Many of the locals were talking about this newsworthy story when Joseph met Daniel McArthur in the woods. With a smile
on his face, Joseph greeted Brother McArthur with, “You are not the young man who sold his wife for a bull-eye watch the other day, are you?” Daniel replied, “No sir.” Joseph laughed, having some fun with Brother McArthur.\footnote{46}

One of the greatest demonstrations of the Prophet Joseph’s humor occurred on a sultry day in May 1843. Joseph stood before the Nauvoo Legion and complimented them for their fine work and discipline. Since the weather was especially hot, Joseph asked for a glass of water. With the glass in his hands, he proposed this toast: “I will drink you a toast, to the overthrow of the mobocrats,’ which he did in language as follows: ‘Here’s wishing they were in the middle of the sea in a stone canoe, with iron paddles, and a shark swallow the canoe, and the devil swallow the shark, and him locked up in the northwest corner of hell, the key lost, and a blind man looking for it.’”\footnote{47} The toast reveals in a very personal way Joseph’s quick wit and humorous perspective directed toward those wanting to murder him. In such tense circumstances, Joseph focused on the lighter side.

Joseph also had a free exchange with Sidney Rigdon. Brother Rigdon was a polished orator who had a flare for the dramatic. When conducting meetings and introducing Sidney to the congregation, Joseph was prone to say, “The truth is good enough without dressing up, but Brother Rigdon will now proceed to dress it up.”\footnote{48} Joseph’s manner of speaking always endeared him to the congregation.

\subsection*{Loosening of the Bow}

Joseph recognized that there is a time and season for everything. When it was time to work, Joseph rolled up his sleeves and dove right in. Joseph also recognized when it was time to relax. For example, while studying Greek and Hebrew, he would often take short breaks from his studies to play with neighborhood children and to get some exercise. Afterward, Joseph would go back to his work. Unfortunately, it tried the patience of some “holy” members when they saw Joseph playing ball with the boys. It seems they wanted a more serious-minded prophet. While preaching one day, Joseph shared the following parable: “A certain prophet . . . was sitting under the shade of a tree amusing himself in some way, when a hunter came along with his bow and arrow, and reproved him. The prophet asked him if he kept his bow strung up all the time. The hunter answered that he did not. The prophet asked why, and he said it would lose its elasticity if he did. The prophet said it was just so with his mind, he did not want it strung up all the time.”\footnote{49}
Joseph understood the importance of rest, diversion, and recreation to relax his mind and body. He was also keenly aware of when those he labored with needed a break. He understood that physical activity and fun could lift a man's spirits. For example, in 1838, a group of Mormon militiamen, including Joseph, were encamped at Adam-ondi-Ahman in hopes of defending the Saints in Missouri. The weather was cold and drizzling, and the men were becoming quite depressed. John D. Lee recorded that “the Prophet came up while the brethren were moping around, and caught first one and then another and shook them up, and said, ‘Get out of here, and wrestle, jump, run, do anything but mope around; warm yourselves up; this inactivity will not do for soldiers.’ The words of the Prophet put life and energy into the men. A ring was soon formed, according to the custom of the people. The Prophet stepped into the ring, ready for a tussle with any comer. Several went into the ring to try their strength, but each one was thrown by the Prophet, until he had thrown several of the stoutest of the men present.”

Meanwhile, Sidney Rigdon was quite upset that Joseph would encourage such an activity because it was the Sabbath day. As Sidney tried to break up the wrestling match, Joseph told him that if he did not allow the men their fun, he would throw him down. He then dragged him out of the ring, tearing his coat and causing him to lose his hat in the process. Rigdon complained about what happened to his clothing, but Joseph told his counselor he was out of place and had no one to blame but himself.

Several days later, the troops were still camped at Adam-ondi-Ahman and trying to keep warm. The weather was bitter cold, and several inches of snow had fallen. Joseph sensed that the men were becoming despondent and discouraged. Edward Stevenson recalled that Joseph divided the men into two teams with himself at the head of one team and Lyman Wight the head of the other. At that point, Joseph engaged the men in a sham battle using snowballs instead of guns and swords. Soon, feelings of despair in camp were replaced with fun, excitement, and happiness. Spirits were rejuvenated, and men were able to approach their difficult situation with a new perspective.

In February 1843, Joseph organized a “Wood-cutting Bee.” Seventy men sawed, chopped, split, and piled up a large stack of wood in the yard of Joseph’s home. The wood was then distributed to Joseph’s family as well as others in the surrounding area of Nauvoo. The purpose was not so much to compete in lumberjack skills but to build unity and camaraderie among the brethren and engage in some fun. A careful review of the Church historical
account reveals that this wood-cutting event was preceded by a myriad of Church activities and bad weather. In fact, the early days of February 1843 brought cold weather and heavy snows to Nauvoo. Consequently, most of the Latter-day Saints were confined to their homes for almost a week. During that week, Joseph had been involved in studying German, reviewing legal cases in his role of mayor, holding meetings with the Quorum of the Twelve, and reviewing the proof of the Doctrine and Covenants. The day before the “Wood-cutting Bee,” Joseph and others met from 9:00 a.m. until midnight as a high council to review land disputes between Wilson Law and Uriel Nickerson. If there was ever time for a good diversion and the “loosening of the bow,” this was it. Joseph recorded, “The day was spent by them with much pleasantry, good humor and feeling.”52

Knowing how to relax and divert his attention towards other areas, when he could, he would endeavor to help others relax as well. Unfortunately, Joseph was not always successful in this quest. Robert B. Thompson, the Prophet’s secretary, was completely devoted to Joseph and was a tireless worker. Joseph spent so much time with Robert and was so attached to him that he said to Mercy Thompson, Robert’s wife, “Sister Thompson, you must not feel bad towards me for keeping your husband away from you so much, for I am married to him.”53 Despite their close relationship, Joseph was concerned that if his secretary did not loosen his bow he would eventually wilt under the pressure of his duties. Once Joseph said, “Robert, you have been so faithful and relentless in this work, you need to relax.” Joseph encouraged Brother Thompson to get away from the office and find some recreation. However, Robert was a serious-minded man. He told Joseph, “I can’t do it.” Joseph replied, “You must do it, if you don’t do it, you will die.” One of Joseph’s sorrows was that Brother Thompson died prematurely—within two weeks of this prophecy. It was a difficult task for Joseph to speak at the funeral of his beloved secretary.54

Hard Times

It should be noted, however, that Joseph wasn’t perfect in his faith and cheerful temperament. Of course, Joseph was human, and, like each of us, he had his moments when the circumstances were awful and grievous. Renowned Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote, “To live is to suffer.”55 No mortals will escape suffering, and Joseph suffered much. We learn from several historical accounts that there were times when Joseph was simply devastated by the
circumstances in his life. For example, on June 15, 1828, Emma gave birth to a baby boy they named Alvin. Several hours after Alvin’s birth, he passed away. Of course, the death of their first son was overwhelming. However, at this same time, there was “another cause of trouble” that unnerved Joseph. Martin Harris had the 116-page manuscript of Joseph’s first translation work on the Book of Mormon in his possession for just short of a month, and Joseph hadn’t heard a word from him. As Joseph took a stage coach from Harmony to Palmyra, he began to think deeply about the manuscript and Martin’s tardiness in returning it, which caused him great distress. A stranger whom Joseph met on the coach walked with Joseph for the twenty miles from where they were dropped off—the last four miles the stranger had to practically carry Joseph—and he was extremely distraught and physically exhausted. Hours later, when Martin joined the Smiths for a meal and revealed that he had lost the manuscript and couldn’t find it anywhere, Joseph responded, “Oh, my God! . . . All is lost! All is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned—it is I who tempted the wrath of God.” In this case, there was no report of Joseph saying things like, “Don’t worry, we’ll find that manuscript,” or “Don’t worry, Martin, it will all work out.” No, there was none of that. Instead, Lucy Mack Smith reported that Joseph was distressed, weeping, and grieving until sunset. Those were dark days in the Smith home, and it took Joseph some time to emotionally and spiritually recover from the devastation. On this occasion, hope was traded for despair, and faith was exchanged with fear and dejection. However, the optimist will always bounce back from defeat. This experience ultimately molded Joseph into a stronger person.

The time Joseph spent in Liberty Jail was also a heart-wrenching experience. The prison dungeon, ironically called “Liberty,” was a fourteen by fourteen square room with a six-foot-high ceiling. Joseph and his comrades Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, and Alexander McRae were imprisoned in Liberty from December 1838 to April 1839. While there, they suffered much thanks to apostates who had turned against them—such as W. W. Phelps, William E. McLellin, and a host of others. Joseph and his prison colleagues had to deal with cold winter weather, extremely poor sanitation, sleeping on the ground, and food so disgusting that it was described as “very coarse, and so filthy that [they] could not eat it until [they] were driven to it by hunger.” For any human, it would be difficult to remain optimistic and full of hope while incarcerated. Perhaps the most difficult part of this entire ordeal was the intelligence Joseph often received
regarding the condition of the Saints—including his own family. Many members of the Church suffered from hunger, many were tortured, some were raped, and others killed—and Joseph could do nothing. Meanwhile, other members such as Isaac Russell claimed that Joseph was a fallen prophet and that he was now appointed to lead the Saints.60

Perhaps in an act of pure frustration, Joseph penned a letter to the Church, lashing out at those who treated him and others so “vilely.” In his letter, he wrote that these men “shall be hanged upon their own gallows,” and “their name[s] shall be blotted out, and God shall reward them according to all their abominations.”61 In the same letter, Joseph harshly rebuked Colonel Hinkle, John Corrill, Reed Peck, William E. McLellin, W. W. Phelps, and David Whitmer for their roles in persecuting the Saints and committing Joseph to prison. Some others, Joseph said, “are too mean to mention.”62 In the letter, Joseph appears to show his human side—obviously he’s upset, angry, and perhaps exasperated. Who wouldn’t be? At this juncture, his heart appeared to be filled with disgust and frustration rather than hope and optimism. However, we must not forget that on November 3, 1838, just as Joseph and other Church leaders were being imprisoned, he said, “Be of good cheer, brethren; the word of the Lord came to me last night that our lives should be given us, and that whatever we may suffer during this captivity, not one of our lives should be taken.”63 This statement reveals the answer as to how Joseph could be so positive amid so much trouble. He found comfort from the constant flow of revelation from the Lord. Truly, Joseph knew where to turn for peace.

Despite this prophecy, several days later, Major-General Clark read to the Saints in Far West these words: “As for your leaders, do not think—do not imagine for a moment—do not let it enter your mind that they will be delivered, or that you will see their faces again, for their fate is fixed—their die is cast—their doom is sealed.”64 Such a directive would make it difficult for Joseph, or anyone else for that matter, to “be of good cheer.” Nevertheless, they held on to hope, kept their faith, and eventually escaped from Liberty Jail, one of the worst places that man could conceive.

Perhaps some of the darkest days for the Prophet Joseph were the Kirtland era of 1837, when the Kirtland Safety Society crumbled and apostasy abounded among the rank and file of the Church. Men like Warren Parrish, John Boynton, Luke Johnson, Martin Harris, and even Parley P. Pratt turned against Joseph, which wounded him to the core. Even before the Kirtland
Temple was finished, many in the Church turned against Joseph, including his brother William. Daniel Tyler recorded a moving incident when he attended a meeting where Joseph presided. Tyler wrote:

Entering the schoolhouse a little before meeting opened, and gazing upon the man of God, I perceived sadness in his countenance and tears trickling down his cheeks. . . . A few moments later a hymn was sung and he opened the meeting by prayer. Instead, however, of facing the audience, he turned his back and bowed upon his knees, facing the wall. This, I suppose, was done to hide his sorrow and tears. . . . When Joseph arose and addressed the congregation, he spoke of his many troubles, and said he often wondered why it was that he should have so much trouble in the house of his friends, and he wept as though his heart would break.65

Indeed, after these experiences in Kirtland and others like it, Joseph was a broken man. However, Joseph never allowed Satan to keep him down for long. The Prophet relied on the Lord for help and strength, especially when he faced deep distress. For example, after the previous mentioned experience, Joseph composed himself and stated to his brethren: “The Lord once told me that if at any time I got into trouble and could see no way out of it, if I would prophesy in His name, he would fulfill my words. . . . I prophesy in the name of the Lord that those who have thought I was in transgression shall have a testimony this night that I am clear and stand approved before the Lord.”66 Soon after, William Smith and others made humble public confessions.

Of course, there were other instances when Joseph was in deep anguish of soul and greatly suffered. The point is, however, that Joseph never let these experiences get the best of him. Joseph faced tremendous burdens, and sometimes the pressure brought him to his knees. But through it all, Joseph persevered. Once again, renowned psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman explained:

The defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and are their own fault. The optimists, who are confronted with the same hard knocks of this world, think about misfortune in the opposite way. They tend to believe defeat is a temporary setback, that its causes are confined to this one case. The optimists believe defeat is not their fault: Circumstances, bad luck, or other people brought it about. Such people are unfazed by defeat. Confronted by a bad situation, they perceive it as a challenge and try harder.67

Such was the lot and pattern of Joseph. From many heart-wrenching experiences, Joseph was transformed from a rough stone to a polished shaft.
Conclusion

President Thomas S. Monson recently declared, “My beloved brothers and sisters, fear not. Be of good cheer. The future is as bright as your faith.” 68 Joseph Smith seems to have lived that declaration perfectly. For example, Orson Spencer observed, “[Joseph] is remarkably cheerful for one who has seen well-tried friends martyred around him, and felt the inflictions of calumny—the vexations of lawsuits—the treachery of intimates—and multiplied violent attempts upon his person and life, together with the cares of much business.”69 How could Joseph experience so many trials and heartaches and yet remain optimistic? His positive attitude was certainly a gift from God. Joseph was further blessed with the twin gifts of faith and hope. Regardless of what difficulties Joseph faced, he had the faith to believe that good would prevail. He declared: “The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”70

Implicit in this statement is that our Heavenly Father is going to win. No person, institution, government, or army can stop God’s work from moving forward. Undoubtedly, this doctrine brought peace to Joseph’s soul. Moreover, the Prophet understood that God was his partner, and if he failed, or the work failed, it meant that God had failed. Since God does not fail, Joseph understood that neither he nor this work would fail.71 Such a concept allowed Joseph to exercise great faith and remain positive throughout his life. He always knew the work he had given his life to would succeed. He knew that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ would one day “fill North and South America it [would] fill the world.”72 Keep in mind that Joseph Smith made this statement while in a fourteen-by-fourteen-foot log cabin that held the entire priesthood of the Church. What vision! What perspective! What faith!

