"We Must Raise Our Sights"

Elder Henry B. Eyring

"The spiritual strength sufficient for our souls to stand firm and meet a few years ago will soon not be enough. Many of them are commendable in their spiritual maturity and in their faith, but even the best of them are weakly rooted. And the testing will become more severe..." - Elder Henry B. Eyring
I am grateful for that music, beautifully sung, and perfectly chosen for the message and for the purpose that I believe I have been given tonight. I’m grateful to Brother Stanley Peterson for his introduction. One of the things that is most pleasant in my being allowed to be the Commissioner of Education and still go on associating with you and with people like you and Brother Peterson is that from time to time I have the chance to sense the appreciation of the Savior for you and for him. I think you need to know that I have had clear and unmistakable evidence that the Lord knows Brother Peterson and has watched over him and is grateful and is pleased. I believe he was inspired to have the volunteers and missionaries stand so that I might for a second feel not my gratitude but the Master’s gratitude.

I was also touched by the opening prayer, to have someone who has given such long full-time service be asked to pray. Because again, as he prayed, I had a sense that some of you who are full-time people have labored in obscurity. But you are not obscure, and your work is known.

I am grateful to be with you and for our opportunity to teach the gospel to the young people of the Church. They hold the future in their hands. The Church has always been one generation away from extinction. If a whole generation were lost, which will not happen, we would lose the Church. But even a single individual lost to the gospel of Jesus Christ closes doors for generations of descendants, unless the Lord reaches out to bring some of them back. Our trust from the Lord as teachers of youth is great. And so is our opportunity.

The world in which our students choose spiritual life or death is changing rapidly. When their older brothers and sisters return to visit the same schools and campuses they attended, they find a radically different moral climate. The language in the hallways and the locker rooms has coarsened. Clothing is less modest. Pornography has moved into the open. Tolerance for wickedness has not only increased, but much of what was called wrong is no longer condemned at all and may, even by our students, be admired. Parents and administrators have in many cases bent to the pressures coming from a shifting world to retreat from moral standards once widely accepted.
The spiritual strength sufficient for our youth to stand firm just a few years ago will soon not be enough. Many of them are remarkable in their spiritual maturity and in their faith. But even the best of them are sorely tested. And the testing will become more severe. The youth are responsible for their own choices. And there are many others to help them. Faithful parents and priesthood and youth leaders shore up the faith of the students we teach. But ours is a unique opportunity. Students at our Church universities and colleges have been required to take our religion classes. The prophets of God have repeatedly endorsed seminary and institute classes and urged the youth to become our students. We are given a regular, often daily, opportunity to meet with them where the word of God from the scriptures is the text and we are their trusted guides. You and those who have gone before you have done a wonderful work. The world has changed but so has our curriculum. Students in seminary and institute and in our campus religion classes are reading the scriptures and understanding them. If you were not teaching with us twenty-five years ago, you may not sense the great sweep of that change. Where once there was a wealth of material calculated to hold the wandering interest of young people and even entertain them, the words of the scriptures are now doing the holding. In your classes students know the scriptures beyond what their older brothers and sisters, or their parents, did. You have made the scriptures live for them. But they need more. Too many graduates of seminary fail to qualify for the mission field. Too many of our faithful students never receive the blessings of the temple ordinances. The proportion of those tragedies among them will increase if we do not change. The place to begin is with our aim, our vision of what we seek in the lives of our students. We have always sought to enroll and hold students in our classes. We have aimed to see them persist to graduation. We have always had a goal that they will qualify for the mission field and for temple marriage and then remain faithful. Those are lofty, difficult goals, but we must raise our sights. Too many of our students want the blessings of a mission and the temple and yet fail to endure to claim them. For many of our students, next year is a long way away, and beyond a year looks like forever. To them, missions and the temple are far distant, in some time when the joys of youth have flown away. Those goals are distant enough that too many, far too many, say to themselves: “Well, I know I may have to repent some day, and I know that a mission and temple marriage will require big changes, but I can always take care of that when the time comes. I have a testimony. I know the scriptures. I know what it takes to repent. I’ll see the bishop when it’s time and I’ll make the changes later. I’m only young once. For now, I’ll go with the flow.” Well, the flow has become a flood and soon will be a torrent. It will become a torrent of sounds and sights and sensations that invite temptation and offend the Spirit of God. Swimming back upstream to purity against the tides of the world was never easy. It is getting harder and may soon be frighteningly difficult. We must raise our sights. We must keep the goals we have always had: enrollment, regular attendance, graduation, knowledge of the scriptures, the experience of feeling the Holy Ghost confirm truth. In addition, we must aim for the mission field and the temple. But students need more during the time they are our students. That is when they make the daily choices that will bless or mar their lives. That is when the pressures of temptation and spiritual confusion are increasing.

The Pure Gospel Changes Hearts and Lives
The pure gospel of Jesus Christ must go down into the hearts of students by the power of the Holy Ghost. It will not be enough for them to have had a spiritual witness of the truth and to want good things later. It will not be enough for them to hope for some future cleansing and strengthening. Our aim must be for them to become truly converted to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ while they are with us. Then they will have gained a strength from what they are, not only from what they know. They will become disciples of Christ. They will be His spiritual children who always remember Him with gratitude and in faith. They will then have the Holy Ghost as a constant companion. Their hearts will be turned outward, concerned for the temporal and spiritual welfare of others. They will walk humbly. They will feel cleansed and they will look on evil with abhorrence.

The Book of Mormon describes such a change and testifies that it is possible. The accounts are found everywhere in the book. One evidence is the experience of the people of King Benjamin, the master teacher:

And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them.
And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.
And we, ourselves, also, through the infinite goodness of God, and the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things.
And it is the faith which we have had on the things which our king has spoken unto us that has brought us to this great knowledge, whereby we do rejoice with such exceedingly great joy.
And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days, that we may not bring upon ourselves a never-ending torment, as has been spoken by the angel, that we may not drink out of the cup of the wrath of God.
And now, these are the words which king Benjamin desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant.
And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. (Mosiah 5:1–7)

That mighty change is reported time after time in the Book of Mormon. The way it is wrought and what the person becomes are always the same. The words of God in pure doctrine go down deep into the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost. The person pleads with God in faith. The repentant heart is broken and the spirit contrite. Sacred covenants
have been made. Then God keeps His covenant to grant a new heart and a new life, in His
time. **Teach the Pure Gospel in a Simple Way**

Whether the miracle comes in a moment or over years, as is far more common, it is the
document of Jesus Christ that drives the change. We sometimes underestimate the power
that pure doctrine has to penetrate the hearts of people. Why did so many respond to the
words of the missionaries when the Church was so young, so small, and seemingly so
strange? What did Brigham Young and John Taylor and Heber C. Kimball preach in the
streets and on the hills of England? They taught that the Lord had opened a new
dispensation, that He had given us a Prophet of God, that the priesthood was restored,
that the Book of Mormon was the word of God, and that we had a glorious new day.
They taught that the pure gospel of Jesus Christ had been restored.

That pure doctrine went down into the hearts then, as it will now, because the people
were starved and the doctrine was taught simply. The people of England, and our
students, were seen long before by a prophet of God named Amos: “Behold, the days
come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor
a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to
sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the
Lord, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst”
(Amos 8:11–13).

Most of those early converts in England had known they were hungry for the true word of
God. Our students may not know that they are fainting from famine, but the words of
God will slake a thirst they did not know they had, and the Holy Ghost will take it down
into their hearts. If we make the doctrine simple and clear, and if we teach out of our own
changed hearts, the change for them will come as surely as it did for Enos. Listen to his
account, so similar to the others:

> Behold, it came to pass that I, Enos, knowing my father that he was a just
> man—for he taught me in his language, and also in the nurture and
> admonition of the Lord—and blessed be the name of my God for it—
> And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I
> received a remission of my sins.
> Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had
> often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the
> saints, sunk deep into my heart.
> And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried
> unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the
day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise
my voice high that it reached the heavens. (Enos 1:1–4)

And then the miracle came:

> And there came a voice unto me, saying: Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee,
> and thou shalt be blessed.
> And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept
> away.
> And I said: Lord, how is it done?
> And he said unto me: Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never
> before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest
himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole. (vv. 5–8)

Then Enos describes the first effects: “Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them” (v. 9).

He ends with a description of the lasting effects:

And it came to pass that I began to be old, and an hundred and seventy and nine years had passed away from the time that our father Lehi left Jerusalem.

And I saw that I must soon go down to my grave, having been wrought upon by the power of God that I must preach and prophesy unto this people, and declare the word according to the truth which is in Christ. And I have declared it in all my days, and have rejoiced in it above that of the world.

And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. Amen. (vv. 25–27)

A Deep Change in Our Students

What we seek for our students is that change. We must be humble about our part in it.

True conversion depends on a student seeking freely in faith, with great effort and some pain. Then it is the Lord who can grant, in His time, the miracle of cleansing and change.

Each person starts from a different place, with a different set of experiences, and so a different need for cleansing and for change. The Lord knows that place and so only He can set the course.

But for all of our students, we can play a vital part. Enos remembered the words of eternal life that he had been taught. So did Nephi, and so did the people of King Benjamin. The words had been placed in memory in such a way that the Holy Ghost could take them deep into the heart. We are teachers whose charge is to place those words so that when the student chooses and pleads, the Holy Ghost can confirm them in the heart and the miracle can begin.

The Pure Doctrine Taught in Plainness

Much of the power of the Book of Mormon is that it presents the pure doctrine so plainly.

For instance, as if He were speaking to us, the Lord through prophets gave us these words in 2 Nephi: “And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen” (2 Nephi 31:21).

And the Lord repeats Himself, as if we might misunderstand:

And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear
And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and
they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.
And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.
Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of
it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also;
and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with
fire and with the Holy Ghost. (3 Nephi 11:32–35)
And He goes on to say it yet again:
Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth
upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail
against them.
And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my
doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he
buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to
receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.
Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have
spoken, unto the ends of the earth. (vv. 39–41)
You wonderful teachers already put great effort and sacrifice into your preparation to
teach the word, into your teaching, and into caring for students. You more than study,
you ponder the words of God. You declare them with faith and with testimony. You fast
and plead in prayer for help, for your students and for yourselves. You teach the pure
doctrine with testimony and in clarity.

**A Higher Vision**
But there is more. We can raise our sights by adding greater faith that the change
promised by the Lord will come to our students. The teachers of the Church Educational
System had faith that the students would take the scriptures into their lives, and they did.
Of all the great contributions Stan Peterson can look back on with satisfaction, it is that
he was a major force in allowing that miracle, that I think he will someday find, when the
Lord shows him the sweep of things, was, if not his greatest contribution, one of the
greatest. He drew from you the faith that a mighty change could come.
You can now add your faith that more of our students will make the choices that lead to
true conversion. The Lord always keeps His promises. We can exercise our faith that He
will keep His word, for our students and for ourselves.
You have already been prepared. You have felt the desire to repent and be cleansed when
these words went down into your heart:

And assuredly, as the Lord liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it
is his eternal word, which cannot pass away, that they who are righteous
shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still;
wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall
go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a
lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and
has no end.
O the greatness and the justice of our God! For he executeth all his words,
and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled.
But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever. (2 Nephi 9:16–18)

You have also felt your heart swell with love just as it is described in the words from Moroni (think of your own experiences—remember): “And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26).

Each of you have at some time in your life, because of the power of the Atonement, felt relief when a temptation no longer seemed appealing to you, exactly as in the words in Alma: “And it came to pass that when Ammon arose he also administered unto them, and also did all the servants of Lamoni; and they did all declare unto the people the selfsame thing—that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33).

And you’ve felt spots on your soul fade just as it did for these servants of God, described in these words from Alma:

Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb. Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest. (Alma 13:11–13)

And you have also felt this: you have felt yourself look up, and feast on the words of the Master and His love, just as promised in the words of Jacob, and just as some of you may have experienced in this very hour we are together: “O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever” (Jacob 3:2).

You know what I know. As a witness of Jesus Christ, I testify that the promises are true. Our Heavenly Father lives. Jesus is the Christ. By faith in Him and keeping His commandments, we and our students can have eternal life. I know that the word of God can be carried into the hearts of men and women by the power of the Holy Ghost. And I know that the blessing the Lord has given so freely since the world began, of a new heart, unspotted and filled with His pure love, is still offered in His true Church. I testify that He has called you to teach and that He invites all who will to become His true disciples, His sons and His daughters.

A Concluding Blessing

Now as I close I need to share with you the desire of my heart. I have prayed that I might have the opportunity to bless you. You know about blessings. All blessings are contingent. I know what I want you to have, and I know what I want for your students and for your families. But it is not enough that I want it. I had to know, is it what God is
now ready to give? Are you ready to do what you must do to receive the gift? Are your
students ready? I have prayed to know that, and I have been given assurance, both as to
the blessing He would give you, and that you and your students are prepared to receive
the blessing.
The reason I take a moment to explain this to you is that I need to explain to you the way
you exercise unwavering faith. Faith is not to hope. Faith is not simply to know God
could do something. Faith is to know He will. And I testify to you that our Heavenly
Father and Jesus Christ are prepared to bless our students. I now leave a blessing with
you.
This is my blessing: I bless you that as you exercise unwavering faith in the Lord Jesus
Christ and in His Atonement, you will see mighty change multiplied in the lives of your
students. As I sought the power to give this blessing I was told that many of you have
already seen, often, change in your students beyond what you know is even reasonable to
hope for, and so you knew the power of the Atonement was working in their lives. I bless
you that you will see that magnified, both in the extent of change and in the numbers who
will be touched.
I bless you in that same way in your families.
Now as I leave you that blessing, I need of course to also caution you. Teach the doctrine
simply. You don’t need to give discourses on true conversion. I have tried tonight to be
an example. I could have told stories of the mighty change. I chose not to do that on this
occasion, although I have at other times. I tried to give to you the words that the Lord has
given us, with faith that the Holy Ghost would take them into your hearts, and that the
desire to exercise your faith would come from that.
My hope would be this: not that you would speak a great deal to your students about the
mighty change nor the blessing from Brother Eyring. It would be better if you simply
taught with unshakable faith the simple doctrine taught so well in the Book of Mormon.
Then, alone, as you kneel in prayer, in great faith, express the confidence you have in
them and the love you have for them.
I have been given assurance that many will respond to the pure doctrine when it is taught
in humility and with testimony and by those who themselves are feeling the effects of the
Atonement in their lives.
You have seen the effects of the Atonement in your life. You don’t need to speak of that
to the students. They will sense it in the way you teach. They will know.
I could have told you of my own wrestles. I could have told you of my own experiences. I
felt a restraining hand which seemed to say: Don’t do that. Do the simple thing. Teach the
doctrine of Jesus Christ, simply, clearly, from the Book of Mormon.
Bear testimony without unduly focusing on examples from your own lives, but rather,
having faith that students have been prepared, and each of them will see in their own
lives the application of the scriptures that you will read with them.
I have been given that assurance, that the Holy Ghost will teach them and bear witness to
them not only of what is true but of what they should do. Each will be given a different
course. Each will be blessed in a different way. The Lord may not reveal to you where
they are or what they must do, but He will to them. I so assure you.
I love you. The Savior loves you. There is great safety as the young people of the Church
accept the gospel into their lives. There will be safety even in the times of great difficulty
that are coming. There is a protection that they will have—because of the mighty change
that has come in their hearts. They will choose righteousness and find that they have no more desire to do evil. That will come. It will not come in an instant, it will come over time. But you will, I promise you, in the year ahead, see miracles of strengthening among your students, and they will strengthen each other. And there will be a fortification created by the gospel of Jesus Christ through your faith and through your great efforts. I say to you again, in the name of Jesus Christ, He loves you. He knows you. You will, in this service, feel His love. I so testify as His servant in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.
waiting near the crash sites displaying pictures of their loved ones and hoping for a miracle. Someone has said that God will turn the evil into good. If the citizens of this and other nations recognize their frailties and turn to God for help, good will be the outcome. However, experience indicates that transformations are seldom permanent unless one is deeply touched by the Holy Spirit. I repeat my statement from last week: “You young people hold the power of peace for the world in your hands. The world depends on you.” Christ depends on you. The message of the Master must be written in your hearts so that you may extend it to others. Christ’s healing power is more than physical. He has the power to make a person whole, to heal the soul as well as the body. The magnificent painting by Carl Heinrich Bloch of *Christ Healing the Sick at the Pool of Bethesda* portrays Christ both as a healer and a comforter. The original painting, a wonderful gift, has just arrived on campus and will be the signature piece for the Museum of Art. We hope it will be a constant reminder of our heritage and our mission.