Joseph was sustained by his great faith, hope, and optimism. When a mob threatened to send the Saints to hell, Joseph said that if they did, “we will turn the devils out of doors and make a heaven out of it.”73 Perhaps even more impressively, Joseph told his young cousin George A. Smith, “Never be discouraged. . . . If I were sunk in the lowest pit of Nova Scotia, with the Rocky Mountains piled on me, I would hang on, exercise faith, and keep up
good courage, and I would come out on top.”74 This metaphor is powerful. What could be more discouraging than being stuck in the deepest pit and having one of the world’s largest mountain ranges piled on top of you?

In the tumultuous world we live in, Joseph Smith is a model of how each of us can look for the sunlight amid the storms of life. It was Elder Orson F. Whitney who reminded us that “the spirit of the gospel is optimistic; it trusts in God and looks on the bright side of things. The opposite or pessimistic spirit drags men down and away from God, looks on the dark side, murmurs, complains, and is slow to yield obedience.”75 More recently, President Gordon B. Hinckley declared: “Of course there are times of sorrow. Of course there are hours of concern and anxiety. We all worry. But the Lord has told us to lift our hearts and rejoice. I see so many people . . . who seem never to see the sunshine, but who constantly walk with storms under cloudy skies. Cultivate an attitude of happiness. Cultivate a spirit of optimism. Walk with faith, rejoicing in the beauties of nature, in the goodness of those you love, in the testimony which you carry in your heart concerning things divine.”76

Joseph Smith lived in great times of sorrow under tremendous amounts of pressure. It attests to his divine calling that he walked in the sunshine and had an attitude of happiness and the spirit of optimism. He walked in total and complete faith. Some could argue that Joseph was optimistic because of his own personality or genetics. However, a closer look reveals that Joseph walked on the bright side because of the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps Joseph was happy because of his family life (see Psalm 127:4–5), because he knew that he could turn to God for help (see Psalm 146:5), or because he kept the commandments (see Proverbs 29:18). Perhaps Joseph Smith was a happy person because he trusted in his God (see Proverbs 16:20) or because he suffered for the sake of righteousness (see 1 Peter 3:14). Or maybe he knew the truth of the statement in Alma that “those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, . . . a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow” (Alma 40:12). Perhaps Joseph took great comfort in the doctrine that we should be of good cheer, for Jesus Christ has “overcome the world” (John 16:33). Perhaps we will never know exactly why Joseph was as happy as he was. There is one clue, however, to his happiness. President David O. McKay once said, “The noblest aim in life is to strive to live to make other lives better and happier.”77 Joseph spent his life striving to make the lives of others better and happier. Joseph taught, “I not only . . . sought my own peace, prosperity, and happiness, but
also the peace, prosperity, and happiness of my friends.” As Joseph engaged in the noble endeavor of helping others in the cause of happiness, he certainly brought peace to his own soul. That is something all of us can do.

Notes

3. Truman G. Madsen, Joseph Smith the Prophet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 51.
11. History of the Church, 2:352.


27. Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mac Andrus, They Knew the Prophet (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), 123.


29. Andrus and Andrus, They Knew the Prophet, 83.


32. Jedediah M. Grant, in Journal of Discourses, 3:66–67. According to Elder Grant, a certain minister, out of curiosity, came to see the Prophet in Nauvoo and carried this sanctimonious spirit so far that the Prophet finally suggested to the minister that they engage in a little wrestling. The minister was so shocked that he simply stood rigid and dumbfounded, whereupon the Prophet playfully acted as though to put him on the floor and help him get up and then called attention to the so-called Christian “folies” of the time; the absurdity of the long, solemn, “asslike” tone of speaking and acting; and the dangers of excessive piety and fanaticism.


34. Andrus and Andrus, They Knew the Prophet, 164–65.


37. Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith: By His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1853), 254–56.


41. Juvenile Instructor, April 15, 1892, 255, in Andrus and Andrus, They Knew the Prophet, 78.

42. Andrew Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1901), 1:197.

43. Jenson, Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, 1:197.

44. Andrus, They Knew the Prophet, 76.


49. Andrus, *Joseph Smith, the Man and the Seer*, 16.
55. As cited in Prager, *Happiness Is a Serious Problem*, 54.
56. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1853), 128.
57. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 129.
64. *History of the Church*, 3:203.
72. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 57.
75. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1917, 43.
77. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 184.
The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves.”
The quest to understand God continues in the hearts and minds of people across the world. This journey spans a diversity of denominations and an assorted collection of cultures. Jesus Christ said, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “it is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God” and that “if men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves.”

Craig L. Blomberg, a New Testament professor at Denver Seminary, wrote, “Christians have usually insisted that a correct formulation of the doctrines of God and Christ is important because the possibility of eternal life depends on it.”

For The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the effort to describe the Godhead has been a gradual process. It began when Joseph Smith entered the Sacred Grove in the spring of 1820. Subsequent leaders slowly added to Latter-day Saint understanding as it was received through revelation. Such leaders include Brigham Young, John Taylor, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith, and many others.
This article explores the influence of Elder James E. Talmage on Latter-day Saint theology with regard to this sacred topic. It provides a brief history of LDS teachings on the subject from the time that Joseph Smith entered the Sacred Grove in 1820 until the late 1890s, when James Talmage first started writing doctrinal books at the request of the First Presidency. Elder Talmage made three major contributions from 1894 to 1916: he wrote *Articles of Faith, Jesus the Christ*, and the doctrinal exposition “The Father and the Son,” each in response to a specific request from the President of the Church, and each was then published under the name of the Church. James Talmage was not the only individual speaking on the topic at the time, but for the purposes of this paper, his teachings will be highlighted.

**Development of the Doctrine of the Godhead in Latter-day Saint Thought**

At times, there are those that stumble because of what they perceive as changes in the Church’s teachings, especially in significant areas such as the Godhead. Understanding how God reveals truth “line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10), however, prepares individuals to receive additional revelation and avoid confusion when further lines of understanding are revealed. Mormonism is based on continuous revelation. Additional revelation brings additional understanding. As such, members of the Church should anticipate supplementary revelations, which at times may refine current understanding. Elder Talmage wrote:

> In view of the demonstrated facts that revelation between God and man has ever been and is a characteristic of the Church of Jesus Christ, it is reasonable to await with confident expectation the coming of other messages from heaven, even until the end of man’s probation on earth. . . . Current revelation is equally plain with that of former days in predicting the yet future manifestations of God through this appointed channel. The canon of scripture is still open; many lines, many precepts, are yet to be added; revelation, surpassing in importance and glorious fulness any that has been recorded, is yet to be given to the Church and declared to the world.3

In a 1932 letter to Leland E. Anderson, Elder Talmage explained his personal view on continuous revelation: “The revelation of fundamental truths through the prophets is progressive and additional light is given through successive revelations.”4 President Joseph F. Smith said, “It seems to me that it would be a very sad comment upon the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and her people to suppose for a moment that we are at a standstill, that we have ceased to grow, ceased to improve and to advance in the scale
of intelligence.” In his own day, the Prophet Joseph Smith tried to prepare the Church—and its critics—for the eventual addition of more scripture and greater understanding. He told his attorney, “The Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.” The Church’s teachings about the Godhead have expanded since the death of Joseph Smith. This is not only a fulfillment of these words but also is in line with the established pattern of revelation set forth in sacred scripture.

The Church did not break away from an existing religion. The doctrinal restoration in this, the last dispensation, was placed in new bottles (see Mark 2:22). Latter-day Saint leaders received the doctrines according to the Lord’s timing. Robert L. Millet noted that “a moment’s reflection suggests that there would have been very little Mormon doctrine” when Joseph Smith organized the Church in 1830. In the very early days of the Church, it is easier to identify what Mormons did not believe than what they did believe. The same can be said of early Christianity. Each additional revelation or discourse dealing with doctrine at this time was, in essence, an expansion on Latter-day Saint thought and a new layer on the doctrinal foundation.

### Joseph Smith and the First Vision

The seeds of Latter-day Saint understanding about the Godhead were planted in 1820 in the Sacred Grove. From that experience, Joseph Smith learned “that not all truth [was contained] in the Bible.” Joseph learned—among other things—that God the Father and Jesus Christ are two distinct personages and that man was created in the express image of God (see Joseph Smith—History 1:15–19). This singular experience started Joseph Smith down a path that would lead him and the Latter-day Saints away from traditional Trinitarian doctrine. In 1844, he said, “I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.” Following the First Vision, Joseph Smith was left to wait “until further directed” (Joseph Smith—History 1:26). Knowledge and understanding would come in God’s time. The boy Joseph Smith became the Prophet Joseph Smith “grace for grace” (D&C 93:12), “precept upon precept,” “line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10), and revelation by revelation. Similar to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Church did not
receive all understanding at once, but progressed one revelation at a time as the prophets have received them from God and according to his timing.

A close study of the Latter-day Saint beliefs early in the history of the Church uncovers a doctrinal migration from beliefs held by other denominations in the early nineteenth century. Combine the integration of people from different religious backgrounds with a lack of a professional clergy and no established creed; the result is a slow acclimation to new doctrine. There were no seminaries or missionary training centers to train and indoctrinate those that would fill the leadership positions in the Church. Beliefs and practices from previous religious backgrounds continued with the convert after baptism until they were addressed and corrected. Leman Copley is a great case study of this phenomenon. In March of 1831, Joseph Smith wrote, “At about this time came Leman Copley, one of the sect called Shaking Quakers, and embraced the fulness of the everlasting Gospel, apparently honest-hearted, but still retaining the idea that the Shakers were right in some particulars of their faith.”11 Joseph Smith corrected Leman’s beliefs and instructed him on topics such as the eternal nature of Christ, the Second Coming, baptism, and eating habits (see D&C 49). Leman’s migration, unfortunately, ended prematurely, as he returned to his previous faith and never came back to the Church.

A successful example of this doctrinal migration from previously held beliefs was the adoption of doctrines in Doctrine and Covenants 76. Brigham Young wrote, “My traditions were such, that when the Vision came first to me, it was so directly contrary and opposed to my former education, I said, wait a little; I did not reject it, but I could not understand it.”12 Every convert, similar to Brigham Young, brought previous traditions and experiences that all influenced the conversion process.13 Nobody converted to the Church with a clean slate. In the introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said, “These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known” (D&C 1:24–25). Weaknesses and errors included false traditions and beliefs that men learned and accepted before finding the fullness of the gospel.

The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible

In discussing the theological education of Joseph Smith, one cannot ignore the vital role of the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible. In June 1830, Joseph Smith recorded the first addition to the Bible. The process of
translating the Bible was unique in comparison to what we typically consider “translating.” It was not a process of revealing new scripture from ancient texts; rather, the King James Version (KJV) was already in English and in the hands of the people in Joseph Smith’s day. The effort served multiple purposes. For example, it helped clarify what was already available. Over and beyond simple clarifications, the JST corrected and added to the KJV. Robert J. Matthews wrote, “There is no substantive difference between the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants and the revelations in the Joseph Smith Translation, even though the latter are labeled a ‘translation.’ They are a ‘translation’ in the sense of being a clarification or restoration of a text, but not in the usual sense in which the word translation is used, meaning the rendering of a subject from one language to another.” This clarifying process served as a filter and a teacher for the Prophet Joseph Smith in that it corrected erroneous theological ideas that he may have accepted as true earlier in life while attending religious meetings of other faiths. Andrew C. Skinner said, “The translation . . . was a major means of educating the Prophet—so that more doctrine could be restored. . . . The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible was a catalyst for, and the seed-bed of, other major revelations and doctrines.”

Among the changes in the Bible, many dealt with the Godhead. Consider the following verses: Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; and 1 John 4:12. These verses describe man as incapable of ever beholding his Creator or of enduring his presence. The KJV of Exodus 33:20, for example, reads, “And [Jehovah] said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.” Joseph Smith had learned, by his own experience, that these verses were not accurate. Seeing God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, was not impossible. The JST adds the following clarification: “And [Jehovah] said unto Moses, Thou canst not see my face at this time, least mine anger is kindled against thee also, and I destroy thee, and thy people; for there shall no man among them see me at this time and live, for they are exceeding sinful, and no sinful man hath at any time, neither shall there be any sinful man at any time that shall see my face and live.” Through the translation process, Joseph Smith became familiar with other truths regarding the Godhead, such as the corporeal nature of the Father and the mission of Jesus Christ.

The Lectures on Faith and the Godhead

The Godhead was the focus of a lecture in Lectures on Faith. The fifth lecture reads, “There are two personages who constitute the great, matchless,
governing, and supreme power over all things. . . . They are the Father and the Son—the Father being a personage of spirit, glory, and power, possessing all perfection and fullness, the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle, made or fashioned like unto man.” 18 Some have suggested that this passage conflicts with the 1843 revelation that declared God the Father to be a being of flesh and bone (see D&C 130:22). Noel B. Reynolds, a former president of FARMS, pointed out that this conflict has “often been associated with the 1921 decision to delete the lectures from the Doctrine and Covenants.”19 Joseph Fielding Smith, however, stated that the lectures were removed not due to any false doctrines but because they were not revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The lectures were merely helps that accented the actual revelations. The leaders of the Church, however, never intended the lectures to be considered equal to the revelations themselves.20

Elder Bruce R. McConkie addressed the conflict in A New Witness for the Articles of Faith. After quoting the above text from the fifth lecture, Elder McConkie stated: “[The Father and the Son] are exalted men. Each is a personage of spirit; each is a personage of tabernacle. Both of them have bodies, tangible bodies of flesh and bones. They are resurrected beings. Words, with their finite connotations, cannot fully describe them. A personage of tabernacle, as here used, is one whose body and spirit are inseparably connected and for whom there can be no death. A personage of spirit, as here used and as distinguished from the spirit children of the Father, is a resurrected personage. Resurrected bodies, as contrasted with mortal bodies, are in fact spiritual bodies.”21 Elder McConkie then quoted 1 Corinthians 15:44 and D&C 88:27 as scriptural usage of the term “spiritual” in reference to a resurrected body.

On April 2, 1843, Joseph Smith revealed what became the canonized declaration regarding the corporeal nature of God. “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit” (D&C 130:22). This revelation clearly separated the Latter-day Saints from more traditional Trinitarian religions. Subsequent teachings have continued to affirm the Latter-day Saint theology that God the Father and Jesus Christ are immortal beings with bodies of flesh and bone. Brigham Young said, “Our God and Father in Heaven, is a being of tabernacle, or, in other words, he has a body, with parts the same as you and I have. . . . His Son Jesus Christ has become a personage of tabernacle, and has a body like his Father.”22 Parley P. Pratt, one of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught that
both the Father and the Son possess “a perfect organization of spirit, flesh, and bones.”

The Roles of Jesus Christ in the Early Church

The title page of the Book of Mormon states that its purpose is to convince the children of God that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.” The Book of Mormon prophet Abinadi said, “God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people” (Mosiah 15:1). The record of John the Beloved notes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus Christ declared to Joseph Smith on May 6, 1833, that the “Word” in these verses referred to the Son of God (see D&C 93:6–8). For Latter-day Saints, these verses establish a separation between God the Father and the Word. John Taylor said, “If, as stated, Jesus was with the Father in the beginning, there certainly was more than God—God the Father, and God the Son.”

Brigham Young taught that Jesus Christ was “appointed, from the beginning, to die for our redemption, and he suffered an excruciating death on the cross.” The idea that Christ was “appointed” to perform the Atonement suggests a power, or an authority above himself, in the premortal existence. The situation of mankind following the Fall required a power above his own in order to be elevated back to the presence of God. Joseph Smith, speaking of the fallen state of mankind, said, “That man was not able himself to erect a system, or plan with power sufficient to free him from a destruction which awaited him, is evident from the fact that God, as before remarked, prepared a sacrifice in the gift of His own Son who should be sent in due time, to prepare a way, or open a door through which man might enter into the Lord’s presence, whence he had been cast out for disobedience.” Jesus Christ was sent to earth by the Father to counteract the consequences of the Fall. “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21–22). Brigham Young and Willard Richards wrote an article in the Millennial Star that Joseph Smith referred to as “one of the sweetest pieces that has been written in these last days.” In that article, the authors stated that God the Father had “ordained [Christ] to the work of creating the world and all things upon it.” This statement again suggests the Father’s authority over the Son and the Son’s humility in accepting the Father’s will.
When the Savior visited the Nephites in the Western hemisphere, he said, “I . . . have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11). In March 1830, the Savior revealed his own first-person account of what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane: “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:16–19).

Jesus Christ will be responsible for the judgment of all mankind. “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). John Taylor, third President of the Church, declared, “We may here state that Christ is called the judge of the quick and the dead, the judge of all the earth.” Another important role of Jesus Christ is that of Creator. This topic alone could fill volumes. The attempt to encapsulate the mission of the Savior in one article is impossible. For the purpose of this article, it is sufficient to point out that early in the history of the Church, the leaders began to solidify the Church’s doctrinal position as they declared and then expounded on the many roles of Jesus Christ in the Father’s plan to exalt his children.

**Distinct Roles of Father and Son**

The clarification between the Father and the Son was one of the doctrinal pieces that took the longest to fall into place for the Latter-day Saints. This may be because it is through those roles that God interacts with men. The intimate nature of those interactions can make it difficult to let go of previous traditions and beliefs. Brigham Young described how difficult it was to accept the revelation known as Doctrine and Covenants 76. “It was a great trial to many, and some apostatized because God was not going to send to everlasting punishment heathens and infants, but had a place of salvation, in due time, for all, and would bless the honest and virtuous and truthful, whether they ever belonged to any church or not. It was a new doctrine to this generation, and many stumbled at it.” Although Brigham Young’s comment deals with a different subject—the three degrees of glory—it provides an insight to the
difficult nature of letting go of previous religious understanding in the face of new insights.

When people misunderstand accurate revelations, they can also be held back from accepting additional revelation. Scriptures in the Book of Mormon, for example, can confuse a reader about the identity of the Father and the Son. “And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—and they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth” (Mosiah 15:2–4). Professor Craig Blomberg was surprised when he read the Book of Mormon for the first time. He said that he “found more instances of seemingly clear trinitarian language in the Book of Mormon than in the Old and New Testaments put together.” If a scholar as notable as Professor Blomberg interprets the Book of Mormon as Trinitarian, what can be said for lay members of the Church in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

At times, even the leaders of the Church intermingled the titles and roles of the Father and the Son. Joseph Smith, for example, wrote, “O Thou who seest and knowest the hearts of all men—Thou eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Jehovah—God—Thou Eloheim.” Elder Franklin D. Richards taught, “The Savior said He could call to His help more than twelve legions of angels; more than the Roman hosts; but He knowing the great purposes of Jehovah could go like a lamb to the slaughter.” Brigham Young and Willard Richards wrote, “The Lord (Jehovah) hath spoken through Isa. (42, 1) saying, behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; evidently referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God chosen or elected by the Father.”

President Wilford Woodruff commented on questions being sent to his office related to the Godhead. He said the following in general conference in 1895:

Cease troubling yourselves about who God is; who Adam is, who Christ is, who Jehovah is. For heaven’s sake, let these things alone. Why trouble yourselves with these things? God has revealed Himself, and when the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants is fulfilled, whether there be one God or many gods they will be revealed to the children of men, as well as all thrones and dominions, principalities, and powers. Then why trouble yourselves about these things? God is God. Christ is Christ. The Holy Ghost is the Holy Ghost. That should be enough for you and me to know. If we want to know any more, wait till we get where God is in person. . . . The Lord is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. He changes not. The Son of
God is the same. He is the Savior of the world. He is our advocate with the Father. We have had letter after letter from Elders abroad wanting to know concerning these things. . . . God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, are the same yesterday, to-day and forever. That should be sufficient for us to know.35

James R. Clark wrote, “It is always dangerous to try to ‘second guess’ circumstances in the absence of direct evidence. . . . Revelation from God is not established or justified by human reason, but explanation of possible circumstances is sometimes helpful in understanding it.”36 Clark suggested that misunderstandings regarding the Church’s doctrine on the Godhead might have also encouraged attacks from other faiths. In an attempt to correct these misunderstandings, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve issued the document “The Father and the Son.” President Joseph F. Smith and Charles Penrose, member of the First Presidency, both alluded to questions being sent to the Church leaders regarding the topic of the Godhead in the April 1916 general conference, just four months before “The Father and the Son” was printed in the Deseret News. President Penrose stated, “I am sorry that has not been rectified long ago, because plain answers have been given to brethren and sisters who write and desire to know about it, and yet it still lingers, and contentions arise in regard to it.”37 The focus of President Penrose’s talk was the distinct roles and personages of God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, and Adam. This talk seemed to be the perfect preface to the document “The Father and the Son,” which focused specifically on the second member of the Godhead, Jesus Christ.

The Important Role of James E. Talmage
In the early twentieth century, President Joseph F. Smith became concerned over the lack of clarity concerning the Latter-day Saint concept of the Godhead and specifically the Only Begotten Son. Seeking to bring light to the issue, he enlisted the aid of James E. Talmage. The following sections summarize how Elder Talmage helped clarify Church doctrine regarding the Godhead at the request of the First Presidency.

Some have asserted that early Mormon theology on the Godhead was basically Trinitarian and that Elder Talmage’s work effectively gave birth to a new Mormonism.38 This claim overlooks what was being taught as early as 1836 in Kirtland, Ohio. Reverend Truman Coe wrote an article to the editor of The Ohio Observer in 1836, in which he reported that Joseph Smith was teaching that God was a “material being, composed of body and parts;
Elder Talmage affirmed what the Prophet Joseph Smith had already taught: both the Father and the Son have bodies of flesh and bone while the Spirit “is a personage of spirit.”
and that when the Creator formed Adam in His own image, he made him about the same size and shape of God himself.” These teachings would have raised the hair on the neck of any man from an orthodox Trinitarian background. Strict Trinitarians from past centuries would have raised a cry of heresy against the Prophet Joseph Smith as early as 1820, but by the 1836 Kirtland period, they would have branded him a heretic and exiled him from the churches of their day.

It should be recognized, however, that even though Talmage was not the creator of a new religion, he did play a critical role in defining and clarifying the nature of the Godhead in Mormon theology through his writings and teachings. At the request of the First Presidency, and under their supervision, James E. Talmage authored four books that were published by the Church, from 1899 to 1915. Two of those books dealt, at least in part, with the basic doctrines of the Church: Articles of Faith and Jesus the Christ. The initial request for Talmage to write a theological book came from President Wilford Woodruff in 1891. Talmage recorded a summary of a meeting between himself and President Woodruff. He wrote, “It is the intention of the brethren to cause to be published a class work in Theology for use in Church schools, and in Religion classes generally. The need of such a work has long been felt among the teachers of the Latter-day Saints. . . . Several preliminaries have to be arranged before the work is begun; but the First Presidency have expressed to me their intention of appointing me to do the labor.” Two years later the official request came signed by Wilford Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith, the second counselor in the First Presidency (George Q. Cannon was out of the state). “It is our desire that a book suitable for the purposes named should be placed in the hands of our people as soon as possible. Knowing your experience in this direction we should be pleased to have you prepare such a work.”

Talmage suggested that a theology class be offered as a way of organizing and preparing the foundation for such a book. Following several delays, the class was organized and finally offered on the campus of the Church University. The first class was held on October 29, 1893. A month later, the First Presidency requested that classes be printed in full in the Juvenile Instructor. Because it was going to be printed, Talmage requested that the First Presidency form a committee to advise him throughout the writing process. The committee consisted of Francis M. Lyman and Abraham H. Cannon of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, President George Reynolds and Elder John Nicholson of the First Council of the Seventy, and Karl G. Maeser. Often
the committee would meet with the First Presidency to council on doctrinal matters. In one instance when James was performing ordinances for the dead in the Salt Lake Temple with his wife, May, he was summoned to a committee meeting that lasted several hours. Following additional meetings among the Quorum of the Twelve, a member of that quorum authorized Talmage to declare what he had written as official doctrine in an upcoming class.42

The class was held only through April 1894, due to James Talmage’s appointment as president of the University of Utah—it was seen as improper for Talmage to be directing the affairs of the nonsectarian state-funded school and teaching the sectarian theological courses concurrently. Although the class was short-lived, it gave James Talmage the basis for the book the First Presidency had asked him to write. It was finally prepared and printed in 1899. At the time of completion the First Presidency suggested that the Church, rather than Talmage as an individual author, take responsibility for the publication.

*Jesus the Christ* had very similar beginnings, only in reverse order. In 1904, Talmage began a series of lectures that focused on the life of Jesus Christ. In the summer of 1905, Joseph F. Smith, as President of the Church, contacted Talmage regarding the possibility of turning the lectures into a book that would be made available to the Church in general. The organizing process began, but its progress was impeded by several interruptions including a subpoena to testify in Washington at the Reed Smoot trials. Talmage had started a private consulting practice around May 1900, and by 1905 his business occupied much of his time. More than once, he requested that the First Presidency accept his resignation from the Deseret Professorship of Geology at the University of Utah.43 His initial requests were denied until, finally, in 1907 the First Presidency granted him permission to resign from the university so that he could make consulting a full-time job. The career expanded very quickly once Talmage was able to give it his primary attention, and it was not long before he was making regular trips to Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and even Oregon to visit mines, investigate smelters, or testify in courtrooms.44

James E. Talmage was called into the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1911, and in 1914 he was asked to finish the book “with as little delay as possible.”45 The book was finished in a matter of only seven months and five days. Elder Talmage was able to accomplish the feat largely because the preparation work was already in place and the First Presidency provided him with a room in the Salt Lake Temple where he could write hidden from the
normal interruptions of his office. There have been rumors over the years that Elder Talmage slept in the temple while writing the book. These, however, are not accurate. Elder Talmage returned home each night, albeit at a late hour.46

President Lorenzo Snow felt a strong desire that the general members of the Church make a serious effort to study Articles of Faith. When it was published, he published the following announcement in the Deseret Evening News:

During the early part of April there will be issued by the Deseret News a Church work, entitled “The Articles of Faith,” the same being a series of lectures on the principal doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, by Dr. James E. Talmage. The lectures were prepared by appointment of the First Presidency, and the book will be published by the Church. It is intended for use as a text book in Church schools, Sunday schools, [Mutual] Improvement associations, quorums of the Priesthood, and other Church organizations in which the study of Theology is pursued, and also for individual use among the members of the Church. The work has been approved by the First Presidency, and I heartily commend it to the members of the Church.47

Joseph F. Smith published a similar request when Jesus the Christ was published. He wrote, “We desire that the work, ‘Jesus The Christ’ be read and studied by the Latter-day Saints, in their families, and in the organizations that are devoted wholly or in part to theological study. We commend it especially for use in our Church schools, as also for the advanced theological classes in Sunday schools and priesthood quorums for the instruction of our missionaries, and for general reading.”48 According to Elder Talmage, when Jesus the Christ was published, there was an increased attention given to the life of the Savior. Following its publication, James wrote in his journal, “The interest manifest by our people in the study of the life of the Savior is one of the most gratifying evidences of the blessing of the Lord attending our recent publication.”49

In these books, Talmage began to clearly distinguish between the personages of the Godhead. “The scriptures specify three personages in the Godhead; (1) God the Eternal Father, (2) His Son Jesus Christ, and (3) the Holy Ghost. These constitute the Holy Trinity, comprizing three physically separate and distinct individuals, who together constitute the presiding council of the heavens.”50 In Articles of Faith, James Talmage affirmed what the Prophet Joseph Smith and others had already taught: both the Father and the Son have bodies of flesh and bone while the Spirit “is not tabernacled in a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of spirit; yet we know that the Spirit has manifested Himself in the form of a man.”51 This was not an
attempt to downplay the unity of the Godhead. Talmage emphasized that the scriptures touching on the oneness of the Godhead were accurate. Such scriptures were simply misapplied, or overemphasized by other teachers of religion. The unity of the Godhead should not be interpreted, according to Talmage, as a unity in person. Rather, the unity is better described as “a type of completeness.”