Sister Bateman and I approach this occasion with concern, knowing and feeling the responsibility that is ours to teach and uplift.

*Christ Healing the Sick at the Pool of Bethesda* by Carl Heinrich Bloch (1834-1890)

Courtesy of Brigham Young University Museum of Art. All rights reserved.

The theme we have chosen is taken from the seventh chapter of Moroni, wherein Mormon explains that “the Spirit of Christ is given to every [person], that [they] may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16). Mormon then counsels the Nephites to “search diligently in the light of Christ . . . and . . . lay hold upon every good thing” (Moroni 7:19).

Given the events of last week, we wish to discuss the opportunity that you have to search in the light and to lay hold upon good things that bring lasting happiness. As young adults you are in the midst of the most critical decision-making period of life. It is important that you have the light and faith to make right decisions, to discern good from evil, to hold onto and develop the things that the Lord has in store for you. It is interesting that Satan offered Adam and Eve the opportunity to know good and evil (see Genesis 3:5). In contrast, Mormon indicates the purpose of mortality is to help us to “know good from evil” (Moroni 7:19; emphasis added). One can know evil without tasting it.
BYU provides an opportunity for you to achieve this aim. It represents an opportunity to search in the light. It is a community of enlightened people, both intellectually and spiritually. The environment is shaped by people of character, people who are honest, people who have made right choices. It is an ideal place to pursue Mormon’s injunction. Let us show a Minerva Teichert painting called *Lehi’s Dream* that illustrates the importance of making right choices. The painting is of Lehi’s dream of the tree of life. I would like to draw your attention to the large and spacious building with its gold dome, statues, and multitudes of people. One would think that it is the most important symbol in Lehi’s dream. Even though it is in the background of the painting, it is so bright and inviting that it commands attention and attempts to overshadow other parts of the story. The building rises up from the water having no foundation, and a careful examination reveals that blue sky pierces the open door and windows. As Professor John Welch and Doris Dant note, “The great building is merely a facade with the sky showing through the door and windows, appropriate for a symbol of the pride and ‘vain imaginations’ of the world” (1 Nephi 12:18).1 In reality the building is a deceitful sham, a storefront with nothing below it, above it, or behind it. It is the empty life with nothing of value in it.

![The House of the World by Minerva Teichert (1888-1961). Courtesy of Brigham Young University Museum of Art. All rights reserved.](image-url)
However, the real story is in the foreground. It is the pathos of a family struggling to hold onto good things, to find their way to the tree of life and to partake of its fruit. Two sons have left the safety of the path and iron rod, whereas others continue the journey. The tree is a symbol for Christ, and the fruits of the tree are the blessings of His Atonement. You will note in the painting that the tree is not highlighted. It is off to the side and in the shadow of the building. Sister Teichert knew that in life it is easier to follow the crowd and the ways of the world than it is to discipline one’s appetites along the strait and narrow road to life. As Jesus said: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13–14).

With the painting as a figurative metaphor, what are the good things you can grasp and internalize while at Brigham Young University? There are three good things that we challenge you to lay hold upon and incorporate in your lives. The first is to make a commitment to build an eternal family and thereby establish your eternal identity. The second is to maintain your personal purity. The third is to learn by study and by faith. Sister Bateman will discuss the first objective.

**Sister Marilyn S. Bateman:** Let me add my welcome to President Bateman’s. For the last forty-two years my major interest and focus have been the creation of an eternal family. I believe it is the most important mission a man or woman can pursue. When one realizes that Heavenly Father’s work and glory is to raise and educate children, one can understand why I believe that my work has been in partnership with Him and why it is the most exciting work on earth. If earthly parents are wise and desire a fullness of joy, they will strive to emulate our heavenly parents. Many of the lessons needed in this life and in the next are learned in the family setting. That is why I determined many years ago to focus my energies on the greatest calling of all—to be a mother, wife, and daughter in Zion. I recognize that not all have the opportunity in this life to be a mother or father. But everyone is a son or daughter, and most are a sister or brother, an aunt or uncle. Everyone plays a role in an earthly family, and everyone may build an eternal family.

My subject today centers on the family. Some of you, the freshmen in particular, may feel that the decisions regarding a companion and starting a family are a few years away. But you are an important part of your parents’ family, and the choices you make today and in the near future will affect personal family decisions later. For others in the audience, spousal and parental decisions are already upon you.

**Build Eternal Families**

Minerva Teichert’s painting of the tree of life reminds us of the importance of having a vision of what life can be. This includes the vision of a family in the eternities. It is important to set goals, establish priorities, and then “hold fast [to] that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The painting illustrates the importance of family relationships and the challenges that can come. The family of Lehi and Sariah, depicted in the painting, is a type for all families. Lehi and his family’s journey to the promised land is symbolic of our journey through life. Our ultimate goal is to obtain an inheritance in the heavenly city. In the Minerva Teichert painting, Lehi is inviting his family to come to the tree and partake of the fruit of eternal life. He is inviting them to come to Christ and build an eternal family. The decision regarding one’s spouse is the second-most important decision in life. It is second only to the decision to follow Christ.
Sisters, suppose you have found a wonderful companion and then one day he arrives home from work and announces that the family should leave for the desert. Your nice home and all that is in it will be left behind, and you will live in a tent for eight years. He asks you to organize the children and bring the scriptures, a few clothes, and some food. What would your answer be? Suppose your husband indicates that an angel has appeared to him and has told him to leave! Would your answer change? Brothers and sisters, trust between husband and wife is a most valuable possession. Living the gospel together is your only protection. Find a companion who will live the gospel and be worthy of your trust!

Husbands, suppose the day comes when you have a dream and your wife agrees to support you. But the dream takes longer to fulfill than you expected, and there are trials along the way. Again, living the gospel and focusing on an eternal family will sustain you in life’s trials.

The painting illustrates the tender feelings that parents have for children and how anxious they are to have all of them complete the journey. Most of us are familiar with the story and are aware of the conflict that exists. Laman and Lemuel rejected the counsel of their parents. But Nephi and Sam learned for themselves that their father spoke the truth (see 1 Nephi 2:16). In spite of the expressions of love and the pleadings to “rebel no more” (2 Nephi 1:24), Laman and Lemuel chose the ways of the world.

In the painting the prophet Lehi has arrived at the tree and has partaken of the fruit. Holding to the rod with one hand, he offers fruit in the other and invites his family to come and partake. Sariah, the mother, is in the foreground, almost overcome with both joy and sadness. First, dropping to her knees in a sign of humility, she recognizes the tree as a symbol for Christ. Second, she sees Laman and Lemuel in a small boat making their way to the large and spacious building. In the process of losing two sons, she pleads with them to return while pointing to the tree. Nephi, feeling Sariah’s sorrow, holds the rod in one hand and reaches down with the other to help his mother. How important it is for children to support their parents!

Family relationships are important and crucial to a child’s development. Children need parents and parents need children. Brothers and sisters play a vital role in the faithfulness of other siblings. Sister Teichert illustrates the importance of one brother strengthening another by showing Sam holding onto Nephi. In contrast, Laman and Lemuel do not provide leadership for their brothers and sisters. As Lehi learned of Laman and Lemuel’s fate through the dream, he “feared lest they should be cast off from the presence of the Lord” (1 Nephi 8:36). Nevertheless he continued to counsel and work with them. As a parent he never gave up on his children. The scripture reads, “And he did exhort them . . . with all the feeling of a tender parent, that they would hearken to his words” (1 Nephi 8:37). Parents never give up.

Family relationships are sacred. The bonds within families have spiritual roots. We know that we lived as brothers and sisters before coming to earth. More important, we are aware that families formed on earth can be eternal. The doctrine that eternal life is familial is one of the unique teachings of our church. Families are welded together by covenant in love and service to each other. As Nephi is reaching out to assist his mother, he is demonstrating sympathy and understanding for her grief. Love is a spiritual gift and comes from the light within us. It is expressed through the service we render. Christ’s life is the epitome of service and reflects His love for everyone. Families are built through
service: parents to children early in life and then children to parents later. President Spencer W. Kimball said, “God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another mortal that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other.”

And the mortals who serve us are often in the family. A few experiences in my life have taught me the truth of President Kimball’s statement. I know that Heavenly Father is aware of families and that He will prompt one family member to meet the needs of another. Some years ago the Lord helped me in a time of trial as He directed our family in the support of my parents. More than twenty years ago President Bateman and I lived in New Jersey with our children. My parents lived in Provo. My father was in very poor health.

At the time my husband was working for a large, multinational firm and had just been promoted to a senior position. In the previous three years we had moved from Utah to England and then to Pennsylvania. Now the new assignment was causing us to move again, this time to New Jersey. It was the third move in three years. The children had patiently accompanied us, establishing new friends each year. We bought a new home in a beautiful area of the state and settled down for what we hoped would be a long stay. We had no desire to move again.

We had been in New Jersey only a few months when BYU President Dallin Oaks called and asked my husband to serve as dean of the School of Management. Neither of us felt that another move was appropriate. The children were adjusting to their new environment, President Bateman was happy in his work, we had just received callings in the ward and stake, and the neighbors were becoming friends. Consequently we declined the offer. During the next few months President Oaks contacted President Bateman on a number of occasions and asked if there was any chance that he might change his mind. After the third or fourth time, the Spirit touched my husband, and he knew that we should accept the BYU position and return to Provo. Even though I agreed to the move, I was uneasy and concerned for the children. Although I prayed for peace regarding the move, no confirmation came, and I wondered about the change.

One night a few weeks before we were to leave for Provo, I had a dream that awakened me in the middle of the night. In the dream I was terribly upset because my father was dying and I was unable to return home. I woke up my husband and related the dream to him. After some discussion we felt that it was the Lord’s way of assuring me that the decision to move was right.

A few weeks later we arrived in Provo, where we were glad to be with our parents again. We enjoyed spending time with them and renewing family relationships. One month after our arrival we were visiting my parents when my dad began having chest pains. Mother hurriedly took him to the hospital. By evening he was gone. The experience of losing a parent is traumatic. I will never forget the sadness I felt, but I remembered the dream and now more fully understand its meaning and purpose. The month prior to my father’s death was an important time for our children to become reacquainted with their grandfather and for President Bateman and me to express our love and support for both Dad and Mom. It was also important that we were there to support my mother in a time of great need. In the months that followed, our appreciation for the Lord deepened as we knew He was aware of us and had prompted us to change our course. As with Lehi and Sariah, He was willing to help in the building of an eternal family.
Family relationships are sacred and are meant to be eternal. Each person in a family is important, as evidenced by last week’s disaster. Each person is needed to complete the family circle. The absence of a person may leave a huge crater in the hearts of family members.

Hold tightly to the iron rod. Pray that you might discern good from evil. Build strong family ties. Keep in contact with your parents and grandparents. We love you. We are grateful you are here. Work hard, be prayerful, stay faithful, and have fun. We pray that you will always “search diligently in the light of Christ” and “lay hold upon every good thing.” I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

**President Merrill J. Bateman:** I am grateful for Sister Bateman’s role in our family. She has a sixth sense when it comes to building relationships. We now have twenty-five grandchildren. Someone asked my wife a short time ago if she knew all of their names. She was stunned and surprised by the question. Not only does she know their names, birthdays, and upcoming events concerning them, she has a personal relationship with each one. After all, they are her children, too. Whenever grandchildren visit our home, they head for the library to find Grandma, who is often reading. It is wonderful to see them embrace her and for Sister Bateman to gather the little ones in her arms. She plans family events that bring grandparents, children, and grandchildren together to build relationships. Remember, when you form your family, find ways to bind your children and grandchildren to you. And at this stage of your life, spend time with parents and grandparents before it is too late. The greatest good on this earth and in eternity is the family.

You are at a critical juncture in life. Your temporal dependence on parents is diminishing, but do not let the spiritual links weaken. As President Hinckley noted in a recent BYU devotional, you must “never become a weak link in the chain of your family’s generations.”

**Personal Purity**

Now I come to the second challenge. The creation of an eternal family depends on personal purity. This earth was created for three major purposes. The first was to allow us, God’s spirit children, to obtain a physical body. The second was to test our obedience to eternal laws. The third was to create an eternal family. The three purposes are linked. You cannot accomplish the third—i.e., an eternal family—without achieving the first two. On occasion while teaching a religion class, I have asked students why it is necessary to have a body. Generally the answer is “to become like God.” I then ask, “Why does God have a body?” Often there is silence, suggesting they do not know. The physical body is essential to the creation of life. As spirit children we could not form families of our own. We did not have the power. The seeds of life are in the physical tabernacle. Perhaps that is an additional reason why our bodies are called the temple of God. Paul stated that the physical body is a temple of God because it is a house for the Holy Ghost (see 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The sacred power of creation is given to us for a relatively short time—for only a few decades—and then removed. We are given laws and tested to see if we will respect this power, protect its use, and respect the body. If we are obedient, the power of life returns in the Resurrection. If we abuse the power and do not repent, the natural capacity to create never returns, and we live singly in the eternities (see D&C 131:1–4).
In a classic devotional here a few years ago, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland gave three reasons why sexual intimacy must be saved for marriage. In order to appreciate the reasons, one must understand the sacredness of life. The giving and taking of life are sacred parts of the Lord’s plan. Sexual sin is second only to murder (see Alma 39:5). As Elder Holland states: “Clearly God’s greatest concerns regarding mortality are how one gets into this world and how one gets out of it. These two most important issues . . . He . . . wishes most to reserve to Himself. These are the two matters that He has repeatedly told us He wants us never to take illegally, illicitly, unfaithfully, without sanction.”

Given the sacredness of life, the first reason that sexual purity is so important relates to the doctrine of the soul. We are taught that “the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15; emphasis added). And, in Elder Holland’s words: “When one toys with the God-given . . . body of another, he or she toys with the very soul of that individual, toys with the central purpose and product of life. . . . In trivializing the soul of another . . . we trivialize the atonement, which saved that soul and guaranteed its continued existence.”