**The Teachings of James Talmage**

Elder Talmage distinguished between the Father and the Son when he wrote, “Elohim, as understood and used in the restored Church of Jesus Christ, is the name-title of God the Eternal Father, whose firstborn Son in the spirit is Jehovah—the Only Begotten in the flesh, Jesus Christ.” Talmage continued, “During the antemortal period there was essential difference between the Father and the Son, in that the former had already passed through the experiences of mortal life, including death and resurrection, and was therefore a Being possessed of a perfect, immortalized body of flesh and bones, while the Son was yet unembodied.” While emphasizing the distinction, Elder Talmage remained constant to explain the unity in the Godhead as described in the scriptures.

The Godhead is a type of unity in the attributes, powers, and purposes of its members. . . . This unity is a type of completeness; the mind of any one member of the Trinity is the mind of the others; seeing as each of them does with the eye of perfection, they see and understand alike. Under any given conditions each would act in the same way, guided by the same principles of unerring justice and equity. The one-ness of the Godhead, to which the scriptures so abundantly testify, implies no mystical union of substance, nor any unnatural and therefore impossible blending of personality. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are as distinct in their persons and individualities as are any three personages in mortality. Yet their unity of purpose and operation is such as to make their edicts one, and their will the will of God.

According to Elder Talmage, even the titles given to Jesus Christ in the scriptures were significant and pointed to his premortal divinity.

In the nomenclature of the Gods every name is a title of power or station. God is righteously zealous of the sanctity of His own name and of names given by His appointment. . . . Jesus is the individual name of the Savior, and as thus spelled is of Greek derivation. . . . In the original the name was well understood as meaning “Help of Jehovah” or “Savior.” Though as common an appellation as John or Henry or Charles today, the name was nevertheless divinely prescribed, as already stated. . . . Christ is a sacred title, and not an ordinary appellation or common name; it is of Greek derivation, and in meaning is identical with its Hebrew equivalent Messiah.
or *Messias*, signifying the *Anointed One*. Other titles, each possessing a definitive meaning, such as *Emmanuel, Savior, Redeemer, Only Begotten Son, Lord, Son of God, Son of Man*, and many more, are of scriptural occurrence; the fact of main present importance to us is that these several titles are expressive of our Lord’s divine origin and Godship.55

The book *Jesus the Christ* points to the experiences of the Messiah’s life as testimony of his divinity and his role in the plan of salvation. Miracle after miracle testified of Christ’s command over the elements of the earth and even over the spirits of men and demons. In reference to the experience of calming the sea, Elder Talmage wrote, “The Lord of earth, air, and sea spoke and was obeyed. He it was who, amidst the black chaos of creation’s earliest stages, had commanded with immediate effect—Let there be light; Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters; Let the dry land appear—and, as He had decreed, so it was.”56

Jehovah, the Creator of the world, willingly accepted the appointment to come to earth and voluntarily sacrificed his own life so that mankind might, if they followed the steps outlined for them by prophets and apostles, return to live with, and become like, their spirit Father, following their days of probation. All men “have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The only possible avenue for men and women to escape this fallen state is to understand and rely on the Atonement and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. “The need of a Redeemer lies in the inability of man to raise himself from the temporal to the spiritual plane, from the lower kingdom to the higher.”57

“The atonement, as wrought out by Jesus Christ, further signifies that He has opened up the way for man’s redemption from his own sins, through faith in Christ’s sufferings, death, and resurrection.”58 This path was opened for man when Christ traveled the path through Gethsemane to Calvary and on to the empty garden tomb. To emphasize the importance of the events on Calvary, James Talmage said, “It seems, that in addition to the fearful suffering incident to crucifixion, the agony of Gethsemane had recurred, intensified beyond human power to endure. In that bitterest hour the dying Christ was alone, alone in most terrible reality.”59 That experience, taken together with what happened before in Gethsemane and all that was to follow in the approaching hours and days, opened the door to exaltation for all mankind.

Like the Savior, the Holy Ghost is given different titles in holy writ: “The term Holy Ghost and its common synonyms, Spirit of God, Spirit of the Lord, or simply, Spirit, Comforter, and Spirit of Truth, occur in the scriptures
with plainly different meanings, referring in some cases to the person of God the Holy Ghost, and in other instances to the power or authority of this great Personage, or to the agencies through which He ministers.”60 The influence or power of the Holy Ghost that men and women experience is not actually the Holy Ghost any more “than the light and heat and actinic energy of the sun are the sun itself.”61 Failure to make this distinction of person and power leads to most of the misunderstandings regarding the third member of the Godhead. The Holy Ghost is sent forth from the Father to his children in order to bring them to Christ. The Spirit will teach, minister, console, commission, reprove, and speak in order to accomplish this mission.62 Talmage referred to the Holy Ghost as “the minister of the Godhead, carrying into effect the decision of the Supreme Council.”63 In carrying out the various activities associated with his mission, the Holy Ghost has at his disposal the use of the different forces of nature, including but not limited to gravity, heat, light, air, and electricity.

“The Father and the Son”

Even with the combined efforts of Elder Talmage and other members of the governing quorums of the Church, the First Presidency continued to receive letters asking for clarification regarding the Godhead. The First Presidency felt it was necessary to officially address the role of Jesus Christ—specifically with regard to his titles “Father” and “Son.” James E. Talmage mentioned in his journals meeting with the First Presidency on multiple occasions throughout his life. He did not, however, make it a habit of recording the purpose of those meetings. Several such meetings took place between April and June of 1916. On June 14, for example, Talmage recorded, “Yesterday and today I have been engaged in the President’s office a good portion of the time.”64 His membership in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles may explain the meetings, and they could have touched on any number of topics. On June 23, 1916, however, Talmage recorded, “I . . . had an interview with the First Presidency and presented to them an outline for proposed publication relating to the status of Jesus Christ as both the Father and the Son.”65 It is likely that in at least some of the meetings held before June 23 the First Presidency addressed the need for the article, extended the assignment, and provided input as to what it should include.

In July 1916, the First Presidency published the document titled “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the
Twelve.” The purpose of the document was twofold: first, it clearly—and more importantly, officially—distinguished between the personages Elohim and Jehovah and permanently established the use of these name-titles within the Church. Second, the document addressed the status of Jesus Christ as both the Father and the Son as found in the Book of Mormon. According to James R. Clark, the secretaries or recorders for the First Presidency did not mention the document in any of the official minutes of the First Presidency meetings. The conversations related to the publishing of the article and its contents may have been done in private or less formal meetings. It is clear from Elder Talmage’s journal that the First Presidency reviewed the document at least once and offered suggestions before Talmage sent the final draft to print. Unfortunately, there is no indication as to what alterations or feedback the First Presidency offered in the June 23 meeting. Seven days later, the final document was printed in the Deseret News. Elder Talmage felt that the document was significant enough to include in the notes section of the 1924 edition of Articles of Faith.

The second purpose of the document was to clarify why Jesus Christ can be referred to as both “Father” and “Son” in the Book of Mormon, while maintaining a separation between Elohim and Jehovah. In Ether 3:14, for example, Jehovah said, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son.” The document declared that the word “father,” as it is used in reference to God the Father, or Elohim, pertains to his being a literal parent. “God the Eternal Father, whom we designate by the exalted name-title ‘Elohim,’ is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and of the spirits of the human race.” In this sense, it is clearly acceptable to refer to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, being both spiritually and physically begotten of the Father. Nevertheless, there are scriptures that use the word “father” but have no reference to literal sireship. Ether 4:7, for example, reads, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of the heaven and of the earth, and all things that in them are.” This verse can in no way imply that Jesus Christ was the literal parent of the heavens.

“The term ‘Father’ as applied to Deity occurs in sacred writ with plainly different meanings.” The leaders of the Church asserted three reasons why Jesus Christ is qualified for the title of “Father.” First, Christ is qualified to bear the title of Father because of his role as the Creator. “He shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Mosiah 3:8). This is the same logic that
allows us to refer to George Washington as the father of the United States. Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “God ... hath ... spoken unto us by his Son ... by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1–2). Christ was the Creator, and “since His creations are of eternal quality He is very properly called the Eternal Father of heaven and earth.”

Another reason that Christ can be called Father is because of his role as Savior. Through the Atonement, Jesus Christ becomes the Father of mankind's spiritual rebirth. “Even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons” (D&C 39:4). When Christ spoke to Nicodemus about baptism, he used the analogy of being reborn. Through that sacred ordinance, the literal spiritual offspring of Elohim become symbolically reborn. Christ is the author, or father, of the covenant which Elohim's children must enter in order to receive a celestial glory (see 2 Nephi 31). In this sense, yet tragic in its contrast, Satan is also called “father” because all who do not follow Christ will become the children of the devil (see Matthew 13:38). “Thus Satan is designated as the father of the wicked, though we cannot assume any personal relationship of parent and children as existing between him and them.”

In Noah's day, the Lord gave the people an opportunity to become his spiritually begotten children through covenants and subsequent obedience. They chose disobedience and, as a result, the Lord declared, “Satan shall be their father” (Moses 7:37). The choice between good and evil is not so much a choice about what to do as it is what to become, or who to become like: the Savior or Satan. In this spiritual sense, God's children decide who will become their father when they choose between obedience and disobedience.

“[Another] reason for applying the title ‘Father’ to Jesus Christ is found in the fact that in all His dealings with the human family Jesus the Son has represented and yet represents Elohim His Father in power and authority.” This permission to speak as though he were Elohim is called divine investiture of authority. It permits one to deliver a message as though he were the actual author of the message, using words such as “I” and “mine” rather than “his.” This was the case when Jehovah appeared to Moses and declared, “Thou art in the similitude of mine Only Begotten; and mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior” (Moses 1:6) and “by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:33). These scriptures are easily misunderstood because Jehovah is speaking in the place of Elohim and, therefore, references to himself are in the third person. Christ is not the only being given the authority to speak in the name of another. Angels have, at times, also been
given similar status when directing or speaking to Heavenly Father’s children. An angel, sent by the Lord, visited John the Revelator to give him the vision that became the book of Revelation in the New Testament. As John was about to worship the angel, the angel said, “See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Revelation 22:9). Then, speaking for the Lord, the angel said, “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Revelation 22:12–13; emphasis added). Talmage explained that the Savior “had placed His name upon the angel sent to John, and the angel spoke in first person . . . though he meant that Jesus Christ would come, and that Jesus Christ was Alpha and Omega.”

The significance of the document cannot be taken too lightly. It was a major step toward clarifying the Church’s official stand on the Godhead. The general membership of the Church finally had an official statement that distinguished between Elohim and Jehovah and then detailed the role of the Savior as the Father of the new and everlasting covenant and explained scriptural passages that had gone relatively unexplained since the publication of the Book of Mormon over eighty years earlier. It stands as yet another evidence of how God works “line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10).

Concerning his own role in the process, Talmage held that he was an instrument in the hands of those whom the Lord had placed at the head of the Church. He would refute any suggestion that he had rewritten or changed the teachings of the early leaders of the Church. His teachings were applied to the foundation left by Joseph Smith and other leaders. The publisher’s preface to Jesus the Christ states, “There is abundant evidence in the notes at the end of each chapter of the completed volume that Elder Talmage drew inspiration from all the standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and from such Latter-day writers as the Prophet Joseph Smith, President John Taylor, and Elder Franklin D. Richards.” He was an instrument in the hands of the Lord as the fullness of the gospel was unrolled to the Church.

Latter-day Saints have the fulness of the gospel, but that should not be equated with having a full knowledge of all things. Revelations yet to come will shed light on topics that to this point have been kept from the Church. Some of those revelations will likely provide even more insights related to the Godhead. James Talmage discussed the Holy Ghost with the committee that
was formed to help with his theological class, which was meant to prepare the text for *Articles of Faith*. Talmage recorded President George Q. Cannon’s thoughts on the subject: “Pres. Cannon in commenting on the ambiguity existing in our printed works concerning the nature or character of the Holy Ghost expressed his opinion that the Holy Ghost was in reality a person, in the image of the other members of the Godhead—a man in form and figure: and that what we often speak of as the Holy Ghost is in reality but the power or influence of the Spirit. However the Presidency deemed it wise to say as little as possible on this as on other disputed subjects.”

Leaders of the Church have always understood that God does not reveal all things at once. Eventually, the day will come when men have all things given to them in full, but it will be in the Lord’s time and in the Lord’s way. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that men would never understand such things “unless it is given by the inspiration of the Almighty.” Latter-day Saints should be looking forward to the day when additional scripture is revealed. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “The day will come . . . when we will have other books of scripture which will emerge to accompany the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Presently you and I carry our scriptures around in a ‘quad’; the day will come when you’ll need a little red wagon.”