The second reason is that human intimacy is a sacred “symbol of total union.” Eternal marriage is intended to be a “welding” together, an “unbreakable union.” The physical relationship is an expression of a deeper spiritual bond. There is a “moral duplicity that comes from pretending we are one” when covenants have not been made.

The final reason for moral purity given by Elder Holland is that “sexual union is . . . a sacrament of the highest order, a union not only of a man and a woman but very much the union of that man and that woman with God” (p. 29).

Do you see the links between personal purity and eternal families? Please understand how important it is not to swim in the river of filthy water seen by Nephi. As sure as the Mississippi River flows into the Gulf of Mexico, so the river of filth flows into the “gulf of misery” (see 1 Nephi 15:27–28; 2 Nephi 1:13). Commit to lay hold upon a life of personal purity that you may have the power to build an eternal family.

Learn by Study and by Faith
Finally, I encourage you to dedicate yourselves to a lifetime of learning in the light—to learn by study and by faith. The most important function of Brigham Young University is to provide you with an enlightened environment. I have heard some complain—primarily people outside the Church—that this campus does not provide enough choice. Since choice is made possible by opposites, the logical conclusion of their statement is that there is too much light at BYU and not enough darkness. They seem to suggest that we “search in the dark”—at least part of the time—to prepare for the “real” world. Last week’s events suggest that there is enough evil in the world without inviting it into our lives. Moreover, Mormon’s words suggest that the presence of evil is not necessary for one to make good choices.

The truth of the matter is that temptation can find a person anywhere. Satan’s work knows few boundaries. He has a long history of playing with the emotions and physical desires of young people. He will tempt you in your relationships, through television, movies, magazines, the Internet, and e-mail. He knows how to invade your apartments and homes. He will not forget you!

So, regardless of where you are, search in the light. It is better to search in the light of day assisted by knowledgeable friends than at night with Lucifer holding the flashlight. From my perspective, this campus is an enormous opportunity for young people to learn from the experience of others, to explore new ideas, to be supported by colleagues who desire
only the best. It is a blessing to be surrounded by good people when making eternal decisions.

In the end, the opportunity to acquire spiritual knowledge at BYU will depend on your sensitivity to the Spirit. This type of learning cannot be forced. The Lord will determine the time and place. If you are diligent, new truths will enter your mind and heart, you will “feel pure intelligence flowing into you,” there will be “sudden strokes of ideas . . . presented unto your minds,” and you will have been taught by the Holy Spirit.iii

Brothers and sisters, we have an opportunity to move to new levels—intellectually and spiritually—by heeding Mormon’s admonition. We are building an institution of infinite influence where one may search in the light and lay hold upon good things.

In light of the recent tragedy, the words of President Harold B. Lee seem appropriate. In a memorable devotional talk called “Have Faith in America,” given on 26 October 1973 at Ricks College, President Lee said: “Men may fail in this country, earthquakes may come, seas may heave beyond their bounds, there may be great drought, disaster, and hardship, but this nation, founded on principles laid down by men whom God raised up, will never fail. This is the cradle of humanity, where life on this earth began. . . . This is the place of the new Jerusalem. This is the place that the Lord said is favored above all other nations. . . Yes, . . . men may fail, but this nation won’t fail.”iv

May we be true to the Light and to the principles of freedom, justice, and mercy is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. 

Notes

5. Ibid., 13.
6. Ibid., 17, 19.

Alma 39: A Model for Teaching Morality

Terry B. Ball

Terry B. Ball is Associate Professor of Ancient Scripture and Associate Chair of Ancient Scripture at BYU.

As a seminary teacher, I had the opportunity one year to teach a class that consisted mostly of non–Latter-day Saint teenagers. Early in the course of study, the occasion to teach the law of chastity arose. While preparing for the class, I realized I was not sure how these students currently felt about the law of chastity. I decided I could teach them best if I first assessed their feelings and values concerning the subject.
To do so, I began the class by drawing a value continuum on the chalkboard. I drew a long horizontal line across the board and on one end wrote the number “1.” On the other end, I wrote the number “100.” In the middle of the line, I wrote “50.” Over the number “1,” I wrote what I thought was a small sin, “Stealing Gum” from the store. On the other end of the continuum over the “100,” I wrote what I hoped they would recognize as a serious sin, “Murder,” as shown in the figure below.

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Then, I asked the class, “Where on this scale of one to one hundred would you put the sin of having premarital sexual relations, assuming that stealing gum was a one and murder was a one hundred?”

Although they were not Latter-day Saints, these were generally good young men and women, and I guessed that most would rate the sin of immorality in the upper half of the continuum, somewhere between fifty and seventy-five.

I never anticipated their actual response. Only a few ranked the sin in the upper half of the continuum; many placed it in the lower half; and a significant number felt that having premarital sexual relations was not a sin at all and therefore it did not belong on the continuum. In fact, in their minds, such relations were viewed as healthy and desirable. To this day, I wonder how well they understood and accepted what I taught them about the importance of chastity in God’s eyes.

Certainly teaching morality in a very immoral world is one of the greatest challenges facing Latter-day Saint educators today. As President Ezra Taft Benson declared, “The plaguing sin of this generation is sexual immorality. This, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, would be the source of more temptations, more buffettings, and more difficulties for the elders of Israel than any other.” President Gordon B. Hinckley explained why the challenge is so great: “It seems as if the whole world has become obsessed with sex. In a very beguiling and alluring way, it is thrown at you constantly. You are exposed to it on television, in magazines and books and videos, even in music.”

Unfortunately, simply being a member of the Church does not protect us from the dilemma. As President Benson further explained, “Sexual immorality is a viper that is striking not only in the world, but in the Church today. Not to admit it is to be dangerously complacent or is like putting one’s head in the sand.”

Teachers and parents face a constant and sometimes frustrating struggle to teach morality convincingly to children. Though we may teach our children the correct principles about how and when to use the power to create life, when they turn on the television, the values we have taught are often challenged and demeaned. When they turn on the radio, they are blasted with dialogue and lyrics that profane the sacred power to create life. They are further exposed to checkout-stand magazines featuring the titles of articles that glamorize immorality. Consequently, we must continually reteach morality to our children.

This battle for the moral values of our students and children is constant and fierce. If the voice of righteousness is ever going to be victorious in the battle, we have to teach morality better than the adversary teaches immorality. As someone once put it, “Satan works night and day to destroy us, and we have to ‘work like the devil’ to stay ahead of him!”
For Latter-day Saint educators engaged in this moral battle, Alma 39 can be an excellent resource to help in effectively combating false principles and corrupt values. In this chapter, Alma counsels his wayward son Corianton, providing a wonderful model of not only what to teach but also how to teach moral cleanliness. Analyzing not only the “what” but also the “how” of Alma’s counsel can help us identify important principles and methodology for effective teaching of this difficult subject. I have found this analytical approach to be an engaging way to teach Alma 39 to my students and help them internalize and find application for the chapter’s message.

**Tailoring the Teaching of Morality to the Student**

Teachers may want to begin a study of the text by suggesting that the class discuss how to teach others about morality by using Alma 39 as a model. Teachers can then invite students to follow as the first two verses are read while considering the question, “What principle of teaching morality is Alma modeling in this passage?”

“And now, my son, I have somewhat more to say unto thee than what I said unto thy brother; for behold, have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee? “For thou didst not give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother, among the people of the Zoramites” (Alma 39:1–2).

Corianton most likely was very unhappy to be compared to his brothers and to be singled out for special treatment in this way. Children seldom seem to appreciate being asked, “Why can’t you be more like your brother?” Children’s typical response is to complain, “This is not fair! You’re treating me differently than him!” or “Why do you give me this lecture and not him? It’s not fair!” All of us have probably recognized that children being disciplined often have a very misguided sense of justice. They mistakenly think that to be fair, we must treat each person exactly the same. What an unjust world it would be if God acted on that principle.

When one of my children complains by saying “It’s not fair! Why do you treat my brother one way and me another!” I have on occasion responded, “Well, the reason I treat you differently than your brother is because I love your brother more than you.” That always gets them more agitated. They immediately protest, “That’s not true. You don’t love him more than me!” I quickly agree, “Of course I don’t love him more than I love you.” Then, I like to ask, “If I’m not treating you differently than your brother because I love you less, then why do you suppose I am treating you differently?”

Hopefully, what follows is a thoughtful discussion of how and why parents teach and discipline their children. Such a discussion usually leads to the conclusion that parents treat their children differently because children are different. Moreover, because everyone is not the same, the ultimate injustice would be to treat them as if they were. In the course of such discussions, I try to find opportunity to reassure my children that because I love them, I try to teach and treat them in the way that is best for them. I confess sometimes I make mistakes, not because I don’t love my children but because I’m not always as smart as I should be.

I share this example of parenting because it illustrates a principle of teaching morality that Alma models as he counsels his son in Alma 39:1–2. Because his son chose to misuse agency and because Alma loved the young man, the content of Alma’s counsel to
Corianton was very different than that given to Helaman and Shiblon, Corianton’s brothers (Alma 36–38). Alma understood and modeled the principle that we too should tailor the teaching of morality to the student. As we teach morality today, we should recognize that how we teach should differ according to the student’s age, maturity, personality, and prior use of agency. For example, we would likely not be very effective teaching morality to a rebellious seventeen-year-old if we used the same content and context as we would typically use to teach an innocent seven-year-old. Teachers carry a heavy responsibility to seek the guidance of the Spirit and to know and love their students so they can correctly identify what, where, and when it is best to teach them about the proper use of the sacred power to create life. The content and context of Alma’s counsel to Corianton seem to be perfectly tailored to meet the young man’s needs.

**Teaching the Seriousness of Violating the Law of Chastity**

In verses two through four of Alma 39, the prophet clearly identifies Corianton’s sins. Then, in the fifth and sixth verses, he models another important principle of teaching mortality. While reading these passages, we should ponder the question, “What principle of teaching morality is Alma modeling?”

Now this is what I have against thee; thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom.

And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me; for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron, among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel.

Yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted.

Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?

For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable; yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness; yea, I say unto you, my son, that it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness. (Alma 39:2–6)

Perhaps Corianton was surprised to learn how “abominable” his sin was in the eyes of God. Certainly many would be astonished at such doctrine in some of today’s spiritually sick societies. Alma rendered his wayward son a great service by not discounting the gravity of the transgression. This wise prophet clearly models for us the principle that as we teach morality, we must teach the seriousness of violating the law of chastity. Some of the adversary’s greatest victories in this dispensation have come as a result of his deceiving so many into believing that violating the law of chastity is an inconsequential offense—if an offense at all. What a victory for Lucifer to have convinced so many that one of the most serious sins they are capable of committing is not really a sin at all! Satan may well relegate more souls to kingdoms that are less than celestial by trivializing the misuse of the power to create life than by any other temptation in his arsenal.
Latter-day Saint educators bear a heavy responsibility to thwart deception. If we are to be effective in teaching morality, we must teach our students the sanctity of the power to create life and of the seriousness of its misuse.

In teaching the seriousness of Corianton’s sins, Alma also made certain his son understood that a person’s actions have a grievous impact on others as well: “Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked harlots. Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11).

Perhaps, like some, Corianton had tried to minimize the damage his sin would cause by accepting the frequently used and extraordinarily pitiful excuse, “It’s okay for me to sin if I want. It’s my life, and I’m hurting only myself.” Latter-day Saints understand that there is no such thing as a sin that injures only the individual. From the story of Corianton, we know that unrighteous acts can undermine missionary efforts. We also know that because the basic unit of exaltation is the family, when individuals use their agency in such a way as to place their exaltation in jeopardy, their spouses and children are affected by those choices. Sin of any kind—especially immorality—has serious consequences not only for ourselves but also for others.

**Being Involved, Open, and Aggressive**

Alma continued to instruct his son in the seventh verse of the chapter: “And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good” (Alma 39:7).

This passage suggests that Alma did not enjoy having to deal with such a difficult issue. Indeed, he seems to find the task to be a very uncomfortable if not painful duty. Yet, despite the difficulty and perhaps awkwardness of the situation, Alma was determined to do what was best for his son by teaching him the importance of chastity. Alma was willing to set aside his own and his son’s comfort to rescue the young man. The adjectives that we could use to describe how Alma counsels his son in verse seven, and throughout the entire chapter, constitute another principle of teaching morality. As we teach morality, we must be involved, open, and aggressive.

As previously noted, Satan is certainly open and aggressive in attacking proper moral principles. There is nothing subtle or obscure in the way he attacks morality, and we have to “work like the devil” to defeat him. If we are reluctant, timid, or passive in teaching chastity, our students will not have an anchor to hold themselves firm in the deluge of immorality with which the adversary floods their mortal environment. Moreover, if we are not matching the aggressive, bold, and constant efforts of those who challenge morality, our reluctance may be interpreted by our students as evidence that chastity is not really very important. We cannot ignore the issue or sugarcoat it so much that those we are teaching do not hear or understand the message—even in instances such as Alma’s where it may be a very painful or harrowing experience for the student or the teacher.

**Teaching Accountability for Sins**

Alma models another principle of teaching morality in verse eight of the text: “But behold, ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day” (Alma 39:8).
One of the great lies that Satan whispers to those he tempts is that it is all right to commit a sin if “no one will ever know!” The lie suggests that one can sin in secret and not be held accountable. Alma poignantly declares the fallacy of such reasoning. God always knows. Ponder the question, “What would be better—if only God knew of our sins or if the whole world knew but God did not?” Truthfully, it would be better if the entire world knew of our sins and God did not, for only God can hold us eternally accountable. Our students need to understand this doctrine to find the strength to be morally clean. Accordingly, as we teach morality, we also must teach accountability for sins.

Teaching Repentance— Appropriately

If we are teaching a significant number of youth, we will most likely have students who have already violated the law of chastity. For them, the principle of teaching morality shown by Alma in verse nine is especially important: “Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things” (Alma 39:9).

Alma understood that the only thing more foolish than committing a sin is refusing to repent. He knew that those who have transgressed need to know the way back—not only to redeem their souls but also to give them a reason to discontinue their sinful acts. As we teach morality, we must also teach repentance appropriately.

The adverb attached to this principle, “appropriately,” is especially important. As a bishop, I noticed that despite all our efforts to teach how to obtain forgiveness for sins, far too many Latter-day Saints have a mistaken understanding of what constitutes true repentance. Too many naively think that all a person has to do to qualify for forgiveness is simply allow a certain period of time to pass without committing the sin again. Such individuals often plan their “repentance” while they are in the very act of committing the sin. Their misguided reasoning tells them, “If I commit this sin I will have to wait this many months before I can take the sacrament, but if I commit this other sin, I can be worthy in only this many weeks!”

Others, equally as deluded, want to reduce the entire process of repentance to mere confession. Such individuals frequently are deceived by what can be called the “sin-now-pay-later program.” In their distorted line of reasoning, they think, “I’ll give into these temptations, but it’s all right because just before my mission, I’ll go confess it all to the bishop, and then I’ll go on my mission!” or “I’ll live a riotous, sinful life for now, but when I meet ‘Mr. Right,’ I’ll go confess my sins so I can marry him in the temple!”