In 1915, Elder James Talmage wrote in *Jesus the Christ*, “Unto Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses the Father revealed Himself, attesting the Godship of the Christ, and the fact that the Son was the chosen Savior of mankind.” Talmage referenced Moses 1:6 as the scriptural account of the Father appearing unto Moses. Since then, President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “All revelation since the fall has come through Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of the scriptures, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was Jehovah who talked with Abraham, with Noah, Enoch, Moses and all of the prophets. . . . The Father has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall, and he has never appeared except to introduce and bear record of the Son.” The Church’s institute manual regarding the Moses 1 account states that Jehovah was the divine guest, speaking through what the 1916 document referred to as “divine investiture,” or “as if He were God the Father.” It is important to not be upset about the additional clarifications that have been set forth; it is also important to remember that we expect even more clarifications in the future. “Current revelation is equally plain with that of former days in predicting the
yet future manifestations of God through this appointed channel [revelation]. The canon of scripture is still open; many lines, many precepts, are yet to be added; revelation, surpassing in importance and glorious fullness any that has been recorded, is yet to be given to the Church and declared to the world. Regardless of the instrument that brings additional revelation and scripture—Joseph Smith, Orson Pratt, James Talmage, Thomas S. Monson, or another—the author of all truth has always been and will continue to be God, the Eternal Father of all mankind.

Notes
3. James E. Talmage, A Study of the Articles of Faith: Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 311.
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Smith Translation, ed. Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 74, 76.

25. Discourses of Brigham Young, 27.
27. History of the Church, 4:256.
30. Discourses of Brigham Young, 390–91.
32. History of the Church, 5:127.
39. Milton V. Backman Jr., “Truman Coe’s 1836 Description of Mormonism,” BYU Studies 17, no. 3 (1977), 352. Reverend Coe was a minister of the Presbyterian faith who lived among the Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, for a period of four years. The aforesaid article was written while Coe was serving the Old South Church in Kirtland. Backman surmised that Coe based his account “primarily on his personal observations and on concepts he had learned from others” (see p. 347).
40. James E. Talmage Journals, September 14, 1891, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
41. Talmage Journals, February 22, 1893.
43. The University of Utah was on the verge of being closed in 1894 due to the national financial crisis. The Territorial Legislature contemplated combining the school with the Agriculture College in Logan. The school in Logan received a land grant trust from the federal government, and the Legislature hesitated to lose that assistance to their educational budget. The acting President of the University of Utah approached President Wilford Woodruff for help. President Woodruff consented to close the Church University in Salt Lake City, thus removing competition to the state-funded school. Additionally, the Church donated $60,000 to the state school in a “desperately needed additional classroom and laboratory space and extensive scientific apparatus and equipment that had been provided for the newly established Church University. . . . To legitimize the reception of gifts of endowment by the University of Utah together with certain special provisions in the contemplated agreement [between Kingsbury and President Wilford Woodruff], the Legislature in 1894 passed an act on ‘Endowing the University of Utah.’” Ralph V. Chamberlin, The University of Utah: A History of Its First Hundred Years, 1850 to 1950 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1960), 203–4. This bill gave the Literary and Scientific Association power to establish a professorship and nominate the person to fill that position. James E. Talmage was nominated and took the position in 1894.

44. Talmage, Talmage Story, 167.
45. Talmage Journals, September 14, 1914.
46. Talmage, Talmage Story, 182.
50. James E. Talmage, Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission according to Holy Scriptures Both Ancient and Modern (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 32.
51. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 42.
52. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 41.
53. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 38–39.
54. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 40–41.
55. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 35–36.
56. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 309.
57. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 27.
58. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 478.
59. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 661.
60. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 159.
61. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 488.
62. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 159.
63. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 160.
64. Talmage Journals, June 14, 1916.
70. “Father and the Son,” 5:30.
73. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, xii.
74. Talmage Journals, January 5, 1894. The religion class was the series of lectures that eventually were compiled into the book Articles of Faith.
75. History of the Church, 6:303.
77. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 39.
80. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 311.
I became acquainted with Arnold K. Garr in August 1994, when I received an appointment to teach part time in the Department of Church History and Doctrine at BYU. Arnie received his PhD in American history from BYU in 1986, the same year I finished my MA in history at the Y, so I knew of him, and I knew something about him from historians in the Mormon historical community. I had also heard a few things about him from some of my CES colleagues, particularly my younger brother Aaron Baugh, who taught seminary in Littleton, Colorado, at the same time Arnie was teaching institute in Boulder. We had even met a few times, but it was not until we were colleagues at BYU that we became close friends.

Our friendship might not have developed like it did were it not for Joy Smith, an administrative secretary in the department. When she gave me my office assignment, she put me in 275C JSB (an interior office with no window—generally given to part-time or junior faculty). “You’ll like that office and hallway,” she said. “You’re across the hall from Brother Garr in 275A. You’ll like him. Everybody likes him.” Later, I moved to a larger office, but in the same hallway, two doors down from Arnie. He kept the same office during his entire time at BYU.
BYU, except for the year he spent at the BYU Jerusalem Center and the four years he served as department chair.

As “hallmates,” Arnie and I saw each other almost every day—multiple times—so of course we talked about shared interests: Mormon history, the scriptures, general conference, doctrinal topics, Church callings, research interests and activities, our fellow faculty members and students, politics, current events, memories of our youth and childhood, and of course our families. We enjoyed some wonderful heart-to-heart experiences and occasionally shed a few tears. But there were many lighter discussions, mostly focused on sports. Arnie certainly wouldn’t be offended by being called a sports junkie, particularly when it came to BYU football and basketball and Utah Jazz basketball. He knew all the players, the coaches, and the issues involving the teams. I once told a faculty member that if Arnie weren’t in Religious Education, he’d make a great sports radio or television color commentator.

Within a short time after I arrived at BYU, I was called to serve on the BYU Second Stake high council. I had a pretty good idea who initiated my call—Arnie, who at the time was serving as a counselor to George Durrant in the stake presidency. One Sunday morning about a year later, President Durrant and President Garr came to my home, where they called me to be the bishop of the BYU Sixty-First ward. To this day, I consider the time I spent as a bishop of a BYU singles ward as the most rewarding calling I’ve ever had. Arnie had a lot to do with that call, for which I am most grateful. Working with him in the stake also gave me the opportunity to observe him serving in an ecclesiastical role. Always the humble and unassuming leader, Arnie practiced the Savior’s admonition that “whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:26–27).

Arnie was appointed chair of the Department of Church History and Doctrine in February 2006, replacing Paul H. Peterson, who had been diagnosed with cancer. (Paul died in September 2007.) Paul’s outstanding administrative skills, congenial personality, and warmhearted nature endeared him to all the faculty members, especially those in Church History and Doctrine. Everyone in the department recognized whoever was called as Paul’s replacement would have a difficult task of meeting the standard of quality leadership set by him. When asked by one of my colleagues who I would recommend, I said it was a no-brainer. “If I could have any say in the matter, I’d choose Arnie,” I replied. “He’s a lot like Paul.” Indeed he was. In fact, in terms of people skills, he reminded me of Paul—kind, congenial, and thoughtful—but he also did things his own way,
particularly in terms of his administrative responsibilities. During the three and a half years he served as chair, the faculty supported him, admired him, and appreciated the significant work he did and what he accomplished.

Arnie’s professional career spanned just over four decades—twenty-one years in the Church Educational System (now called Seminaries and Institutes) and twenty years at BYU. In CES he was a seminary teacher, a CES coordinator in New York, and an institute instructor and director in Tallahassee, Florida, and Boulder, Colorado. He became a full-time faculty member and assistant professor in the Department of Church History and Doctrine at BYU in 1991. In 1997 he was appointed associate professor, and in 2004 he was appointed full professor. He retired from BYU in 2011.

In the spring of 2011, just prior to his retirement, Arnie addressed the Religious Education faculty—a “last lecture” of sorts given at our weekly Friday Faculty Forum. During the hour, he shared a number of his experiences in CES and at BYU. In conclusion, he remarked, “I’ve lived my dream!” That statement had a profound effect upon me. It caused me to think about my expectations and what I hoped I would experience and accomplish in my career in CES and at BYU. I thought in my mind and heart, In a few more years when I retire, or perhaps at the end of my life, I hope that I too will be able to say, “I’ve lived my dream!”

The history profession has helped me gain a greater appreciation for biography and its related forms, including published and unpublished biographical and autobiographical works, short personal historical narratives and reminiscences, and oral history. Everyone has a story to tell—their own story—and it can be recorded in various ways. However, oral history provides a wonderful means to record and preserve a person’s life story in a simple but effective way.

Soon after Arnie gave his talk, I asked if he would let me conduct an oral history interview with him. “You’ve lived your dream,” I told him, “so let’s record it, transcribe it, and share it.” The interview was conducted on July 21, 2011.

The Interview

Baugh: You were raised in Ogden, Utah. Talk about your experience in the seminary program at Ben Lomond Seminary.

Garr: When I took seminary, it was only a three-year program. Seminary wasn’t taught in the ninth grade, so I didn’t have it in junior high. It’s hard for me to even imagine this now, but the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and
Covenants weren’t even part of the curriculum. The three courses taught were Old Testament, New Testament, and Church History.

I was raised in an active family. My mom and dad were married in the temple, but there was no expectation for me to go on a mission. I can attribute my seminary experience to helping me make the decision to go on a mission. One of my seminary teachers was Mack Palmer. When I was a junior in high school, he was teaching New Testament and gave a lesson on Matthew 6:33, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,” and he applied it to missionary work, and it touched my heart. I thought, If I’m going to seek first the kingdom of God, I need to go on a mission. I can attribute my decision to go on a mission to that lesson more than anything else. I’m really grateful for Mack Palmer and the seminary program.

In part, I’m a product of the seminary program. I certainly believed that the Church was true. I was born with the gift of faith. I wasn’t a doubter, but I can’t say that I really had a dynamic testimony. All through Primary, I know I received lessons on the plan of salvation, but the plan of salvation really crystallized for me in seminary. When I learned about the three degrees of glory, baptisms for the dead, and missionary work in the spirit world, my heart was touched. I can attribute this to my seminary experience. I had those teachings as a young person, but they never internalized until I was in seminary.

Larry C. Porter was a really important person in my life. Brother Porter was our seminary principal when I was at Ben Lomond Seminary. I never had a class from him, but for some reason he seemed to take an interest in me. He called me by name, and he always seemed to know what was going on in my life. He’d stop and talk to me, and he always treated me so well. When I went on my mission, Brother Porter came to my farewell! He’s been a significant person in my life ever since. He was the department chair and my mentor when I was getting my doctor’s degree, and then we became colleagues at BYU. When I gave my last lecture to the Religious Education faculty this past spring, Larry Porter showed up for my presentation, even though he had been retired for ten years. This was forty-eight years after he attended my mission farewell. So he has been such a great influence in my life. I think he’s a great man. He’s a great mentor of mine.

**Baugh:** Was there any particular year in seminary that was kind of the banner year? You mentioned your junior year when you were studying the New Testament.
Garr: I would say my junior year was my banner year. That’s the year that Mack Palmer taught me that lesson in the New Testament. That was a turning point in my life. President Gordon B. Hinckley talked about when he was discouraged on his mission and his father sent that letter that said, “Forget yourself and go to work.” Then he said, to follow up on that, “Everything good that’s happened to me since then, I can attribute to my decision to stay on my mission.” I can say that about Mack Palmer’s lesson on “seek ye first the kingdom of God.” Everything good that’s happened to me, I can attribute to my decision to go on a mission. Seminary was really important.

Baugh: That’s wonderful! Have you ever had the opportunity to tell Brother Palmer about your experience when he gave that lesson?

Garr: I’ve told him since. That’s also when I started thinking about being a seminary teacher as well. The seminary teachers were so impressive to me. I didn’t make a decision then, but I thought, I think I’d like to be a seminary teacher someday.

Baugh: After you graduated from Ben Lomond High School, did you attend a year at Weber State before going on your mission?

Garr: That’s right. My mission call was to Finland. I served a two-and-a-half-year mission from 1963 to 1965.

Baugh: Did your mission serve as a catalyst for you to go into Church education? Did your mission continue to steer you in that direction?

Garr: Yes, it did. During my mission, my testimony took a quantum leap. I mentioned that we didn’t have Book of Mormon in seminary, and I’m ashamed to say this now, but I had never read the Book of Mormon before I left on my mission. I’d read a little bit in it, but I had never read the entire Book of Mormon cover to cover. I got right into it after I got on my mission, and that’s when my testimony and my love for the gospel soared. It made me start thinking, I’d like to teach the gospel full-time. So yes, my mission experience did have something to do with my decision to get in the Church education program.

Baugh: You returned from your mission, and then you started back up at Weber State. Talk for a minute about your experience in the institute program at Weber.

Garr: I had an excellent experience. Even before I went on a mission, I took a missionary preparation class from Brother Glen Stubbs. He was so energetic. He got me really excited about going on a mission. I was going to go on a mission because I knew it was the thing I was supposed to do, but
Glen Stubbs really motivated me. So that was an important institute class for me. After I returned home from my mission, I took the seminary teacher preparation course from Brother Donald Colvin. In those days, the Church required that you have a teacher’s certificate to teach seminary, so I had to take a number of education classes at Weber State. Back then it was called Weber State College. I probably took thirty hours of education classes. But I can say that I learned more about teaching in the class I took from Brother Colvin than I learned in all the education classes I took at Weber State.

_Baugh_: Did you major in education?

_Garr_: I majored in history, but I did get a teacher’s certificate.

_Baugh_: Did you do your student teaching in history?

_Garr_: I did my student teaching in history at Ben Lomond High School—my alma mater—and did my seminary student teaching at Weber High School.

_Baugh_: What was directing you into history? It seems that all of a sudden you took this road into history. How did that happen?