Such attitudes demonstrate an alarming disrespect for the Savior’s atoning sacrifice—not to mention a complete misunderstanding of the vital role godly sorrow plays in the repentance process. Somehow, we need to help students understand that obtaining forgiveness is not a simple and painless experience and that the godly sorrow required for true repentance is not something that can be turned on and off at a whim. Students need to realize that those who sin with impunity, thinking that repentance is an easy balm to be smeared over their spiritual wounds any time they wish, will find it difficult, if not impossible, to muster the godly sorrow sufficient to obtain forgiveness when the day for their planned repentance arrives. As we teach morality, we can help students come to a proper understanding by making certain that we appropriately teach all the steps of
repentance. Teachers may want to invite their students to identify the steps of repentance Alma teaches his son in the following verses:

Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked harlots. Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words. And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me: Command thy children to do good, lest they lead away the hearts of many people to destruction; therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities; That ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength; that ye lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly; but rather return unto them, and acknowledge your faults and that wrong which ye have done. (Alma 39:11–13)

And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance. O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility. And now, O my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen. (Alma 42:29–31)

In these verses, Alma clearly teaches his son the steps of repentance, including recognizing sins, feeling godly sorrow and being humbled by sins, forsaking sins, confessing wrongs to those offended, and seeking to make restitution by proclaiming the gospel.

**Teaching Students to Be Source Critical**

Another important principle of teaching morality can be seen in Alma’s counsel recorded in verse ten: “And I command you to take it upon you to counsel with your elder brothers in your undertakings; for behold, thou art in thy youth, and ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers. And give heed to their counsel” (Alma 39:10).

As teachers, we may want to ask our students to consider why Alma told Corianton to look to Corianton’s brothers for advice. Why didn’t Alma say, “I command you to counsel with all your drug-addicted, immoral friends for advice on moral cleanliness” or “Look to your favorite R-rated movie star for advice on moral cleanliness?” Our students will certainly recognize that such individuals generally cannot be considered reliable sources for information about how God would have us live chaste lives. Yet far too many are quick to learn and accept moral values from such spiritually challenged sources. If we are to help our students learn and accept correct moral values, we must teach students to be source critical.
One way to accomplish the task of being source critical is to ask students to make a list of criteria that a good, reliable advisor on morality should meet. Hopefully, their list will include some of the following:

1. A good and reliable advisor on morality should be smart enough to give counsel. For example, one certainly would not go to a kindergarten-aged brother or sister to get help with a calculus assignment! While such little ones may want to help, they simply do not know enough about the subject to be of assistance. They may sincerely give the best answers they can contrive and may even believe their answers are correct, but they will be wrong. In the same spirit, it would certainly be folly to look to morally uneducated individuals for advice about chastity. We simply cannot trust moral advice given by a spiritually untrained peer, an amoral media star, or a passion-driven friend. Such individuals may sincerely want to advise us, but they simply are not morally smart enough to give reliable counsel.

2. A good and reliable advisor on morality must share our goals and values. If the individuals to whom we look for counsel do not have our values and goals, such as keeping baptismal covenants, being a faithful priesthood holder, serving an honorable mission, and having an eternal family, then they may not be able to give counsel that will help us reach our goals and maintain our values. Individuals who do not share our goals and values may be—and likely are—wonderful people, but their values and understanding of the purpose of life may well lead them to make life choices that disregard the importance of chastity. Consequently, they cannot be considered reliable sources for moral counsel for an individual whose goal is to gain exaltation.

3. A good and reliable advisor on morality must have our best interest and welfare in mind while giving counsel. Reliable counselors must love us—love us enough that they would never place their personal desires above our welfare. They must be willing to give the counsel they sincerely feel is best for us, even if it may be painful or require sacrifice. If the counselors are selfish, uncaring, or eager to please their own carnal desires first, they cannot be counted on to advise us properly, especially on moral issues.

After such a list of criteria for reliable moral advisors has been compiled, it might be helpful for students to identify the individuals in their lives who meet those criteria. Students will likely identify their parents, Church leaders and advisors, and perhaps some teachers. If they are fortunate, they will also have friends who meet the criteria of having appropriate intelligence, sharing the same values, and reflecting enough love to give unselfish and correct moral advice. If our students are truly fortunate, not only will they have friends who meet the criteria but also they will be that kind of friend themselves.

**Teaching Morality in the Context of the Plan of Redemption**

Perhaps the most important principle of teaching morality is demonstrated by Alma in verse fifteen and throughout the rest of chapter thirty-nine and through to the end of chapter forty-two. In verse fifteen, Alma instructs: “And now, my son, I would say somewhat unto you concerning the coming of Christ. Behold, I say unto you, that it is he that surely shall come to take away the sins of the world; yea, he cometh to declare glad tidings of salvation unto his people” (Alma 39:15).

As Alma bears witness of salvation through Christ in this verse and then teaches about the Atonement, Resurrection, Judgment, and the ultimate redemption of humankind in subsequent verses and chapters, he helps his son see how and why moral cleanliness fits
in God’s eternal plan. Likewise, we too must teach morality in the context of the plan of redemption.

We will struggle to convince our students to live chaste lives if we teach morality as merely part of a good code of ethics. To maintain the faith and motivation necessary to stay morally clean in an environment that constantly challenges morality, our students need to understand that the law of chastity is a vital part of God’s great and eternal plan to bring to pass our immortality and eternal life. With that understanding, they will better find the strength and faith to live chaste and virtuous lives, even in the face of great temptation.

**Conclusion**

Alma’s approach to teaching morality to his son was effective. Corianton repented and became an effective missionary. Later, we read that the sons of Alma, including Corianton, “did go forth among the people to declare the word unto them” (Alma 43:1). Along with Helaman, Corianton was part of the great missionary effort that reformed the apostate Nephite people for a time. In Alma 48:18, Corianton, as a son of Alma, is described as a man of God. It was eventually said of both Shiblon and Corianton, “He was a just man, and he did walk uprightly before God; and he did observe to do good continually, to keep the commandments of the Lord his God” (Alma 63:2).

In summary, I believe that Latter-day Saint educators can more effectively help their students earn the same praise if they, like Alma, will do the following:

- Tailor the teaching of morality to the student
- Teach the seriousness of violating the law of chastity
- Be involved, open, and aggressive in teaching morality
- Teach accountability for sins
- Teach repentance—appropriately
- Teach students to be source critical
- Teach morality in the context of the plan of redemption

**Notes**

4. As discussed in Alma 39:5–6, the gravest sin a person can commit is to deny the Holy Ghost, followed by murder and then sexual immorality. Because denying the Holy Ghost requires a person to have made certain covenants, participated in certain ordinances, and have certain knowledge, most individuals cannot commit this sin. Therefore, committing murder and violating the law of chastity are the first and second most serious sins most individuals are capable of committing.

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**Preparing Elders, Sisters, and Couples to Serve**
Randy L. Bott

Randy L. Bott is Associate Professor of Church History and Doctrine at BYU.

“Called to serve Him, heav’nly King of glory, / Chosen e’er to witness for his name, / Far and wide we tell the Father’s story, / Far and wide his love proclaim.”

What a soul-stirring anthem with a powerful message!

Prophets from Joseph Smith to Gordon B. Hinckley have issued and reissued the invitation to prepare and to serve honorable missions. However, a sizable majority of eligible young men choose not to serve full-time missions. Although not under the same mandate to serve, many young women want to serve, but fear of the unknown holds them back. In recent years, the clarion call for senior couples to serve has found a prominent place in every general conference and in many articles in the Ensign magazine. Why are so many reluctant to serve?

In this essay, several factors associated with missionary service are identified, and practical solutions are suggested. Is the list comprehensive? Certainly not. Are there other concerns equally as important that are not touched upon? Yes, but this essay is a place to begin.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “In relation to the kingdom of God, the devil always sets up his kingdom at the very same time in opposition to God. Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council. It is the testimony that I want that I am God’s servant, and this people His people.”

First, and most importantly, our calls to serve were foreknown to the Lord; the calls were issued and accepted; and we were ordained to the very purpose of missionary service long before the foundations of the world were laid. Second, but also important, Satan is not going to allow individuals or couples to serve uncontested. He always has done and always will do—even until the millennium—all in his devilish power to thwart the progress of the kingdom of God.

Now, having identified the source of opposition to missionary service, I will consider the forms the opposition takes and explain how to overcome the roadblocks to successful service.

Fear of the Unknown

Although fear may be applied in many areas, fear of the unknown—usually ungrounded—causes many prospective missionaries who have earned the right to be among those chosen ones to minister to the inhabitants of the world to shrink at the very moment the time to serve comes. Paul taught his son in the faith, Timothy, a powerful lesson: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

If God does not give us the spirit of fear, where does it come from? The answer is obvious; fear of the unknown comes from Satan. But why listen to his constant suggestions that we are incapable, unprepared, or unworthy of serving? He is called “a liar from the beginning” (see D&C 93:25). In addition, Lehi clearly revealed Satan’s mission statement: “And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind” (2 Nephi 2:18). Following Satan’s directives will eventually result in misery and unhappiness to all who fall prey to his deceptive tactics.
As noted previously in 2 Timothy 1:7, God’s promise to those who serve is power—power sufficient to accomplish all He has commanded them to accomplish. Love as an endowment of power takes on special significance when coupled with 1 John 4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” Even Mormon linked his ability to be bold in teaching the truth with perfect love: “Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear” (Moroni 8:16). Paul’s final promise was a sound mind—not a tortured, tormented one but one capable of reasoning and speaking clearly and persuasively.

One more important factor that prospective missionaries can control should be considered: “But if ye are prepared ye shall not fear” (D&C 38:30).

Will there always be some apprehensiveness about the unknown? Probably, but if prospective missionaries really believe the Lord’s promises, those concerns will not preclude them from serving. So why not put the Lord to the test?

**Testimony’s Role in Missionary Preparation**

One of Satan’s most effective tactics is challenging the strength of a person’s testimony. Because we are not given perfect knowledge, we must learn to live by faith. The Lord has said, “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38). If prospective missionaries, young or old, hold back because of fear caused by lack of a perfect knowledge, the Lord takes no pleasure in them. It was not uncommon, while I was serving as a mission president, for young missionaries, with many tears, to confess that their testimonies were small and weak—if they existed at all.

The Lord patiently tutors all who want to strengthen their testimonies. As Oliver Cowdery began his work as scribe to Joseph Smith in the translation of the Book of Mormon, the Lord said, “Behold, thou knowest that thou hast inquired of me and I did enlighten thy mind; and now I tell thee these things that thou mayest know that thou hast been enlightened by the Spirit of truth” (D&C 6:15). Evidently, Oliver had previously received many mind-enlightening revelations from the Lord but had failed to recognize them. Perhaps Oliver had a preconceived notion of the form in which answers to prayer should come. Later, Oliver was encouraged to stand back and take note of the strength of his testimony and then to act upon it: “Behold, I have manifested unto you, by my Spirit in many instances, that the things which you have written are true; wherefore you know that they are true. And if you know that they are true, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written” (D&C 18:2–3).

For all prospective missionaries, learning to recognize a testimony and continuing to build on it until it becomes unshakable are not only desirable but also essential to successful missionary work. Prospective missionaries should begin immediately the process of examining every part of their testimonies. When they discover an aspect that is weak, they should work to strengthen it. The Savior promised: “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17).

For testimony purposes, I suggest prospective missionaries begin with the Articles of Faith by taking each phrase of each article and making sure they scripturally and doctrinally understand and can defend the basic beliefs. Elder James E. Talmage’s *The Articles of Faith* is a great resource if any seeker of a testimony has difficulty using the
Topical Guide to look up references. A small pamphlet entitled *A Missionary’s Scripture Guide* is available at the Church Distribution Center as an inexpensive study guide to eliminate the fear associated with prospective missionaries’ believing they are not scriptural or doctrinal enough to be effective missionaries.

I suggest further that prospective missionaries study the plan of salvation and look up associated scriptures and quotes from the Brethren to clarify and solidify understanding of the “big picture.” By studying just one hour a day, prospective missionaries will be astonished at how quickly they read the scriptures, keep up on monthly issues of the *Ensign,* and read the gospel doctrine lesson and also the priesthood or Relief Society lessons for the week. Surely there is an hour somewhere during the day when things of little or no eternal importance could be bumped to be better prepared to “stand as witnesses of God” (see Mosiah 18:9). The rewards are immediate and soul satisfying, and any prospective missionary’s confidence will “wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distill upon thy soul as the dews from heaven” (D&C 121:45).

When the reality of our being led by living prophets and the absolute certainty that the true gospel of Jesus Christ was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith are burned deeply into the souls of prospective missionaries, then the insatiable desire to share what they know will overcome any ungrounded fears the adversary may put in their way. The Lord has challenged and promised, “Neither take ye thought beforehand what ye shall say; but treasure up in your minds continually the words of life, and it shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man” (D&C 84:85). One of the great fears senior couples have is that they cannot memorize scripture and dialogue like young missionaries can. Senior couples also are often concerned that they do not know enough to teach.

In reality, virtually all senior couples discover that their real challenge is to simplify their teaching so that people with little or no understanding of spiritual things can understand. Such is also the case with young missionaries. Learning the gospel on a basic, elementary level gave the Lord all the depth He needed to convince those who are His elect of the truthfulness of His gospel (see D&C 29:7). Those who are being prepared by the Spirit to receive the gospel will not harden their hearts but will accept truth even from the “despised and unlearned” (see D&C 35:13). The Lord has designated those whom He wants to spread His gospel during this final dispensation: “That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers” (D&C 1:23).

**The Need for a Desire to Serve**

In many revelations given to inquiring brethren in the early days of the Church, the Lord stated the initial qualifier to serve was desire (see D&C 4:3; 6:3; 11:3; 12:3; and 14:3 for examples). The more prospective missionaries understand what an honor it is to be called of God to be His representatives in these crucial last days before the Second Coming and the more they understand the importance and magnitude of the work to be accomplished, the easier it is to generate the desire to serve.

Service, however, requires selflessness. Therefore, we can naturally expect that Satan’s counter-gospel will focus on selfishness. “What’s in it for me?” is an attitude fostered by the modern world. The idea of giving up one’s freedom for a year or two to serve—at the missionary’s own expense—is incomprehensible to the world.
For most senior couples who have grown up in the Church, service has become second nature. We always have and always will respond to the Lord’s call to arms, whether it be in Primary, Young Men, Young Women, Relief Society, or priesthood callings. Senior Saints have grown up knowing that Church callings require sacrifice, dedication, diligence, and hard work and that callings are not always “fun.” However, young prospective missionaries may not have the attitude of service ingrained so deeply in their souls. Therefore, any meaningful activity, calling, assignment, or task they can be given, from their earliest years, will make the transition to full-time missionary service that much easier. It is a terrible shock to many young elders and sisters to realize that their needs are the very last to be met during missionary service. Virtually everyone else comes first—companions, members, and investigators.

In helping prospective missionaries generate the desire to serve, we must not neglect to tell them about the rewards promised for their willingness to sacrifice. Here are a few of the promised rewards:

- Missionary service brings salvation to the souls of missionaries (D&C 4:4).
- Missionaries receive a remission of all past sins (D&C 132:50).
- Selfless service brings blessings and the promise of life to missionaries’ families (D&C 31:5).
- Missionary service increases missionaries’ financial and familial blessings by a hundred times (see Mark 10:28–30).

It is revelatory to see the marked difference between those who either have not yet served or are unwilling to serve and those who return with honor after completing full-time missionary service. Returned missionaries are scarcely the same people they were before their missions. They have matured into men and women of Christ and have prepared to become husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and powerful Church leaders. The rewards for missionary service so far outweigh the inconvenience and sacrifice involved that it is difficult to compare them in the same breath.

Senior couples who serve one mission often return again and again to missionary service because they see the sanctifying influence that full-time missionary service has on them. During their golden years, they sacrifice the frequent, coveted visits from children and grandchildren for the essential service they can give as they take the “bread of life” to a starving world.

Senior couples may feel they are needed more at home to stabilize families than they are needed in the mission field. The Lord addressed Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon when they became concerned about being absent from their families and said, “Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you, my friends Sidney and Joseph, your families are well; they are in mine hands, and I will do with them as seemeth me good; for in me there is all power” (D&C 100:1). Unless senior couple missionaries have all knowledge and all power, it seems like a good trade to leave their families in the hands of the Lord and go out and serve His other children. Time after time, senior couples report drastic and dramatic changes in their families because of the couples’ service in the mission field.

**Worthiness of Prospective Missionaries**

Example really is the best teacher; indeed, sometimes it is the only teacher. Prospective missionaries cannot teach what they do not know and cannot effectively teach what they do not live. In the Lord’s law of teaching, He said: “And they shall observe the covenants and church articles to do them” (D&C 42:13).
From very earliest opportunities, Church leaders and teachers must be forceful in teaching youth to avoid the practices embraced by the world but condemned by the Lord. There are certain sins that, although a person can repent of and be forgiven for, disqualify young people from full-time missionary service.

It would be productive for prospective missionaries to ask their priesthood leaders for a copy of the 19 June 1998 letter from the First Presidency on “Qualifications for Full-Time Missionary Service.” Also, the Church Handbook of Instructions, on pages 80–82, specifically outlines many qualifications.

Such serious things as having an abortion, having a child out of wedlock, having a divorce, being HIV positive, and participating in homosexual activities during the last three teenage years can disqualify a candidate from missionary service. Also listed in the 19 June 1998 letter from the First Presidency is a lengthy directive on moral worthiness—some transgressions may postpone service for up to three years. What a tragedy to have young people fill out the missionary recommendation forms only to find out at that late date that they have disqualified themselves because they have embraced Satan’s counter-gospel of “sin now, repent later, and everything will be all right.”

Without full and complete repentance, a missionary cannot enjoy all the blessings of the Spirit in the mission field. Without the Spirit, a missionary will discover it is virtually impossible to be truly effective in performing missionary activities. Without the protective influence of the Spirit, missionaries are subject to the bone-crushing buffetings of Satan to the point that too many leave their foreordained missions and return to the safety and protection of home. What a tragedy when that happens, but it does not have to happen if leaders and teachers can get the prospective missionaries’ attention early in life and keep holding the standard high for missionary service. Couples who have worthiness issues left to resolve can and should set the example by making sure they are clean and worthy to serve. Satan will take advantage of every perceived “chink” in a prospective missionary’s armor. If prior sins have not been completely resolved, it is like giving Satan the bullets he subsequently uses to shoot a missionary in the mission field. Prospective missionaries should be taught that disarming Satan now by seeking the help of the bishop or stake president as well as the Lord is part of the process of making sins “as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

The Social Preparation of Prospective Missionaries

In reflecting on my years of missionary work, in watching five of my six children serve (the youngest is planning to serve as well), and in teaching literally thousands of preparing missionaries and listening to them report back, I have concluded that much of the opposition to successful missionary work comes from within the companionship. As a mission president, I spent a majority of my time helping resolve companionship problems. Even couple missionaries are not totally exempt from Satan’s attempts to “divide and conquer.”

Prospective young-men missionaries reflect immaturity if they believe they can fight and argue with their parents and siblings and then live harmoniously with their missionary companions and leaders. Prospective young-women missionaries reflect unrealistic expectations if they expect to “live together in love” (see D&C 42:45), without friction, with someone not of their own choosing—often someone who is on the opposite end of the personality scale—when they have not learned to react properly to hormonal changes,
mood swings, and impulsive behavior. For senior couples who have lived together for years but who have been separated for the majority of the time because of work and family demands to believe they can pick at each other’s perceived weaknesses, speak harshly with each other, and then live without contention in the mission field suggests a credibility gap that needs to be bridged.

From the very moment that the idea of serving a mission enters a person’s mind, he or she should be identifying and working to overcome every un-Christlike characteristic that Satan can eventually exploit to retard the progress of the work. It is unlikely that anyone can anticipate all the ways the adversary will set companions at odds with each other. However, if missionaries can develop the skills of identifying the problem and then focusing their energies and skills on solving the problem, they will have taken a giant step forward in their quest to eliminate the spirit of contention.

If asked, most of us would be able to generate a list of habits or characteristics we know are irritating to others. If someone offered us a large sum of money to eliminate those habits from our personality, we would likely do it. Then, knowing that we must overcome all ungodly traits before we are welcomed into Heavenly Father’s presence, why not systematically attack them now? How much more pleasant life would be if we all sacrificed our selfish attitudes and replaced them with a totally outward-focused attitude of the Savior.

Since perfecting ourselves is a goal for members of the Church of Jesus Christ, what a golden incentive it is to redouble our efforts to reflect the Lord’s counsel: “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me” (D&C 19:23). In a world where “peace” both internally and internationally is a rare commodity, why not use our impending missions to expedite the perfecting process and receive the promised blessings?

**Determination as an Aspect of Service**

We have all noted with some degree of consistency that as soon as we plan a family outing, a temple excursion, a service project, or a mission, the adversary throws obstacles in our way to deter us from succeeding in our proposed goal. If we give in to the smoke screen Satan uses to obscure our vision of the desired goal, then we often fail to follow through and receive the expected blessing.

Missions are particularly vulnerable to satanic interference because of the potential they have to draw people away from the Lord’s kingdom. If the adversary can detour young men from serving—because of schooling, girls, employment, cars, toys, scholarships, or whatever—he can theoretically stop thousands of people from being introduced to the gospel. The statistics are staggering! In a world of about 6.6 billion people, only sixty thousand are missionaries. That means only one in every 110,000 people on earth is a missionary for the Lord’s true Church. It is no wonder the adversary focuses on the destruction of potential missionaries.

If Satan cannot succeed in stopping prospective missionaries from going on missions, perhaps he can lessen their effectiveness by getting them to try to serve unworthily. If that does not work, then playing on the mind-set of the environment they have grown up in (one of fun, self-entertainment, ease, and self-centeredness) may be his next best shot. Missions are difficult—probably more difficult than anything else in life other than marriage. But marriage is spread over a lifetime, whereas a mission is highly concentrated and intense for eighteen months or two years.
When they hit the wall of opposition in the mission field, too many missionaries determine that a mission just is not for them. They then come home at their own insistence, believing they can resume life as usual at home. Too many of them suffer more from coming home early than they would have suffered if they had stayed in the field.

Somehow we must be more effective in teaching our young people that they need to stay in the field—with very few exceptions. Helping them develop a “can-do” attitude with regard to small tasks and distasteful projects during their growing-up years may pay huge dividends when the storms of a mission swirl menacingly around them.

If we can instill in prospective missionaries the idea that the Lord did not call them to fail and that He will sustain them through the tough times, they will be more likely to see the times of discouragement and homesickness as normal things that “come to pass” rather than a condition that will last throughout their missions. We should remind them that the Lord promised, “And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up” (D&C 84:88). What wonderful promised company to each missionary who serves with diligence and honor.

As we are successful in preparing both our youth and ourselves to serve, we will sense a power that transcends our natural abilities. We will feel peace and contentment that we did not know still existed in this topsy-turvy world. Therefore, as the challenge to prepare has been issued, we now have the responsibility to determine how and when to serve. Even with those decisions, the Lord has promised to help us. He said, “And the place where it is my will that you should tarry, for the main, shall be signalized unto you by the peace and power of my Spirit, that shall flow unto you” (D&C 111:8).

In response to the invitation to serve, may prospective missionaries be bold enough to respond: “We are all enlisted till the conflict is o’er; / Happy are we! Happy are we! / Soldiers in the army, there’s a bright crown in store; / We shall win and wear it by and by. / Haste to the battle, quick to the field; / Truth is our helmet, buckler, and shield. / Stand by our colors; proudly they wave! / We’re joyfully, joyfully marching to our home.”

Notes
1. “Called to Serve,” Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), no. 249.
3. “We Are All Enlisted,” Hymns, no. 250.

Eli and His Sons: Some Lessons for Parents
Frank F. Judd Jr.

Frank F. Judd Jr. is Instructor of Ancient Scripture at BYU.

The prophet Nephi stated, “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). Numerous stories in the scriptures illustrate how parents have tried, either successfully or unsuccessfully, to teach their children to keep the commandments of God. Thankfully, we can learn important lessons from both types of examples.
One such instructive story is that of Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Before Solomon built a permanent temple at Jerusalem, the portable tabernacle was located at Shiloh, a city north of Jerusalem. Eli was the priest (probably the high priest) over the tabernacle at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:9, 2:11) as well as a judge in Israel (4:18). By this time, Eli was ninety-eight years old (4:15).

One day Hannah was at the tabernacle earnestly pleading with the Lord to bless her with a son and promising to dedicate her future child to the service of the Lord. When Eli observed Hannah, he was inspired to declare to her, “Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him” (1 Samuel 1:17). Later, after she gave birth to a son, Hannah brought the young Samuel to Eli to fulfill her vow (1:24–28).

Under the supervision of Eli, Samuel faithfully served at the tabernacle (2:11).

Unfortunately, Eli’s own sons did not submit to their father’s supervision as Samuel did. Like their father, Hophni and Phinehas were also priests at the tabernacle (1 Samuel 1:3). The sons of Eli “knew not the Lord” (2:12). They are referred to as “sons of Belial” (2:12), which is a term of derision used elsewhere in the scriptures. The word Belial basically means “wickedness” or “worthlessness.”

The sons of Eli earned their bad reputation. For the priests to obtain their rightful portions of the sacrifices, it was customary at the tabernacle at Shiloh for the priest’s servant to thrust a large fork into the pot in which the sacrificial animal was cooking and to give the priest whatever portion of boiled meat the fork happened to bring up (1 Samuel 2:13–14). However, the sons of Eli wanted roasted meat instead of boiled meat; so Hophni and Phinehas compelled the priest’s servant to extort the best portions of meat from the person presenting the sacrifice before the fat was burned and before the meat was boiled (2:15–16).

According to the law of Moses, the fat was not to be eaten but was to be burned as the Lord’s portion of the sacrifice. If the one who was presenting the sacrifice refused to hand over the desired portions of meat before the fat was burned, the sons of Eli compelled the priest’s servant to take the meat by force (1 Samuel 2:16). In addition to extortion, the sons of Eli were also guilty of sexual immorality with the women who gathered at the entrance to the tabernacle (2:22). Naturally, the Lord was very displeased with this sinful behavior (2:17).

When Eli heard what his sons were doing, he was very concerned. He chastised his unruly sons by saying, “Ye make the Lord’s people to transgress” (1 Samuel 2:24). By forcing those who presented sacrifices to relinquish the meat before burning the fat, the sons of Eli were causing them to break the law of Moses. Alma’s strong words to his wayward son Corianton, who had committed fornication with the harlot Isabel, reflect a similar situation and reaction: “Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11). Poor examples can have lasting effects.

As priests, Hophni and Phinehas were consecrated to be holy representatives and upstanding teachers; in a sense, they belonged to the Lord. Eli instructed his sons that they did not merely “sin against another” person but rather they did “sin against the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:25). In an analogous situation in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira had covenanted with the Lord to sell their possessions, giving all the proceeds to the Church as part of living the law of consecration. However, as the Apostle Peter told them, by keeping back a portion of their money and breaking their covenant, Ananias and
Sapphira had “not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4). Covenant breaking threatens our relationship not only with others but also, more importantly, with Heavenly Father. After the sins of Hophni and Phinehas were exposed, a man of God arrived with a devastating message for Eli. The Lord said Eli was guilty of honoring his sons more than the Lord (1 Samuel 2:27–30). Although Eli chastised Hophni and Phinehas, he apparently had not done everything he could to correct their bad behavior. Eli was guilty of neglecting his parental duties toward his sons because “he restrained them not” (3:13). As a result of Eli’s neglect, the Lord said that Eli and his house would be cut off from His favor and that, as a sign of the truth of the Lord’s words, both sons would die on the same day (2:30–34).

Neglecting the serious responsibilities of parenting carries grave consequences. The Lord has declared in the latter days that “inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents” (D&C 68:25).

After the Israelites lost a battle in their war against the Philistines, the sons of Eli accompanied the ark of the covenant to the battlefront because the Israelites hoped the ark would provide some divine protection (1 Samuel 4:1–5). The Philistines were initially afraid when they realized that the Israelite army had the ark with them but then took courage and defeated the Israelites (4:6–10). The result was that “the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain” (4:11).

Meanwhile, Eli nervously waited at Shiloh for the safe return of the ark (1 Samuel 4:13), only to be greeted with the tragic news that “thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken” (4:17). As a sad conclusion to this story, when Eli heard that the ark was captured, he fell backwards off his seat, broke his neck, and died (4:18).

There are several lessons to be learned from the experiences of Eli and his sons. As a priest of the Lord, Eli successfully supervised Samuel at the tabernacle but was not as diligent as he could have been toward his own sons. In a similar fashion, although many endeavors may be worthy of our time and attention, we ought not to neglect our responsibility toward our family because of our devotion to other activities. The First Presidency recently stated, “We counsel parents and children to give highest priority to family prayer, family home evening, gospel study and instruction, and wholesome family activities. However worthy and appropriate other demands or activities may be, they must not be permitted to displace the divinely-appointed duties that only parents and families can adequately perform.” As President David O. McKay taught, “No other success can compensate for failure in the home.”

Further, we should not assume that parents are culpable for the poor conduct of their children. Many righteous parents earnestly strive to teach their children from their youth the principles of the gospel, yet their children still go astray. At the same time, however, we must not downplay the crucial responsibility of parents to instruct their children. President Gordon B. Hinckley has given the following counsel:

I recognize that there are parents who, notwithstanding an outpouring of love and a diligent and faithful effort to teach them, see their children
grow in a contrary manner and weep while their wayward sons and daughters willfully pursue courses of tragic consequence. For such I have great sympathy, and to them I am wont to quote the words of Ezekiel: “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son” (Ezekiel 18:20).

But such is the exception rather than the rule. Nor does the exception justify others of us from making every effort in showing forth love, example, and correct precept in the rearing of those for whom God has given us sacred responsibility.

Finally, we understand that the family unit is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the inspired declaration “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles solemnly affirmed, “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.”

The story of Eli and his sons reminds us of the serious responsibility parents have to teach their children the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the heartbreaking consequences that can result if parents neglect this sacred obligation.