_Garr_: History was always my favorite subject in school, with the exception of physical education. I always liked history. I liked it better than English and science. I had some good history teachers. My seventh-grade history teacher was Rulon Garfield. He could talk about politics, and he was just outstanding. Rulon Garfield had actually served on Vice President Richard Nixon’s staff. Later on he taught in the Education Department at BYU, and he served as a Utah state senator. So, early in my life, I had good, interesting history teachers, and I’ve always enjoyed it.

_Baugh_: So at Weber State you had training in education and history, and then you received training in the Church’s preservice seminary program. What year did you graduate?

_Garr_: I graduated from Weber State in 1969.

_Baugh_: Did you receive an appointment to teach seminary at that time?

_Garr_: No. I actually went to Utah State University and started on a master’s program in history. I did one year of coursework. Then I started teaching seminary at Roy High School.

_Baugh_: And were you married at this point?

_Garr_: Yes. In fact, when I began teaching seminary at Roy High School, my wife, Cherie, was teaching physical education at the same school. It was a great experience for both of us. We didn’t have any children at the time. She was the adviser to the dancing group—the Royalaires. It was a lot of fun.
Cherie’s girls danced at the halftime of BYU basketball games. They even danced at the halftime of the ABA championship game between the Utah Stars and the Kentucky Colonels. It was a lot of fun.

**Baugh:** Let’s talk about your master’s program at USU. I’m guessing you moved to Logan.

**Garr:** Actually, we lived in Brigham City. Cherie and I were friends with two other couples, and all three of our wives taught school in Ogden while the other two men and I were attending Utah State. Every morning our wives would carpool to Ogden, and the men would carpool to Logan.

**Baugh:** Who were some of your professors at USU?

**Garr:** The person I studied under was George Ellsworth—he was an outstanding professor—a Mormon historian and a Utah historian. He was the chair of my thesis committee. I’ve always been grateful to him. Leonard Arrington was on my committee for a while. However, by the time I completed my master’s thesis, he had left to become the Church historian. My thesis was on the history of Brigham Young College. For some people, that college is the forgotten academy. When someone says Brigham Young College, many people think that’s Brigham Young Academy in Provo, but it was Brigham Young College in Logan. It was established by Brigham Young just before he died in 1877, and it had almost a fifty-year run. It was closed down in 1926, but it had a really interesting history. It was actually a four-year liberal arts college for a while. One of its most distinguished alumni was John A. Widtsoe. Some people think it was the forerunner to Utah State Agricultural College, now Utah State University, but it wasn’t. The two schools operated simultaneously and coexisted for a while. That’s one of the reasons Brigham Young College was closed down—because there were two institutions of higher learning in Logan. When they closed BYC down, the Church gave the library to Utah State Agricultural College, and the buildings became Logan High School. BYC had a fascinating history, and I’m glad I was able to do some work on it because I think that history might have been forgotten otherwise. To this day I think it’s still misunderstood quite a bit.

**Baugh:** Talk for a few moments about some of your seminary teaching experiences at Roy High School.

**Garr:** It was a great experience. I taught there from 1970 to 1974. I think it’s important with each lesson to make application to our lives. I learned that in my seminary teacher preparation courses. The students there at Roy were really good students. The principal was Jacob Davies. He was an advocate of
teaching the scriptures sequentially even before it became part of the pro-
gram in the Church Educational System. The year I began teaching, there
were four other first-year teachers—all of us brand new—and Jacob Davies
had the responsibility of training five new seminary teachers. He had a great
influence on my life. It was an excellent experience for me.

**Baugh:** By this time, the seminary curriculum included *Old and New
Testament, Book of Mormon, and Church History/Doctrine and Covenants.*
Has Church history always been your favorite subject to teach?

**Garr:** It’s always been my favorite.

**Baugh:** By 1974 you had completed your master’s and you’d been teaching
seminary for four years. It was at this time you were given the opportunity to be
a CES coordinator. Talk about that for a minute.

**Garr:** It was a tremendous opportunity and assignment for us. We
wanted to eventually get into the institute program—that was our goal—and
it was kind of an unwritten rule in those days that if you wanted to get into
the institute program in Utah, you were expected to go away from Utah and
the Intermountain West and coordinate early-morning seminaries and teach
institute part time. We thought my assignment might be in California or
Arizona, but we were asked to go to Palmyra, New York. Cherie had never
even been outside the western United States before, so this was quite a leap
for us, but it was a wonderful experience, especially because of my love for
Church history. I was just like a kid in a candy shop. We lived a few blocks
from the Sacred Grove and the E. B. Grandin Print Shop, where the Book of
Mormon was first printed, and only a few miles from the Hill Cumorah. We
lived in the Palmyra area for four years.

In addition to my CES assignment, I was honored to serve as the
bishop of the Palmyra Ward. One person who had a huge influence in my
life at the time was Kay Whitmore. He was serving in the stake presidency
of the Rochester New York Stake when I was serving as a bishop. At the
time, Kay Whitmore was associate vice president of Eastman Kodak, and
later he became the president and CEO of Eastman Kodak and stake presi-
dent and still later a mission president. In fact, there’s a nice tribute to Kay
Whitmore in the Tanner Building on campus. There are three different pic-
tures of him there—one is with President George H. W. Bush, another is with
President Spencer W. Kimball, and the last one is with Pope John Paul II. Kay
Whitmore was a great man, and I learned more about Church administration
from him than from anybody else in my whole life. He was very efficient, very
conscientious, very proactive, but he had the common touch. I mean, he was extremely successful and well-to-do, but he never said or did anything to give people the idea that he was better than them. He had that great combination. He was efficient, brilliant, and well organized, but he just had that common touch. He was a great role model for me as a Church administrator.

**Baugh:** What were some of the responsibilities you had while serving as a CES coordinator?

**Garr:** I would teach only one institute class a week, and it was at the stake center, close to the University of Rochester. Most of my time was spent coordinating the home study seminary program. I had the Buffalo, Ithaca, Rochester, and Syracuse stakes—so basically the western half of the state of New York. Coordinators spent most of their time doing seminary work. It was very different than a released-time seminary assignment.

**Baugh:** After four years in New York, you were ready to return to Utah not to teach institute but to pursue your doctorate. Talk about that.

**Garr:** We moved to Orem so I could work on my doctorate in American history at BYU. My goal was always to teach in the institute program somewhere here in Utah, so I thought that would enhance my chances if I could get a doctor’s degree. I had some great professors and some fascinating classes. I studied under Thomas G. Alexander, and I have always considered him to be my chief mentor when it came to American history. The most demanding class I ever had in my life was called Problems in Mormon History, and it was taught by Tom Alexander and James B. Allen. We had to read over twenty-five books and dozens of articles and write six position papers, but it was a tremendous class. I also minored in LDS Church history in Religious Education. I took a series of classes called Documents in LDS Church History from Larry Porter and Keith W. Perkins. Richard O. Cowan served on my dissertation committee along with Tom Alexander. I always felt my great mentors in LDS Church history and in Religious Education have been Larry Porter, Keith Perkins, and Richard Cowan.

**Baugh:** Did you teach part time while you were working on your PhD?

**Garr:** I taught Church history and Doctrine and Covenants—my two favorites. That got me thinking that if it were ever possible, it would be great if I could teach at BYU full time. I didn’t think it was very possible, but I thought that would be the ideal assignment if I could ever have that opportunity.

**Baugh:** How did you make it through those years?
Garr: I’ve always thought about that time. It was a great experience, but it was probably the most stressful time in my life. During my first year (I was thirty-four years old), I was going to school full time and teaching part time. By the second year I was going to school full time, I was teaching three-fourths time, I had a Church calling, and we had three children. I was at BYU for four years. Then it took me another four years before I completed writing my dissertation. During my last year (we had moved to Florida by this time), I was teaching full time, I was writing my dissertation, I was in the stake presidency, and I had five children, so it was really stressful.

Baugh: After four years you left BYU and you were assigned to be the CES coordinator in Tallahassee, Florida. Talk about that assignment.

Garr: I loved Tallahassee. I’m a sports fan, and Bobby Bowden was the football coach at Florida State. That’s when I became a Florida State University football fan. The institute program was much more developed in Tallahassee than in Palmyra. The institute program had been there much longer. The Church had a building right across the street from the stake center. I coordinated the seminary program, but I spent more time teaching institute. We had some really good experiences. We started Friday forums—a lunchtime forum—where guest speakers would come and speak to the students. I really enjoyed teaching institute students because they didn’t have discipline problems. However, with a one-teacher institute, the big challenge is recruiting. It’s always such an awkward situation to go out and recruit and say, “We’ve got this wonderful institute program and oh, by the way, I’m the teacher.” I never did enjoy the recruiting part of it, but I really enjoyed teaching college students. That was the difference in Tallahassee.

Baugh: While you were in Tallahassee, how did you find time to finish your dissertation? Did you come back to BYU in the summers?

Garr: That’s how I did it. At first I was on the stake high council; later I was in the stake presidency. Our stake president was kind enough to let me leave during the summers and keep my calling even though I was absent for two months each summer. I’d bring the whole family to Provo and we lived in married student housing. That’s when I would do my research for my dissertation. We made three trips back to Utah.

Baugh: Talk about your dissertation.

Garr: I chose to write my dissertation on the history of a Church periodical, actually a mission periodical, called *Liahona: The Elders’ Journal*. It was the only mission periodical published in the United States from 1907 to
1945. My decision to write on that subject was actually a practical one. I knew I wasn’t going to be able to be in Utah to do research on the topic, so I went to my good friend and mentor Larry Porter, and I asked if he’d give me a little grant to get all of the issues of *Liahona: The Elders’ Journal* on microfiche so I could take them with me to Tallahassee, which he did. My idea was that in my spare time, I could do my research on the microfiche machine in Tallahassee. However, I didn’t have much spare time, so I still had come to Provo in the summers to get the work done.

**Baugh:** Basically, to write the dissertation, you had to read and familiarize yourself with every issue of that paper printed for nearly forty years.

**Garr:** Yes! But it was such an important paper. It served a great purpose because at the time it was the only mission periodical for all the LDS missions in America. It was especially important early on when there was no radio, television, or *Church News*. The Saints were spread out all over the country, and for these members the *Elders’ Journal* was the only information source connecting them with the Church. Both the missionaries and the members used it. In one of the chapters, I discuss how it was also used as an instrument in conversion. So it had a really important history. I was glad I was able to write about it.

**Baugh:** Why was *Liahona: The Elders’ Journal* published in Independence, Missouri?

**Garr:** Missouri was centrally located, and that’s where Zion’s Printing and Publishing Company was located—the Church’s main printing operation. It was the ideal place to have it printed.

**Baugh:** Jumping back, how many years were you in Tallahassee?

**Garr:** Seven.

**Baugh:** Then an opportunity came for you to move to be the CES coordinator in Boulder, Colorado. Why did you agree to take that assignment?

**Garr:** I always hoped that I could get an opportunity to teach institute in Utah and to be closer to our families. When the CES administrators offered me the opportunity to go to Boulder, I thought, “Well, at least it’s closer to Utah and to our family.” Even though we loved Tallahassee, we took that offer. We were in Boulder for only a couple years, but it was a good two years.

**Baugh:** How did the opportunity come for you to come to BYU?

**Garr:** At the time, Larry E. Dahl was chair of the Department of Church History and Doctrine. He called and told me that I was being considered as a candidate for a full-time position in the department and asked if a couple
of faculty members could come to Boulder to observe my teaching. That was exciting for me, but it was also nerve-racking. Leon Hartshorn and Dean Garrett were the two who came to Boulder to observe my teaching. I assume they gave a good report, because I got hired a few months later. I’ll always be grateful to Brother Hartshorn and Brother Garrett for visiting my class and, I assume, giving a good report on my teaching.

**Baugh:** You began teaching at BYU in 1991, and you had a twenty-year career at the university. What was your main teaching emphasis at BYU?

**Garr:** I taught almost exclusively Doctrine and Covenants and Church history. I was one year at the BYU Jerusalem Center. While there, I taught Old Testament and New Testament. Other than that, almost all the classes I taught were Church history and Doctrine and Covenants. I felt these two subject areas were my niche.

**Baugh:** In coming to BYU, you knew you would be expected to research, write, and publish. With that expectation, what are some of the subjects you’ve researched and written about?

**Garr:** As I look back on it, I think the three things that I spent the most time on in my career were three books that I wrote or edited: *Christopher Columbus: A Latter-day Saint Perspective* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992); *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000); and *Joseph Smith: Candidate for President of the United States* (Orem: Millennial Press, 2007).

**Baugh:** Talk about each of these books.

**Garr:** I learned a lot of things researching and writing these books. For example, take Columbus. We know that Christopher Columbus fulfilled Book of Mormon prophecy. We know that he was a forerunner to the Restoration of the gospel. We know that he was inspired to make his first voyage to America. But what about his character? He was far from perfect, but I think his outstanding character trait was persistence—dogged tenacity. Two examples: During a seven-year period, he approached several different European crowns six separate times to try to get them to sponsor his voyage—six times before Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain consented. That, I think, is a good example of persistence. Then on the voyage he went thirty-three days due west, with the threat of mutiny, and he just kept on. I think that is a great example of dogged tenacity as well. Persistence is an important attribute for success in life. That’s one of the things I learned from Christopher Columbus.
Compiling and editing the *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* was also a great experience for me. At the time, I was an associate professor—I had been at BYU for only six years. I had only published one book and a handful of articles. I wanted to get some people to help me as editors because I didn’t think the publisher would even pay attention to me if I didn’t get some high-profile scholars. So I went to Richard Cowan and Donald Q. Cannon and asked them if they would serve as editors with me, and they were nice enough to do it even though I was much less experienced than they were. It was a great project because I got to work with so many LDS scholars. We had over 350 scholars—many of the greatest LDS scholars—contribute more than 1,400 articles to the book. In fact, we asked Leonard Arrington to coauthor with Larry Porter the article on Brigham Young, and I think that it’s the last article that Leonard Arrington wrote before he died. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* is such a great work, but a lot of people don’t realize that as great as that encyclopedia is, only about 15 percent of the articles were about Mormon history. So we feel like we really made a significant contribution because our volume dealt strictly with Church history. To me, the *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* is my most important contribution.

**Baugh:** *It had to be a monumental effort coordinating and working with all of the authors.*

**Garr:** It was. When I think back, I’m not sure how we were able to do it. I had the articles stacked in trays on the floor, on my desk, and on my filing cabinets. The trays were stacked six, eight, ten, and twelve layers high. Richard Cowan was seeing-impaired, and I’d meet with him and Don Cannon every day. One time Richard came in and conked his head on one of those trays and cut his forehead. I felt so bad. But both these men were great to work with.

**Baugh:** *Talk about the third book, Joseph Smith: Candidate for President of the United States.*

**Garr:** Over a thirteen-year period, I had written several articles on the political activities of Joseph Smith. Finally, I decided to combine all those articles and produce a book. It’s interesting because, in the case of Christopher Columbus, I wrote about the spiritual life of a great secular figure. With Joseph Smith, I wrote a secular, or political, biography of a great spiritual leader. A lot of scholars believe the Prophet’s campaign for president of the United States was a waste. They didn’t think he could be elected, and of course he died before the election occurred. But when I think back on it, at the time, Church leaders called 337 election missionaries to campaign in all twenty-six states.
of the Union. The missionaries included all of the Twelve, except for John Taylor and Willard Richards. When those numbers are added to the number of men called as traditional missionaries, the missionary force totaled 586. And they not only campaigned for Joseph Smith, but they also proselytized. That number was five times more than any other year in missionary work up to that time, and it would be the largest number of missionaries called for the next fifty years. Not until Wilford Woodruff was President in the 1890s did they call that many missionaries again. In addition, at least forty-five newspaper articles about Joseph Smith and the Church appeared in print. The Church had never received as much publicity as it did in 1844. So as I think back on it—it really did a lot of good.

**Baugh:** We should also talk about the book you coauthored about the Saints in Illinois during the 1830s.

**Garr:** The book is titled *Mormon Thoroughfare: A History of the Church in Illinois, 1830–1839* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 2006). I coauthored it with Marlene C. Kettley and Craig K. Manscill. It's the history of the Church in Illinois before the Nauvoo period. During the 1830s, numerous branches were established in Illinois primarily because it was part of the Church thoroughfare between Ohio and Missouri. Typically, when people think about the history of the Church in Illinois, they think about Nauvoo, but we discovered that even before the establishment of Nauvoo, the LDS Church was the fourth largest church in the state.

**Baugh:** In addition to your books, talk about some of the articles you’ve written.

**Garr:** I did an article for *BYU Studies* titled “Which Are the Most Important Books?” (*BYU Studies* 41, no. 3 [2002]). So often our students come to us and say, “I don’t have too much money. I want to start my library. What are the most important books?” I thought, “Okay. Let’s find out.” So I did a survey. I actually surveyed over three hundred faithful LDS scholars and asked them to say what they thought were the most important books. As a result of that survey, I was able to write the article. I think it’s been a very helpful essay. It’s been ten years now, so it’s time for someone to do another survey, because there have been some great books written since then.

**Baugh:** What books came out on top? Do you remember?

**Garr:** Number one was *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, number two was *Jesus the Christ*, number three was the *History of the Church*, number
four was the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, and number five was *Mormon Doctrine*.

**Baugh**: Who were the individuals you surveyed?

**Garr**: They were all faithful LDS Church scholars—professors from various departments at BYU, as well as BYU–Hawaii, BYU–Idaho, seminary and institute people, and people in the Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City. In fact, I broke down the survey so a person could see how each entity voted. There were also subtopics such as “Which were the most important history books?” and “Which were the most important biographies?”

**Baugh**: Let’s talk for a moment about your experience at the BYU Jerusalem Center. Although you were a faculty member in Church History and Doctrine, not Ancient Scripture, you had a chance to teach at the BYU Jerusalem Center. How did you prepare for that experience, and what was that like for you and your family?

**Garr**: Our year at the Jerusalem Center was the greatest experience our family has ever had. The administrators expect you to teach Old Testament and New Testament at BYU before you go. However, even before that, I sat in on classes taught by the Ancient Scripture faculty. Looking back, I’ve thought, *Why was it the greatest experience of my career?* I think the reason is that I got to know my students better than any other time; therefore, I grew to love my students more than any other time. The BYU Jerusalem students weren’t any more lovable than the other students I’ve had, but I was closer to them. I taught them every day. We lived in the Center, right there with them. We went to church with them. We went on daylong field trips once a week, and we went on weeklong field trips out of the country to Egypt, Sinai, and Jordan. You get to know people real well when you do those types of things. So I’ve determined that the reason it was the greatest teaching experience I’ve ever had is that I got closer to my students there, and I loved them more than any students I’ve ever had.

**Baugh**: What was it like for your children?

**Garr**: My family had a great experience! For example, my son played on a baseball team. There were only four baseball leagues in the entire nation—in Israel—and one of them was a youth league in the Jerusalem area, and my son played on a team. My son and five other boys who were also at the Jerusalem Center played on a baseball team that won their league, and they got to go to Tel Aviv to play in the national championship, which they won! My fourteen-year-old son received the most valuable player award. And because
there were so many Mormon boys on the team, the coach—he was not a Mormon—let the boys take the championship trophy to church so that our branch president could have them stand up in sacrament meeting and receive some recognition. It just so happened that Steve Young was on a tour in Israel at the time, and he attended the sacrament meeting when the Mormon boys who won the Israeli national championship were recognized. We asked Steve Young if he would speak to our students in a fireside that night, and he was nice enough to do it, and afterwards all the students lined up to get an autograph from him. When my fourteen-year-old son walked up to get Steve Young’s autograph, Steve asked, “Weren’t you on that team that won the national championship?” And my son Robbie said, “Yes. Would you like to have my autograph?” And Steve Young, the great guy that he is, said, “Yes! That would be great! I’d love to swap autographs with you five boys who were on the baseball team.” My boys also played on basketball teams and played games in Tel Aviv, Bethlehem, East Jerusalem, and West Jerusalem. It was the best experience in sports they ever had. Articles about their baseball team even appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* and the *New Era*.

**Baugh:** From 2006 to 2009, you were chair of the Department of Church History and Doctrine. You followed one of our dear friends and colleagues, Paul Peterson. Could you talk about your experience as a department chair?

**Garr:** Paul Peterson was a great man—a great soul. His son married my daughter, so we have that connection. We were together the year we were in Israel. I also served as associate department chair when Paul was department chair. I had a long history with Paul. He was a great friend of mine.

Serving as department chair was also a great career experience. It’s a lot like being a bishop. You just get to know the professors better than you would otherwise, and therefore you get to love them more than you would otherwise. My love for my colleagues took a quantum leap during the three and a half years I was department chair. For that reason, I’m grateful that opportunity came my way. The majority of my time was spent doing administrative things, so I was not able to teach as much. I wasn’t a trained administrator, so the members of the department were patient with me. We experienced some great things together. We had a memorable regional studies trip to the Pacific, and a number of our faculty went on a weeklong trip to Missouri together. We also invited Terryl L. Givens, professor of literature and religion at the University of Richmond, to come and present a special series of lectures to our department. It was a terrific time to be department chair. I enjoyed
serving with our dean, Terry B. Ball, so much. He was a great man to work with. I enjoyed serving with John P. Livingstone as associate chair and Linda Godfrey, our secretary.

**Baugh:** You did a great job, Arnie. You were innovative, and you made some changes and did some things that had not been done before, all the time keeping the ship on course. I’m sure that when you were teaching at Roy Seminary, you never imagined that someday you would teach at BYU and be the department chair in Church History and Doctrine at BYU. You never would have projected that, would you?

**Garr:** I never would have projected that. However, most of all I’d like to be remembered as someone who loved his students and loved his colleagues. It was hard for me to retire. I’ve loved my career and my time at BYU. I lived my dream.

**Baugh:** I’ve been impressed with how you’ve maintained a balance in your life. You’ve been devoted to your family, your professional career, and the Church; but what are some of the things outside the classroom that have shaped Arnie Garr’s persona? What do you enjoy doing?

**Garr:** I’ve always thought it was important to exercise, and during the twenty years I was at BYU I tried to exercise three or four times a week. For most of that time I would run. I got involved in running marathons. I ran twelve marathons.

**Baugh:** I’m going to interject here. You’ve told me many times that you really didn’t run, and you really didn’t jog; you shuffled.

**Garr:** I shuffled. I never posted very good times on my marathons, but I completed them! Unfortunately, two years ago I fractured a disk in my back and I had to have it operated on, and the doctors told me I couldn’t run anymore. However, I’ve shifted to using the elliptical four or five times a week for about forty-five minutes and get exercise that way.

I’ve always loved sports. I wasn’t a great athlete in high school, but I participated in sports in high school, and I’m a big BYU Cougars fan. I’ve been a season ticket holder for twenty years. I loved watching Jimmer Fredette play this year—one of the most exciting things I’ve ever experienced as a fan. Thirty years ago when I was here getting my doctor’s degree, Danny Ainge was playing, so I got to see his career as well. That’s been a lot of fun. I’m also a Utah Jazz fan. I’ve kidded that if I hadn’t watched so many Utah Jazz games, I probably could have read a couple more hundred books. I’m also an Atlanta Braves fan. I do like sports. I’m really a homebody. I enjoy being with
my family more than anything else. I don’t have any hobbies other than being with my family and doing sports.

**Baugh:** One thing that has characterized you among our faculty is how you’ve come up with all these lists. That’s so unique to you. We talked earlier how you took a survey and came up with the most important books used in the Church. How did you come up with this idea of making lists—not only making lists but memorizing them?

**Garr:** It all began when I started training to run marathons. When you’re training to run twenty-six miles, you build up until you’re running three and four hours at a time, which can be pretty boring. So I started memorizing lists just to pass the time while I was running. I ran with friends, and because they liked sports, I started memorizing lists such as the greatest athletes of the twentieth century, the greatest basketball players of the twentieth century, and the great baseball players of the twentieth century. Then I started to expand. I started making religious lists. I compiled a list of fifty-three of my favorite scriptures, forty-five of the most important events in Church history, twenty-three important events in secular history since World War II, and so on. My lists started to expand and multiply until I now have seventy-eight lists. It takes about two and a half hours for me to recite them all. It was important to me to memorize them. I was inspired by my mother because at age ninety-nine, she memorized the thirteen Articles of Faith. I have all these seventy-plus lists memorized. When I would run, I would recite these lists. Can you imagine how boring it would be to run with me? Now that I don’t run anymore I get on the elliptical and I don’t have enough time to do all two and a half hours of the lists, so I do about a third of them at a time. It’s idiosyncratic for sure, but I think the Lord likes lists. The Ten Commandments are a list. The thirteen Articles of Faith are a list. The Beatitudes are a list. So I think the Lord likes lists also. I’ve even printed my lists in a book and given them to my friends.

**Baugh:** You’ve also memorized inspirational quotes—not just from Church leaders but from great personalities who have inspired you. Talk about that for a moment.

**Garr:** I like to use inspirational quotes in my teaching, and I just feel like they’re more effective if you have them memorized. I haven’t memorized many, but I’ve got a few that I like to use. I quite often quote Calvin Coolidge on persistence, Theodore Roosevelt on diligence, Joan of Arc on living according to what you believe, and Joseph Smith on happiness.
Baugh: How about sharing them?

Garr: Okay. Calvin Coolidge on persistence: “Nothing in this world will take the place of persistence. Talent will not; there is nothing more common than an unsuccessful man with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan ‘press on’ has solved, and always will solve, the problems of the human race.”

Baugh: I love that! That’s a powerful quote. We don’t quote Calvin Coolidge very often, do we? Historians have ranked Coolidge pretty low among the most successful presidents, but that’s a great quote. I guess the fact that he lived to become the president of the United States is indicative of his persistence. How about Theodore Roosevelt?

Garr: Roosevelt on diligence: “It’s not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errrs and comes up short again and again . . . ; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

Baugh: That is fantastic!

Garr: I think it’s great. I’m a huge Theodore Roosevelt fan. And he was a great president.

Baugh: Joan of Arc?

Garr: Joan of Arc: “The world can use these words. I know this now. Every man gives his life for what he believes. Every woman gives her life for what she believes . . . One life is all we have and we live it as we believe it. Then it is gone. But to surrender what you are and live without belief—that’s more terrible than dying. Even more terrible than dying young.”

She said that when she was about to be burned at the stake. They offered to spare her life if she’d recant, but she refused. She’s a big hero of mine as well.

Baugh: And Joseph Smith on happiness.

Garr: Joseph Smith: “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God.”
Baugh: Let’s talk for a few moments about some of your Church callings. You talked about serving as a bishop in Palmyra, and you mentioned that you served on the high council and in the stake presidency in Florida. Talk about your Church callings and how they’ve been a blessing and maybe some challenges there as well.

Garr: One of the most stimulating Church callings I had was when I served on the Church Correlation Materials Evaluation Committee. I served on that committee for eight years. When I first went on the committee, there were eight members of the committee and we reviewed all the printed literature of the Church—the Church manuals, the *Ensign*, *New Era*, *Friend*, *Liahona*—all of them—everything except the *Church News*. Nine months before the articles are published, they go through correlation. In the case of Church manuals, like the priesthood and Relief Society manuals, they went through correlation three years before being published. I would work in a subcommittee of three. Every Tuesday night we would meet in Salt Lake City and get an assignment, and then we would come back the following week and discuss what each had come up with. It was demanding. Sometimes I would spend as much as fifteen or twenty hours a week reading and evaluating materials. Not always, but sometimes it took a great amount of time. I learned more in that assignment than any other Church calling I’ve ever had. So that was a great experience for me.