Notes
3. The term “Belial” is also used to describe those who practice and/or promote such things as false religious practices (Deuteronomy 13:12–15), sexual immorality (Judges 19:22–25), opposition to the Lord’s anointed servants (1 Samuel 10:24–27; 2 Samuel 20:1–2), generally rude and unruly behavior (1 Samuel 25:14–26), or giving false testimony (1 Kings 21:9–14).
6. Compare further the poor examples of Nephite husbands and fathers during the time of Jacob (Jacob 2:35, 3:10) and of Church members during the time of Alma the Younger (Alma 4:11).
7. Priests were “called of God” (Hebrews 5:1–4). As representatives of the people and of the Lord, they were anointed, consecrated, and sanctified (Exodus 28:41; 29:33, 44) to offer sacrifices at the temple (Numbers 18:1–7; Deuteronomy 18:1–5) and to teach the children of Israel (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 33:10). As “holy” and “chosen” servants, they were the Lord’s—or “his” (Numbers 16:5). See also Bible Dictionary, 753–54.
8. See also D&C 93:40–44; Jacob 2:35, 3:10.
13. Helpful ideas and suggestions for parents are available at the Church’s official website (www.lds.org) through the link of “Family Resources.”

"Through the Restoration in these latter days we do have the fullness of the Savior's gospel, and the standard of progress we must apply is not to be found in comparisons to the perverse and misguided patterns and practices of the world."

Inaugural response at Ricks College (now BYU—Idaho), 27 February 1998.

BYU—Idaho photo by Michael Lewis
I am honored and humbled by the charge and responsibility I have received today from the President of the Church. The invitation from the Brethren to become the fourteenth president of Ricks College was unexpected—and has been a great blessing in my life and for our family. One does not aspire to or apply for a position such as this. My only qualifications for this sacred stewardship are a willingness to work and a desire to learn. President Hinckley, I accept your charge and pledge to work with all of my heart, might, mind, and strength to achieve the goals you have outlined. I appreciate and will strive to be worthy of the trust the Brethren and the Board of Trustees have expressed in me and our family through this invitation to serve. This is the most exciting and overwhelming invitation I have ever received.

Not only was the invitation to serve as the president of Ricks College unexpected for our family, it was surprising to some people who have known me. I recently received an interesting e-mail message from the daughter of one of my Primary teachers. Back in the days when I attended Primary, it was held once a week in the afternoon following school. I remember riding every week with a number of my friends to Primary with Sister Gladys Cheney, our teacher. Apparently I have forgotten much of what transpired during those weekly trips to Primary. The e-mail message I received from Sister Cheney’s daughter included the following statement: “My mom really wanted to write you a letter because she has been following your life’s progress through the years in the Church News. She is so proud of you and wanted to let you know that, but did not quite know where to begin. I told her I would write you a quick letter, and that was fine with her. She chuckles every time she thinks of those rides to Primary and how well you’ve turned out.”

Clearly, the invitation to serve at Ricks surprised the one Primary teacher who undoubtedly knew me the best! Brothers and sisters, I have been taught since my youth to “follow the prophet.” Never in my wildest imagination, however, did I ever think I would speak in the same meeting with and literally “follow the prophet” as I have been assigned to do today. I pray for and invite the Holy Ghost to be with us during our time together, that I may appropriately express the feelings of my heart and that we may understand each other and be edified on this special occasion.

In the few minutes I have to speak with you today, I would like to achieve two major objectives: (1) to express appreciation to some very special people and (2) to speak about the future of Ricks College.

I would like to begin by expressing appreciation to my wife Susan. Next month Sister Bednar and I will have been married for twenty-three years. We have now reached the point in our lives where we have been married longer than we were single. Other than my time in the mission field in Southern Germany, I really do not remember very much about what it was like to live without her.

Susan is a virtuous woman and a righteous mother. Purity and goodness are reflected in her countenance. Indeed, she is receiving His image in her countenance (Alma 5:14). I love her and appreciate the complementary influence she is in my life. I thank her for the woman she is and the lessons she has taught me. All that is good in my life has come because of and with her.

In our marriage we have been blessed with three sons: Eric will soon be twenty-two, Mike is about to turn twenty, and in a few weeks Jeff will be sixteen. No mom and dad could be more pleased than we are with these precious sons. Susan and I have become
one through these young men, and we have learned much in the process of attempting to teach and rear them. They are wonderful boys—certainly not perfect boys, but they are very good boys.

Let me share with you just one quick story about our sons. We lived for many years in Fayetteville, Arkansas, while I was employed as a business professor at the University of Arkansas. We were and still are avid Arkansas Razorback basketball fans. We had season tickets and enjoyed attending almost every home game. A few years ago the featured game of the season, No. 1 UNLV versus No. 2 Arkansas, was scheduled to be played on a Sunday afternoon. We had a long-standing tradition in our family of not participating in little league, soccer, basketball, or other sports events on Sunday, nor did we attend or watch sports on Sunday. In our family council meeting the week before the game, Susan and I asked Eric, Mike, and Jeff what they thought we should do with our tickets. The unanimous decision we reached was to sell the priceless tickets to one of our neighbors. I will never forget Mike saying to me immediately after the closing prayer in our family council, “Dad, hurry up and sell those tickets before I change my mind!” They really are very good boys.

Eric and Jeff are present with us today. Mike is serving as a missionary in Bolivia. We are confident that he is aware of and participating in the special spirit of this occasion. I express appreciation to my mom and dad, both of whom are deceased. I am thankful for their sacrifices in my behalf, and I hope they are aware of the events of this day.

I also am thankful for Sue’s parents, Kay and Nyla Robinson. I love them as I love my own parents and appreciate their love and support.

Finally, I am thankful for many other relatives, friends, and colleagues, too numerous to mention, who have influenced me in positive ways. I appreciate the contribution each of you has made to my life.

Now I would like to spend a few minutes visiting with you about the future of Ricks College. As we prepare for and move into the next century, we at Ricks College are embarking upon a voyage that will be filled with high adventure. Sweeping changes are occurring around and along our “charted course,”21 both in our sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and in the world of education. The rapid growth of the Church throughout the world will require us to be ever better stewards of the sacred resources and support we receive. And the changes presently taking place in institutions of higher education around the world are nothing short of revolutionary. New technologies, innovative pedagogies, and more sophisticated students are challenging us to rethink and reevaluate many of our most fundamental assumptions about the processes of learning and teaching.

These and many other changes will cause us to move out of our established “comfort zones” and confront a series of apparent contradictions and paradoxes. For example, it will be necessary for us at Ricks College to remain the same even as we change. The “Spirit of Ricks,” the unique combination of spirituality and supportiveness that characterizes the interaction among students, faculty, and staff on this campus, must be preserved and enhanced—even in the midst of dramatic changes in how we accomplish the work of education.

It will be necessary for us at Ricks College to serve ever better the thousands of students we have on campus while simultaneously reaching out to bless the lives of tens of thousands of young Latter-day Saints throughout the world. We have an ever increasing
responsibility to use the resources of this great campus to assist in the building of the kingdom of God in all of the world.

It will be necessary for us at Ricks College to *move forward rapidly even as we pause to thoroughly assess and evaluate our existing programs and our present use of physical space*. The swift currents of change along our route will not cease temporarily for us to make unobstructed and safe mid-course corrections. Rather, as we navigate, we must remain fixed upon the instruction we receive from the Board and our own specific mission statement to guide us through turbulent waters.

Along our charted course we will undoubtedly encounter many potential perils and unseen obstacles. It is a wonderful feeling of security and safety to know that we are under the leadership of a pilot who knows the course the ship is sailing. William R. Sloan, president of the Northwestern States Mission, shared the following observations and experience in general conference many years ago:

> I have rejoiced in my acquaintance with the leadership of this Church. I am thrilled beyond all words of expression for this acquaintance with them and bear witness that they are men of integrity and men of God.

> Last summer it was our pleasure to visit Alaska. We took the inland route, and you who have enjoyed that wonderful voyage know that the channels you go through, in many cases, are very narrow. One evening the pilot invited Sister Sloan and myself into the pilot room. As we sailed along the narrow channel he pointed out to us and said, “I want you people to note that just on the opposite side, on the right side of the boat [and the boat was moving very slowly] a few feet underneath the water, about eight or ten feet from the vessel, there is a great ledge of rock. Many a ship has struck the same and been sunk.”

> So it is an inspiration to know in this Church that God is at the helm, and that his servants are inspired, directed and led by his influence.

I testify that as we follow the direction of our inspired Board of Trustees, we will steer clear of the dangers, both seen and unseen, that could impede our progress towards our desired spiritual and educational destinations.

The mission of Ricks College is clear and unchanging. Our efforts and resources are aimed at educating the whole man and woman, to focus upon the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical development of every student who studies on this campus. Specifically, the mission of Ricks College is to (1) build testimonies of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and encourage living its principles, (2) provide a quality education for students of diverse interests and abilities, (3) prepare students for further education and employment, and for their roles as citizens and parents, and (4) maintain a wholesome academic, cultural, social and spiritual environment.

Elder John A. Widtsoe described the importance of this kind of comprehensive approach to education: “Let me say again, that to be merely mentally trained is to be only partly trained. The man whose mind only has been trained may be likened to the ship with great engines and a huge propeller, ready to drive the ship forward, but without rudder, chart, compass, or definite destination. When we add to the man, so trained, spiritual training, then it is as if we add to the ship, with its wonderful machinery, a compass, a chart, a rudder, and a dependable intelligence which controls the whole machinery, above and
below deck, so that the vessel may reach a safe haven, according to a definite purpose."

Let me provide one additional example of how important it is to maintain a clear focus upon the holistic education of young men and women. As I quote the following statement, I invite you to surmise the institution being referred to: “Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. . . . Everyone shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day, that he shall be ready to give such an account of his proficiency therein, both in theoretical observations of the language, and logic, and in practical and spiritual truths, as his tutor shall require, according to his ability; seeing the entrance of the word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple.”

This statement is found in a book entitled *The Founding of Harvard College* and describes many of the basic principles upon which that great institution was founded. Clearly for us at Ricks College, maintaining a clear focus upon our central mission will be essential as we sail into the uncertain waters of a new century.

For the past several months I have been intrigued by and diligently studying the account in the Book of Mormon of Lehi’s family and their travels in the wilderness. As they reached the place called Bountiful, which was located near the sea, Nephi was commanded by the Lord to “construct a ship, after the manner which I shall show thee, that I may carry thy people across the waters” (1 Nephi 17:8). Brothers and sisters, the more I reflect upon this verse, the more interesting it becomes to me. Nephi was not a sailor. He had been reared in Jerusalem, an inland city, rather than along the borders of the Mediterranean Sea. It seems unlikely that he knew much about or had experience with the tools and skills necessary to build a ship. He may not have ever previously seen an ocean-going vessel. In essence, then, *Nephi was commanded and instructed to build something he had never built before in order to go someplace he had never been before.* May I suggest that Nephi’s experience in building that ship is a model for us at Ricks College as we prepare for and move into the next century. We, too, must build something we have never built before in order to go someplace we have never been before.

Nephi further describes the process of constructing the ship: “And we did work timbers of curious workmanship. And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship” (1 Nephi 18:1–2; emphasis added).

Two points stand out in my mind about these verses. First, the manner of workmanship was curious. It is interesting that the phrase “curious workmanship” is used five times in the Book of Mormon: once in the testimony of the eight witnesses, twice in relation to the Liahona, once in relation to the productivity of a righteous and prosperous people, and in the verse I have just quoted in relation to the manner whereby Nephi would build the ship. The word *curious* in these contexts does not mean strange or weird or odd. Rather, it connotes careful, skilled, expert, and deliberate. Clearly the concept of “curious workmanship” sets a standard for us at Ricks College as we move forward to meet the challenges before us.

Second, the phrase “time to time” suggests to me that Nephi perhaps did not receive everything he needed to know about shipbuilding as he began his task. Apparently he received the necessary knowledge line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and
there a little as it was needed. This may be one of the first recorded instances of a Just-In-Time learning process.

Now please note with me the description Nephi provides in verse 4 of Chapter 18: “And it came to pass that after I had finished the ship, according to the word of the Lord, my brethren beheld that it was good, and that the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine; wherefore, they did humble themselves again before the Lord” (1 Nephi 18:4; emphasis added).

Even Nephi’s brothers, who initially opposed the idea of constructing the ship and who were reluctant to help, ultimately had to acknowledge the “goodness” of the finished product.

I know, brothers and sisters, that we will be guided and directed by Him whose school this is as we respond to the challenge to build an educational ship of curious workmanship. As we at Ricks College construct our ship and travel according to the coordinates set by the Board and identified in our mission statement, Ricks College will become increasingly different from and distinctive among other institutions of higher education. Surely, we must build this ship after the manner which the Lord will show unto us and not after the manner of men. Our standards and practices indeed will be unique, and we will be “set apart” from the world.

I anticipate that we will be the focus of both flattery from the prominent and scorn from the many mocking voices originating in the “great and spacious building,” which Nephi described as the pride of the world. Those taunting voices will counsel us to “chill out,” “loosen up,” “stop being so old-fashioned,” and to “get in step with the ’90s.” Some may mistakenly believe that we can chart our future course by comparing ourselves to the patterns and practices of the world. Certainly, we might rationalize, we are doing well because our standards are so much different from those generally found in the world. Brothers and sisters, please do not misunderstand the point I am attempting to make.

There is much in our world that is lovely, praiseworthy, and of good report. And there are many professionals, craftspeople, and artists who greatly bless and enrich our lives through their diligence and intelligence. The Church and its related institutions do not have a monopoly on goodness. However, through the Restoration in these latter days we do have the fullness of the Savior’s gospel, and the standard of progress we must apply is not to be found in comparisons to the perverse and misguided patterns and practices of the world. If it were, then comparing ourselves to the world would permit us to feel safe and secure while slipping ever deeper and deeper into what Nephi described as the river of filthiness. Rather, the standards come from and are established by the Lord. They do not change or vary, and they will be increasingly distinctive and, some will say, outdated in an ever-more-secularized and hedonistic world. May I suggest that those scornful voices will be one of the surest indicators that we are following precisely the proper coordinates on our voyage. The very fact that the world may say we should “loosen up” will be a confirmation that we are following the correct course.

Thus far I have highlighted the challenges and changes before us, and the fixed points of prophetic vision and a clear understanding of our mission that will provide direction for us during this voyage. I would now like to focus upon several fundamental principles that should be at the heart of all we are and do at Ricks College. Our planning and decisions and programs and activities should be focused upon and give emphasis to these basic principles.
**1. True teaching is done by and with the Holy Ghost.**

All truth, spiritual as well as secular, is manifested through the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a revelator, a teacher, a comforter, and a sanctifier. To create an environment where the Holy Ghost can teach, everything done at Ricks College must be in harmony with the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. As Elder Parley P. Pratt explained concerning the man or woman who is taught by the Holy Ghost: “His mind is quickened, his intellectual faculties are aroused to intense activity. He is, as it were, illuminated. He learns more of divine truth in a few days than he could have learned in a lifetime in the best merely human institutions in the world.”255 And as President Brigham Young taught: “It [the Holy Ghost] shows them things past, present, and to come. It opens the vision of the mind, unlocks the treasures of wisdom, and they begin to understand the things of God. . . . They comprehend themselves and the great object of their existence.”26

**2. Every person at Ricks College is a teacher.**

Everyone at Ricks College—faculty, staff, students, ecclesiastical leaders, and so forth—has a responsibility to impact others for good. Each interaction with a student or colleague is a potential teaching and learning opportunity. Let me provide two examples of what I mean by this principle.