I served in two stake presidencies—in Tallahassee and in a BYU stake. Paul Nicholson was the stake president in Tallahassee. He had the most successful restaurant and pest control business in two counties. He was chairman of the county commission in Gadsden County. He really emphasized missionary work. There was a time when our stake had more missionaries serving in the field than any other stake in the southern United States. He was a great man. I also served in a stake presidency with George D. Durrant at BYU. He was probably the most well-liked professor when he taught at BYU. He’d been a mission president and the MTC president. He was a pleasure to work with. Most recently I’ve been serving in a branch presidency at the MTC. It’s been exhilarating to do that. It’s so enjoyable to watch these missionaries come in and try so hard to get their life in order and crystallize their testimony. It’s inspirational to see how much progress they make in a three-week period. I loved that Church calling. Those are the ones that I’ve probably enjoyed the most.
Baugh: Have you had any teaching callings?

Garr: After we got back from Israel, I was the priests quorum instructor for four years. All three of my sons went through the priests quorum during that time. I loved that Church calling as well. I taught Gospel Doctrine for one year also, but other than that, all of my callings have been administrative callings.

Baugh: You’ve probably had some ups and downs and some joys and sorrows in your career and in your life. Talk about some of the hard times.

Garr: I haven’t had a lot of adversity in my life. I really haven’t, but I live in a ward that has about a hundred condominiums which are exclusively for people who don’t have dependent children—retired people. They’re wonderful people, but they’re old. They get cancer and go through chemotherapy and lose their hair. Some have congestive heart failure. But it is so inspirational watching them. I haven’t had a lot of adversity in my life, but I know I’m going to get it someday, and I’ll have no excuse when it comes because I’ve had great examples on how you handle adversity when it comes your way. I believe with all my heart in D&C 121:8 when it says that if you will endure adversity well, you’ll be exalted on high. The people who inspire me the most are people who have endured their adversities well.

Baugh: What are your favorite scriptures?

Garr: I have two favorite scriptures. D&C 90:24 reads “Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good.” That says that as long as you’re living righteously, you don’t need to second guess yourself. All things will work together for your good as long as you’re living righteously. I love that scripture. It’s a good scripture for these young men that are trying to decide whether to go on a mission and then fall in love like they never have before and are afraid to go because they’re going to lose their girlfriend. That scripture says if you do what you’re supposed to do, all things will work together for your good. She’ll either be there when you come back or you’ll get somebody even better. My other favorite scripture is the one that impressed me so much with Mack Palmer when I was a seminary student, Matthew 6:33: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Those are my two favorite scriptures.

Baugh: What has motivated you?

Garr: I’m not a competitive person, but I am a goal-oriented person. Early in my life—and I don’t know exactly where I got it from—I learned
this definition of success: “Success is the achievement of righteous goals.” That definition has always stuck in my mind. I believe that with all my heart. More recently, President Thomas S. Monson validated that statement when he taught, “Success is the progressive realization of a worthy ideal.” Therefore, I’ve been a goal-oriented person all my life, and I always feel more fulfillment when I’m working on a goal. Actually, I feel bored when I’m not working on a goal. I tell my students, “If you’re bored, I can guarantee you’re not working on a spiritual goal.” If you want to get rid of your boredom, you don’t go out and do momentary pleasure, because as soon as you get done with your momentary pleasure, you’re going to go back to being bored again. The way you get rid of your boredom is to work on goals. Always be working on a spiritual goal. It’s the key to success and it’s the key to happiness. People who are not working on spiritual goals are bored, and they are also boring. That’s what I tell my students. That’s something that has motivated me.

Another thing that’s motivated me is love. The reason I’ve enjoyed teaching my whole life is I just love being with the students. It was hard for me to retire because I love my colleagues and I love my students. I really think you can make a case that love is the greatest force on earth. In D&C 121, it says that the priesthood doesn’t even work unless the person manifests persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love—love unfeigned. That’s what I believe in.

**Baugh:** Even though you’ve officially retired, you will still be actively teaching in the classroom because you’ve received a mission assignment to teach at BYU–Hawaii. Talk about your upcoming mission and beyond. What does the future hold for Arnie Garr?

**Garr:** We have been called to serve an education mission at BYU–Hawaii for two years. Cherie will be involved in several things as well over there. I understand that about half the students at BYU–Hawaii are international students. So we’re looking forward to a great experience. After we get back from Hawaii, we’d love to work in the temple. I’d like to do some family history work. I’d love to write a biographical family history. I want to keep going. I think that’s really important for happiness—to always be working. We might consider going on another mission, but I’ll be sixty-nine years old then, so I don’t know. Hopefully, I’ll live a long time and be able to continue doing the things I enjoy: serving in the Church and enjoying our family. **RC**
New Publications

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The Earth Shall Teach Thee:
The Lifework of an Amateur Artist
Boyd K. Packer

This book features paintings, drawings, and wood carvings representing a lifetime of work. As an avid lover of nature, President Boyd K. Packer has carefully studied the appearance and habits of birds and animals and used them as his primary subjects. Above all, his art expresses reverence for life. Through artwork he has shared the lessons of life with his family and with members of the Church in publications he has illustrated. His paintings and carvings have enhanced his home and have been given as gifts. Creating art has also provided respite from his heavy responsibilities as a Church leader and has enabled his mind to cultivate ideas. President Packer wrote, “During those hours working with my hands, I pondered on the marvels of creation, and inspiration would flow. As I carved wood, I carved out talks.”

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2806-1, Retail: $44.99
Zion’s Trumpet (1851)
Edited by Ronald D. Dennis

The epic story of the early Welsh Mormons was virtually unknown until Ron Dennis personally mastered nineteenth-century Welsh—a major challenge even for a linguist. After writing impressive books on Welsh immigration and literature, he focused for a dozen years on producing “facsimile translations,” or reproductions of early Welsh missionary texts and volumes of official Welsh Mormon periodicals produced during the great harvest of converts from that land. Virtually alone, Ron continues to work to preserve the full story of how the early preaching of the restored gospel inspired both fiery debate and heroic sacrifice among the people of Wales. This volume is another important disclosure in this saga, part of Dennis’s continuing efforts to translate all early Welsh Mormon literature.


No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues
Edited by Robert L. Millet

From the time young Joseph Smith Jr. walked out of the grove of trees, opposition to what he had seen and experienced has been constant. To suggest that all the existing churches were wrong and that their creeds were an abomination in the sight of God was to stir up a hornet’s nest, to invite criticism and suspicion, and to open the door to persecution. We ought to be competent disciples, serious students of the gospel who are able to provide a defense of the faith. As contributors, we are fully persuaded that Mormonism is not only true and faithful but also reasonable. We are committed to our faith and way of life because the Spirit of the living God has borne witness to our souls that
what began in Palmyra and now reaches to every corner of the globe is true and is God-ordained and God-inspired. This volume does not address every sensitive issue, but it does provide answers to a reasonable cross section of hard questions.


Notes from an Amateur: A Disciple’s Life in the Academy

John S. Tanner

The word *amateur* derives from the Latin word for “love.” An amateur is at root a lover—a lover of sport, science, art, and so forth. Tanner explains, “There is much to recommend the professional ethic, including rigor, methodology, high standards of review, and so forth. Yet it is hoped that we also never cease to be amateurs in our professions—that is, passionate devotees of our disciplines.” This book gathers together brief messages that were periodically sent to the faculty at Brigham Young University by former academic vice president John S. Tanner. Tanner’s words reflect his years of experience as a scholar, an administrator, and a disciple, addressing with characteristic insight and wisdom an impressive range of topics from the seemingly mundane to the inspiring. This book is enhanced by the evocative art of Brian Kershisnik.


The King James Bible and the Restoration

Edited by Kent P. Jackson

The King James translation of the Bible celebrated its four-hundredth anniversary in 2011. This historic text has had a greater impact on the world than any other book in the English language. It is still in print today, four centuries since it first came off the London presses. This book is not solely about the history of the King James Bible and its contributions to the world in general. Its primary goal is to shed light on the
intersection of the King James translation and Mormonism—hence the title. In important ways, the King James Bible was one of the contributors to the founding of the Latter-day Saint faith, and it has continued to play a significant role in its history to the present time, even in lands where English is not the spoken language.


**Salt Lake City:**

**The Place Which God Prepared**

Edited by Scott C. Esplin and Kenneth L. Alford

For more than 150 years, “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” the anthem of the pioneer journey, has praised Salt Lake City as “the place which God for us prepared.” This new book from Brigham Young University’s Religious Studies Center discusses the fulfillment of that poetic longing. The sixteenth in a series of regional studies on Latter-day Saint Church history, it contains a collection of essays by faculty members in the Department of Church History and Doctrine discussing Salt Lake’s place in our sacred story. Topics include histories of significant landmarks, stories from the city’s past, and discussions of Church organizations. The reader will see connections between the revelations of Joseph Smith and Salt Lake City as a modern city of Zion, the place, indeed, where the Saints have been blessed.

Upcoming Events

For more information about these events, please visit us online at http://rsc.byu.edu/conferences-and-symposia

The Fortieth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium
Scheduled for October 26–27, 2012. The keynote speaker will present in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium Friday, October 26, at 6:30 p.m. The Sidney B. Sperry Symposium at Brigham Young University has become one of the premier venues for Latter-day Saint religious study. Over the past four decades, both the conference and its corresponding publications have expanded in scope and outreach, extending the impact of Religious Education at BYU. Like Sperry himself, today’s Sperry Symposium influences thousands through seminars and publications. For more information, please visit http://rsc.byu.edu/symposia/sperry.

The BYU Church History Symposium
The Church History Symposium will be held in March 2013. The topic will cover Joseph Smith and the ancient world. The symposium will be cosponsored by the Church History Library and will be presented at two different venues. One session will be held in the LDS Conference Center in Salt Lake City, and another session will be on the BYU campus. Selected papers from each symposium will be published in a book by the BYU Religious Studies Center. Several hundred people attend each year to be enlightened and edified. There is no charge to attend this symposium. For more information, please visit http://rsc.byu.edu/symposia/churchhistory.

The BYU Easter Conference
Scheduled for March 2013, the BYU Easter Conference is a wonderful event that helps participants better prepare for the Easter season. Presenters will speak about the Savior, his life, his mission, the Atonement, and his influence in our lives today. The conference will feature notable Church leaders, historians, scholars, educators, and authors. The conference also features special instrumental and vocal presentations. This conference is free to attend and registration is not required. For more information, please visit http://easterconference.byu.edu.
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Richard E. Bennett is a native of Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. He was head of Special Collections at the University of Manitoba from 1978 to 1987. He is a former stake president of the Winnipeg Manitoba Stake. He earned a PhD in US intellectual history at Wayne State University. He is the author of several books and articles, mainly on nineteenth-century Church history. Presently Bennett serves as the associate dean of BYU Religious Education, the associate director of the Religious Studies Center at BYU, and the Church history editor for BYU Studies. He is married to Patricia Dyer, and they are the parents of five children.

RSC Publications Director

Dana M. Pike is a professor of ancient scripture and the publications director of the Religious Studies Center at BYU. Born in Boston and raised in New Hampshire, he and his family became Latter-day Saints when he was twelve years old. Pike earned a BS degree in archaeology from BYU and a PhD in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. Since coming to BYU two decades ago, he has taught two years at the BYU Jerusalem Center, has worked as one of the international editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and has been involved in researching and publishing about the Bible and the Book of Mormon. He is just finishing seven years of service as the coordinator of BYU’s interdepartmental Ancient Near Eastern Studies major.

Student Editor

From Colorado Springs, Colorado, Katie M. Skovran is a senior studying English language with an emphasis in editing. She began editing for the Religious Studies Center in September 2011 and hopes to pursue a career in publication when she graduates in December 2012. Katie’s interests include reading, baking, playing games, and spending time with family and friends. From a young age, she has been an avid writer and especially enjoys keeping a journal. In particular, she loves music, and she plays the piano and the flute. Katie and her husband, Steven, were married in May 2012 and live in Provo.
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The Religious Educator serves the needs and interests of those who study and teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis. The distinct focuses are on teaching the gospel; publishing studies on scripture, doctrine, and Church history; and sharing outstanding devotional essays. The beliefs of the respective authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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4. Does the author follow the canons of responsible scholarship (uses sound and fair methodology; documents arguable facts)? If not, why?

5. Is the manuscript faith-promoting? Is the piece in harmony with the established doctrine of the Church?

If a manuscript is accepted, authors will be notified and asked to provide photocopies of all source materials cited, arranged in order, numbered to match the endnotes, and highlighted to show the quotations or paraphrases. Photocopies of source material must include title page and source page with the highlighted quotations.

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In 1975, Religious Education dean Jeffrey R. Holland established the Religious Studies Center (RSC) to facilitate religious study and serve not just the university but the entire Church. Today the RSC continues to have an impact on the university and the worldwide Church.

Global Impact

A major step in reaching to a global audience was the creation of the RSC website (rsc.byu.edu). This site offers a blog of recent events, news of upcoming conferences and symposia, a list of our most recent publications, a searchable database of past books and articles, and translations of selected articles in Portuguese and Spanish. The RSC is committed to sharing its resources with an ever-growing worldwide audience.

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While serving as president of BYU, President Holland said, “With the horizons expanding at an unprecedented rate for the study of what is ancient and what is modern, it is fitting for us to look to the resources, scholarship, and leadership of the [Religious Studies] Center to assist us in our search for ‘all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and [all] that he will yet reveal . . . pertaining to the kingdom of God.’ We build on a grand tradition and hope to add an increasing amount of substantial, published research to the good work already begun.” The RSC remains committed to pursuing that ever-expanding horizon of gospel scholarship and sharing our resources with a global audience.
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