My first example of this principle is the faculty of Ricks College. We presently have 353 full-time teaching faculty on this campus. These dedicated teachers have provided a total of 5,209 years of service to the youth of the Church at Ricks College. Consider the impact for good of those years of faithful service in the lives of thousands, tens of thousands, and even millions of individuals and families throughout the world. The talents of these teachers easily would have enabled them to hold positions of prominence, prestige, and financial reward far beyond anything they have experienced at Ricks College. Yet they have chosen to forego those opportunities to live and work in Rexburg, Idaho, and serve the young people of the Church. These competent and dedicated faculty members could be elsewhere but love to teach and work and serve at Ricks College.

My second example highlights how nonfaculty employees at Ricks College also serve as teachers. I recently was assigned to preside at the Brigham City Utah West Stake conference. The stake president, Michael Dustin, is a graduate of Ricks College. President Dustin came to Ricks College in 1968 with no place to live and not knowing what to expect of college or of himself. President Dustin found a job on campus and was assigned to shovel snow and clean around the girls dorms. He was hired and supervised by Brother DaVawn Beattie. Today Brother Beattie is the supervisor of Grounds and the Motor Pool at Ricks College. It was obvious as I talked with President Dustin that he had a great regard and love for Brother Beattie. In fact, President Dustin named his youngest son Beattie Dustin as a tribute to DaVawn.

I asked President Dustin what DaVawn had done to have such a profound impact on his life and why he would name his son after him. He gave the following answers:

DaVawn gave me direction in my life and helped me learn how to implement into my everyday life the things I was learning in my classes. He helped strengthen my testimony. He built us up and told us we were doing a good job. He was a friend and someone I could talk to.
When I was unsure about continuing in school, he taught me this principle: If you get an education, you can more effectively serve the Lord. That principle changed my life, and I have since taught it to many other adults and young people.

DaVawn is but one example of the hundreds of wonderful employees at Ricks College who also serve and bless students. Brother Beattie, you may not have attended college or received a degree; but in the curriculum of the eternities, you indeed have earned a Ph.D. You have not been assigned to be a classroom teacher at Ricks; however, in the things that matter most, you are an example of the first-class teaching that takes place at this college. Every person at Ricks College is a teacher.

3. The most effective teaching and learning experiences occur “one by one.”

Perhaps the defining characteristic of the Savior’s ministry was His ability to teach “one by one.” For example, following His resurrection, He visited the Nephites on the American continent. He invited the 2,500 gathered near the temple in the Land of Bountiful to come forward “one by one” to feel the prints in His hands and feet and to thrust their hands into His side (3 Nephi 11). In one of the most moving stories in all of holy writ, He blessed the children “one by one” (3 Nephi 17). He touched and tutored His Nephite disciples “one by one” (3 Nephi 18; 3 Nephi 28). This same principle manifests itself today in the worldwide labors of proclaiming the gospel, which is carried out “one by one,” and of redeeming the dead, as saving ordinances are provided “one by one.”

Ricks College is uniquely positioned as an institution of higher education to show and lead the way in applying the principle of “one by one.” This college is legendary for the individualized and nurturing attention given to students by the faculty and staff. Some people on campus candidly have shared with me their concerns that the growth in our student body and technological changes may inhibit our ability to provide “one by one” support in the future. Let me now emphasize an important point just as forcefully as I can. New technologies and innovative pedagogies at Ricks College cannot and will not replace the special powers of people in the processes of learning and teaching. Technology is not an educational panacea. In fact, some supposed technological advances seem to create as many, if not more, problems than they solve. However, technology can and should play a supporting and complementing role in our work of educating. If we are wise, we will learn to use technology and the other advancements at our disposal to greatly enhance both the opportunities for and effectiveness of our “one by one” teaching. I believe this principle in particular will distinguish us from other institutions of higher education and will in large measure define our educational ship of curious workmanship. We at Ricks College will be both high-tech and high-touch.

4. More students must be blessed.

All worthy youth of the Church deserve a Ricks College experience, yet an increasingly smaller percentage of them will ever have that opportunity. As I indicated earlier in my remarks, it will be necessary for us at Ricks College to serve ever better the thousands of students we have on campus while simultaneously reaching out to bless the lives of tens of thousands of young Latter-day Saints throughout the world. We must learn how to assist and bless institute students and other LDS youth in Rhode Island and Rome while effectively serving our students on campus in Rexburg.

5. Righteous sociality (D&C 130:2) is essential to individual development.
The word *sociality* as used in the scriptures refers to more than the sociability and socialness we experience in everyday living. Sociality implies an enduring bond of love and brotherhood and sisterhood. In fact, sociality as described in the scriptures specifically refers to the organization of eternal families. The sweet and tender associations we enjoy “here and now” are but a foreshadowing of the eternal relationships that will endure “there and then” beyond the grave.

The unique environment of Ricks College exists, in part, because of the righteous endeavors of both students and employees. Participation in all types of wholesome activities—spiritual, academic, social, and cultural—promotes the positive interactions that bring about a righteous sociality capable of enduring throughout eternity.

**6. Service provides opportunities for growth.**

Only those individuals who lose themselves in meaningful service to others can ever discover who they really are. True service both blesses the one being served and provides unparalleled opportunities for personal growth and development to the one doing the serving. As students and staff fulfill callings in their respective wards and stakes, follow through with classroom, club, and other assignments, and carry out responsibilities in their homes, apartments, or elsewhere, they grow in character and in their commitment to become more like the Savior.

**7. A Ricks College experience must be affordable for students and families.**

The efforts to provide unique teaching and learning experiences at Ricks College are of no avail if only an elite group, academically and economically, can ever come here. The cost of a Ricks experience must be kept within reasonable and affordable limits. I believe that abiding by these principles will enable us to both preserve and enhance the spirit of Ricks College as we progress on our voyage of high adventure in a sea of rapid change.

Brothers and sisters, you and I have come here today primarily to be in the presence of and receive counsel from the prophet of the Lord. We have also assembled to celebrate Ricks College and its influence for good. An inauguration ceremony is not about the particular person who occupies the office of president. Rather, the ceremony is a celebration of the institution and its wonderful people. I am grateful to be here with you today and to share in this historic and memorable occasion.

As I now conclude, I would like to pay tribute to the people who make Ricks College what it is. Your faithfulness, dedication, and loyalty are a great source of inspiration to me. You have taught me much in the short time I have been with you. Elder Orson F. Whitney related the following relevant experience:

> A captain of a ship in a storm was approached and asked if there was any danger. The tempests had been beating upon the vessel for days; she had been driven out of her course; the waves were rolling mountain high; the appearance of things was perilous, and the passengers were fearful.
> 
> “Captain, is there danger?” asked one. The Captain smiled reassuringly, and replied, “Not one particle, so long as conditions remain as they now are. I have been down below; I have examined the machinery; every wheel is moving as it was ordained to move; every pin is in its place; every man is at his post; everything is working well, and as long as this continues, there is no danger whatever; but,” he added, ”if a single wheel refused to
move, if a single pin were out of place, if a man were to rebel and mutiny, there would be danger that we might all go to the bottom of the sea.”

I, too, have been “down below and examined the machinery” of this great college during the past eight months. I am not suggesting that we are perfect, nor do I believe that every responsibility and job on this campus will always be executed exactly as it is today. Indeed, we have much room for continuing improvement. But the illustration by Elder Whitney is an appropriate model for how Ricks College will move forward majestically through the uncertainties that lie before us. The machinery and pins that must remain as they now are at Ricks College include our faithfulness to the Savior and His teachings, our loyalty to the Brethren, and our willingness to do more than is required or expected in serving the young people of the Church. As we progress on our voyage, there is no danger for Ricks College whatsoever as long as we preserve and enhance these essential conditions. Again quoting Elder Whitney: “So long as we serve God, and are one with each other, the storms that come from without and spend their fury upon us, pass harmlessly over; they only have the effect of driving us together, making us feel for one another, love one another, and strengthen one another.”

May I now conclude by sharing with you my possession of greatest worth—my testimony that God lives, my knowledge that Jesus is the Christ and that the fulness of the gospel has been restored to the earth in these latter days. I testify and witness that there are living prophets and apostles on the earth today. These things I know. Of these things I testify, and do so in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes
8. Ibid.

Jack L. Rushton

Teaching with Disabilities

Jack L. Rushton

Jack L. Rushton is a retired Church Educational System employee who has been a quadriplegic since 1989. Since the
accident that paralyzed him, he has taught the Gospel Doctrine class in his ward and has participated in Know Your Religion and in part-time institute classes.  

My love for teaching was born as a young missionary serving in the Central American Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1958 through 1961. As a missionary, I was overwhelmed with how the gospel changed the lives of the humble Central American people I taught during those two and a half years. After they were baptized and continued to be faithful, the entire quality of their lives improved dramatically. It came to me then that there would never be anything more important than being a teacher of the gospel.

Upon completing my mission, I returned to Brigham Young University. It was at BYU that I learned about the seminary program in the Church. Growing up in a small mining town in eastern Nevada, I had never attended seminary and did not know that such a program existed. I took the classes necessary to prepare myself for a full-time seminary teaching position.

The first seminary class I ever attended was at Pleasant Grove High School. I sat in the back of the room observing the full-time teacher instructing a classroom full of teenagers. By the end of that class, I knew I wanted to be a seminary teacher. As I did my student teaching in that same classroom, the desire to teach teenagers the scriptures intensified each day. Fortunately, a few months before graduating from BYU, I was hired to teach seminary at Bonneville High School in Ogden, Utah.

For the next twenty-five years, I experienced the joy of teaching the youth, both in seminary and in institute classes. For those twenty-five years, I always marveled that a teacher could actually be paid for doing something so wonderful and rewarding.

In August of 1989, I was serving as a stake president and as a teaching support consultant and director of preservice training in the California South Area of the Church Educational System. While I was waiting for the annual Church Educational System symposium to begin in Provo, Utah, our family accepted a friend’s offer to use his beach-front apartment at Laguna Beach, California, for a week. The second day we were there, I was body surfing in the ocean with my sixteen-year-old son and his friend. It was a beautiful, warm summer day at the beach, and the waves were not the least bit threatening.

My son and I decided we would take one more wave and then call it a day. I caught the wave perfectly and thought I would ride it all the way to the shore. To this day, I am not sure what happened next, but I hit my head on a rock or sandbar or something in the surf.

The moment I hit my head, I knew I was paralyzed. I couldn’t move my arms or legs, and I can still remember the panic I felt before I blacked out.

My son and his friend miraculously pulled me through the waves to shore, where lifeguards and paramedics kept me alive. I woke up two hours later surrounded by doctors and nurses. When I opened my eyes, the nurse standing directly above my head said, “Mr. Rushton, you have had a serious accident. If you can understand what I am saying, blink your eyes once.” I knew what she was saying and blinked my eyes.

That was the beginning of a new life for me. My family and I were told that I would never again speak, breathe on my own, move any part of my body, or eat on my own. We were further informed that I more than likely would have to live in a care facility for the rest of my life—however long that might be. To say we were devastated does not even begin to describe our feelings of anguish.
As I lay in the trauma center alone at night, I could not fully process what the doctors had told me. How would I take care of my family? How would my wife deal with these circumstances? What impact would the accident have on my children? How could I live without being able to move any part of my body? How could I possibly live that way? If I could not speak, then I could not teach. If I could not teach and be of service, why keep on living? Within two weeks, however, I was transferred to a rehabilitation hospital and was soon speaking through a “cuffless trach,” slowly learning to eat, and mastering use of a “sip-and-puff” power wheelchair.

I recently entered my thirteenth year of life as a quadriplegic on a respirator. I am paralyzed from the neck down, and the only feeling I have in any part of my body is in my face and on the top of my head. The doctors were partially right in their diagnosis: I do not have any movement in any part of my body, and I cannot breathe without the aid of a respirator.

One great truth I have learned through these thirteen years, however, is that we must not let our circumstances control our behavior and keep us from achieving our true potential. This is something I struggled with as I tried to adapt to my new set of circumstances. I was depressed and felt my life was not worth much to me or to anybody else. At that bleak time, a good friend, a physical therapist, came to me and said, “Jack, what you must do is accept the circumstances over which you have no control and then maximize and develop to the highest possible degree every talent and ability you have left.”

I was ready for his advice, but the thought occurred to me, “What talents and abilities do I have to develop in my situation as a quadriplegic who is on a respirator and who cannot move or breathe?” I did not realize at the time that the Lord had already taken into account my limitations and would provide opportunities for me to serve and to grow.

Shortly after this conversation, the stake president came to our home eight months after my accident and called me to be the patriarch of our stake. “A paralyzed patriarch,” I thought. “How could it be?”

A week or so later, a good friend in CES asked me to be the keynote speaker at our stake seminary graduation. I flatly refused, knowing I could not possibly prepare or deliver a talk in my condition. He said, “Fine, but I’m going to have your name printed on the program as the speaker. Whether you show up or not is up to you.” Needless to say, I did show up—after two weeks of agony trying to prepare a simple talk. And I delivered the address. Later, the bishop called me to be the Gospel Doctrine teacher in our ward, a calling in which I have served for nine consecutive years. Opportunities to teach courses in institute followed, and I hesitatingly accepted.

Soon after these opportunities began coming to me, my wife and I were eating at a Chinese restaurant with some friends. When the fortune cookies were brought out, my wife opened mine and read, “Your talents are still intact. Use them!” It seemed that every time I was willing to go to the edge of the light, and at times even beyond, the Lord magnified my talents and abilities and helped me do things I felt exceeded my capabilities—given my unique circumstances.

Through all these events, I have discovered some interesting things about teaching. I tell my students that I am the most laid-back teacher in the Church. I don’t write on the board; I don’t use visual aids to speak of; because I can’t turn my head, it’s difficult to maintain good eye contact with my students; and I can’t move about the classroom.
enthusiastically as I did before my accident. However, we still seem to have great experiences in the classroom. I attribute that outcome to be the fundamental truth regarding teaching in the Church as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants: “And again, the elders, priests and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel. And they shall observe the covenants and church articles to do them, and these shall be their teachings, as they shall be directed by the Spirit. And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:12–14).

Teaching is about having the Spirit and relying on the principles of the gospel as found in the scriptures. I will always remember the time while I was serving as a bishop that I called a young married man to teach the priests quorum. He had a severe stuttering problem, and I worried how the young priests would respond to him. I knew he had a deep and abiding testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel as well as a profound knowledge of the scriptures. Would this knowledge and testimony, I wondered, compensate for his communication challenges? I reasoned that they would. Sure enough, the young men never once ridiculed him or thought less of him because of his disability. They loved his lessons and were very patient as he struggled with his words from time to time. As he bore his testimony at the conclusion of each class period, anyone listening could sense the impact he was having on the hearts of those young priests.

Disabilities are as varied as the personalities of individual teachers. There are the obvious physical disabilities like mine or like the young man with the stuttering problem, but other things in life can also be perceived as disabilities. As a bishop, I also called a young widow to be our Young Women’s president. She felt her disability was that she had no husband, but she loved the girls and taught them powerfully from the scriptures and through her own example. Through her teaching and example, many girls in our ward were influenced to further their education and marry in the temple.

As a gospel teacher with a disability, I suggest everyone view disabilities in a broad, comprehensive context. All of us have challenges, weaknesses, private fears, etc. Some of these involve physical disabilities; some do not. There are seminary and institute teachers throughout the Church who may feel they have disabilities. Maybe their home life is not perfect. Perhaps they have a wayward child who is of great concern to them. Perhaps their physical appearance is a concern to them. A single sister or single mother may at times feel that her marital status is a disability for her as a CES teacher. The fact of the matter is that there are no perfect teachers. Except for Jesus Christ, there never have been, nor will there ever be.

Thankfully, most of us can teach better than we think we can regardless of our circumstances. In spite of our weaknesses, if we truly love our students and teach the scriptures by the Spirit, the Lord will magnify us and help us be successful in the classroom. As the Lord said to Moroni, “And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).
The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest teachers and missionaries the world has ever known. He too had a disability that he described to the Corinthians: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Corinthians 12:7). I suppose that Paul’s thorn in the flesh, rather than being a hindrance, enabled him to be the powerful teacher he was.

Through my own disability, I have come to appreciate the words of Matthew Arnold, the great English literary critic and writer. On one occasion, he said, “All art gains freedom through discipline.” I have always believed that teaching is an art.

Since my accident, I have had to discipline myself more than at any other time in my life. Because I do not have the use of my arms or hands, I do all my preparation on my computer, using voice-recognition software. By means of the Church Web site, GospeLink 2001, and various Internet sites, I have a depth of resources available to me. I have learned I must be very selective in what I choose to use, however. When I speak or teach, I cannot thumb through the scriptures, read long passages, or flip through copious notes. My wife sits by my side with the scriptures and a few notes on a stand where I can see them. As needed, she turns the pages of the scriptures for me to the selected reference. However, for the most part, what I teach must be in my head and in my heart, or I am ineffective. When I have prepared well and have disciplined myself sufficiently, I have freedom in my teaching, and wonderful, spontaneous things take place in the classroom.

I have learned to utilize the scriptures effectively in my teaching. As my students and I read and discuss the scriptures together, I feel the Spirit present in the room. Much of my preparation time is spent in thinking of good questions that will elicit discussion and involvement in the scriptures. I have to admit the fact that in many ways, I feel I am a better teacher as a quadriplegic on a respirator than I was when I was able-bodied. In the end, however, it is the discipline, the Spirit, and my use of the scriptures as the ultimate lesson manual that make the difference.

I am convinced that regardless of what disabilities we may have, if we are willing to pay the price of preparation and implement true principles of teaching in the classroom, we can be successful. In fact, our disabilities may prove to be our greatest assets.

Note


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The Soteriological Problem of Evil

Robert L. Millet

Robert L. Millet is Professor of Ancient Scripture and former Dean of Religious Education at BYU.

One of the distinctive beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is associated with baptism for the dead, a practice derived from the concept that living individuals may perform vicarious saving labors in behalf of those who have never had the opportunity to receive them. The Prophet Joseph Smith initiated this most unusual rite during the Nauvoo period of Church history—a time when there were no temple facilities
in which the Saints could perform the baptisms. As Latter-day Saints, perhaps we do not fully appreciate the manner in which this profound doctrine addresses one of the most perplexing issues in the religious world—particularly the Christian world.

More often than not, baptism for the dead is considered an unnecessary, ill-advised, or even contemptible practice by traditional Christians. This is a very current issue. In the 10 August 1998 issue of Christianity Today, a reader inquired: “I’ve heard Mormons criticized for getting ‘baptized for the dead,’ but in 1 Corinthians 15:29 [New International Version], Paul writes: ‘Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?’ Did Jews or early Christians practice this? Why do we believe it’s wrong to practice it today?”

Professor D. A. Carson, a respected Evangelical biblical scholar, responded briefly with familiar arguments against the practice: (1) The doctrine is not taught in the Book of Mormon; (2) It is mentioned in only one place in the Bible; (3) Paul uses the word they (rather than we) in referring to the practice, thus implying that Paul was not associated with the practice; and (4) “There is no good evidence for vicarious baptism anywhere in the New Testament or among the earliest apostolic fathers. . . . If the practice existed at all, it may have been tied to a few people or special cases—for example, when a relative died after trusting the gospel but before being baptized. We really do not know.”

In a Christian world where people are not persuaded that baptism in the flesh is necessary for entrance into the Lord’s Church and thus essential to salvation (or where baptism is viewed as an extraneous and inessential work that somehow undercuts or compromises the saving grace of the Lord), members of the Church of Jesus Christ should not be surprised about some of the reactions we receive.

Statement of the Problem

It is fascinating to allow those not of our faith to state the problem. One Evangelical theologian wrote:

What is the fate of those who die never hearing the gospel of Christ? Are all the “heathen” lost? Is there an opportunity for those who have never heard of Jesus to be saved?

These questions raise one of the most perplexing, provocative and perennial issues facing Christians. It has been considered by philosophers and farmers, Christians and non-Christians. In societies where Christianity has had strong influence, just about everyone has either asked or been asked about the final destiny of those dying without knowledge of the only Savior, Jesus Christ. Far and away, this is the most-asked apologetic question on U.S. college campuses.

During my freshman year at a large state university, several of my friends and I regularly practiced evangelism. On one of those occasions a thoughtful unbeliever asked me, “If Jesus is the only way of salvation, then what about all those who have never heard about him?” At the time I had only been a Christian for a short while and consequently did not have an informed answer to give. Nevertheless, I acknowledged the importance of the question and later asked my pastor about it. He pointed me to some basic texts of Scripture but did not, he said, have any firm opinion on the
matter. In the years since that encounter, I have been asked the same question hundreds of times.

A large proportion of the human race has died without ever hearing the good news of Jesus. It is estimated that in A.D. 100 there were 181 million people, of whom 1 million were Christians. It is also believed there were 60,000 unreached people groups at that time. By the year 1000 there were 270 million people, 50 million of whom were Christians, with 50,000 unreached people groups. In 1989 there were 5.2 billion people, with 1.7 billion Christians and 12,000 unreached people groups. In addition we could think of all those who lived prior to [the birth of Christ] who never heard of the Israelites and God’s covenant with them. Although there is no way of knowing exactly how many people died without ever hearing about Israel or the church, it seems safe to conclude that the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived fall into this category.

In terms of sheer numbers, then, an inquiry into the salvation of the unevangelized is of immense interest. What may be said about the destiny of countless billions who have lived and died apart from any understanding of the divine grace manifested in Jesus?

This issue has been labeled by some as “the soteriological problem of evil.” “The problem of evil” in philosophy and religion may be stated as follows: If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, how can He allow so much pain and suffering in the world? The effort to address the problem of evil and suffering is known as theodicy. Soteriology is the study of salvation; and thus the soteriological problem of evil might be stated simply as follows: If in fact Christ is the only name by which salvation comes (Acts 4:12; Mosiah 3:17) and if, as we have seen, the majority of the human race will go to their graves without ever having heard of Christ in this life, how can God be considered just or merciful?

This is an ancient issue. As early as the fourth century, St. Augustine was confronted by Porphyry, a philosopher who opposed Christianity. Porphyry asked: “If Christ declares himself to be the Way of salvation, the Grace and the Truth, and affirms that in Him alone, and only to souls believing in Him, is the way of return to God, what has become of men who lived in the many centuries before Christ came? . . . What, then, has become of such an innumerable multitude of souls, who were in no wise blameworthy, seeing that He in whom alone saving faith can be exercised had not yet favoured men with His advent?”

**Varied Responses**

Efforts to respond to what is indeed a significant challenge to the Christian faith have been numerous. Some people readily adopt an agnostic position—we simply do not know what God intends to do with the unevangelized. Others tend to believe that those who remain true to the light they have here will somehow be rewarded with greater light, including the gospel itself, in the life to come. In Christendom, these efforts to address the problem tend to fall into four main categories: (1) exclusivism or restrictivism, (2) pluralism or universalism, (3) inclusivism, and (4) divine perseverance or postmortem evangelization.

**Exclusivism**—Exclusivism or restrictivism might be stated as follows: People are saved only if they accept the Lord Jesus Christ in this life. This acceptance includes a worship
and practice of the only true God, a union with Christ through full acceptance of His saving grace and atonement, and a Christian walk that reflects one’s membership in the body of Christ. All others will be damned. There is no chance for salvation or receipt of the gospel hereafter. Those who are Calvinistic, who believe in the election and predestination of souls, would have to conclude that those who do not receive Christ here were not elected, in God’s infinite wisdom and mercy, to do so. Besides, they might add, no one deserves to be saved; we ought to feel intense gratitude for those whom God foreknew and thus foreappointed to salvation. In short, in this view, “our destinies are sealed at death and no opportunity for salvation exists after that.”

*Universalism*—Pluralism or universalism’s response to the soteriological problem of evil is quite simple: There is goodness and morality in religions and religious practices throughout the world. Christians do not have a monopoly on morality and decency. The philosopher John Hick wrote: “Coming to know both ordinary families, and some extraordinary individuals, whose spirituality has been formed by these different traditions and whose lives are lived within them, I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians. They seem on average to be neither better nor worse than are Christians.”

If we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus’ death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation. But if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the “fruit of the Spirit,” then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions—and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent.

Hick thus argues “on Christian grounds” for a doctrine of universal salvation. *Inclusivism*—The third approach to this difficult question is what some have called inclusivism. Justin Martyr, the early Christian apologist (ca. a.d. 100–165), explained that Christ “is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them.” Justin believed that all are partakers of a general revelation through the universal logos, though in Jesus Christ the logos was revealed in its fulness. Likewise, Irenaeus (ca. a.d. 120–205) contended that God has never been completely unknown to any race of people, as the universal Spirit of Christ is inherent in the minds of men and women of all times and places.

For it was not merely for those who believed on Him in the time of Tiberius Caesar that Christ came, nor did the Father exercise His providence for the men only who are now alive, but for all men altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practised justice and piety towards their neighbours, and have earnestly desired to see Christ, and to hear His voice. Wherefore He shall, at His second coming . . . give them a place in His kingdom.
C. S. Lewis wrestled with this question when he explained: “Those who put themselves in [God’s] hands will become perfect, as He is perfect—perfect in love, wisdom, joy, beauty, and immortality. The change will not be completed in this life, for death is an important part of the treatment.” On another occasion, he remarked: “Here is another thing that used to puzzle me. Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life [in Christ] should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.”

Further, Lewis taught that “Christ saves many who do not think they know Him. For He is (dimly) present in the good side of the inferior teachers they follow. In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31 and following), those who are saved do not seem to know that they have served Christ.”

Lewis also said:

There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name: some of them are clergymen. There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. . . . Many of the good Pagans long before Christ’s birth may have been in this position.

Lewis repeatedly taught that Jesus is the only way to salvation. But although “all salvation is through Christ, we need not conclude that He cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted Him in this life. And it should (at least in my judgment) be made clear that we are not pronouncing all other religions to be totally false, but rather saying that in Christ whatever is true in all religions is consummated and perfected.”

In the closing pages of his book, The Great Divorce, C. S. Lewis concludes with a fascinating conversation between himself and George MacDonald, a Scottish Congregational minister whose writings deeply influenced Lewis. MacDonald teaches Lewis concerning Christ’s descent into hell by saying, “There is no spirit in prison to Whom He did not preach.” Lewis then asks, “And some hear him?” “Aye.” Lewis follows up with, “In your own books, . . . you were a Universalist. You talked as if all men would be saved. And St. Paul too.” MacDonald then delivers a rather complex and difficult response in which he seems to be saying that everyone who desires to be saved will be saved. He observes that although Christians speak rather categorically of heaven and hell and formulate straightforward criteria from an eternal perspective for attaining each, far more will be saved than we realize. Lewis did not attempt to correct MacDonald’s doctrine for the reader.

In short, while inclusivists acknowledge that salvation is in Christ alone, they also note that God is working through His Spirit to bring people to that higher light we know as the gospel of Jesus Christ. Favorite passages of scripture for this group are Titus 2:11 (“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men”) and 1 Timothy 2:3–4 (“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men
to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”). Scriptural illustrations of those who obviously exercised faith but were outside the purview of a traditional Christian reception of the gospel include people mentioned in Hebrews 11 such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Melchizedek, and Jethro (those called “holy pagans” by Clark Pinnock); premessianic Jews like Abraham; and faithful Gentiles like Cornelius. From this perspective, “God saves people only because of the work of Christ, but people may be saved even if they do not know about Christ. God grants them salvation if they exercise faith in God as revealed to them through creation and providence.” Further, “According to the inclusivist view, the Father reaches out to the unevangelized through both the Son and the Spirit via general revelation, conscience and human culture. God does not leave himself without witness to any people. Salvation for the unevangelized is made possible only by the redemptive work of Jesus, but God applies that work even to those who are ignorant of the atonement. God does this if people respond in trusting faith to the revelation they have.”

Postmortem Evangelism—A fourth position taken by Christians in regard to the soteriological problem of evil is what has been called future probation, second probation, eschatological evangelism, divine perseverance, and postmortem evangelism. According to this view, those who die without a knowledge of the gospel are not damned; they have an opportunity to receive the truth in the world to come. “God is resolute,” one advocate of this position has pointed out, “never giving up on getting the Word out. In this world God will give us power to spread the gospel far and wide. But the Word will also be declared to those we can’t reach, even if it takes an eternity.” Moreover, “God’s love is patient and persistent. It outlasts us . . . For the final victory of this powerful patience, however, we must await the end of the story. Only then will the kingdom come—the resurrection of the dead, the return of Christ, final judgment and everlasting life. In the end, God will settle accounts, vindicate the sufferer and validate the divine purposes.”

Donald Bloesch, a respected Evangelical, explained:

We do not wish to build fences around God’s grace, . . . and we do not preclude the possibility that some in hell might finally be translated into heaven. The gates of the holy city are depicted as being open day and night (Isaiah 60:11; Revelation 21:25), and this means that access to the throne of grace is possible continuously. The gates of hell are locked, but they are locked only from within. C. S. Lewis has suggested in The Great Divorce that where there is a supposed transition from hell to heaven the person was never really in hell but only in purgatory. This, of course, is interesting speculation and may be close to the truth. Yet we must maintain a reverent agnosticism concerning the workings of God’s grace which are not revealed in Holy Scripture. We can affirm salvation on the other side of the grave, since this has scriptural warrant.

Favorite passages of scripture for this group are 1 Peter 3:18–20 and 1 Peter 4:6, which refer to Christ teaching the gospel in the postmortal world; John 5:25, in which Jesus states that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and Ephesians 4:8–9, which speaks of Christ descending to the “lower parts of the earth.” One critic of the doctrine of postmortem evangelism declared that a “reading of 1 Peter 4:6 is neither the only nor even the most plausible interpretation. Wise Christians do not base any important
doctrine—especially one that is controversial and that might also contain heretical implications—on one single, highly debatable passage of Scripture. If this approach were applied by PME [postmortem evangelism] advocates to 1 Corinthians 15:29, it would lead Christians to follow a policy of baptizing living people as proxies for the unbaptized dead.50

Indeed, it just might!

After having quoted 1 Corinthians 15:28, Richard John Neuhaus, a noted Roman Catholic thinker, observed: “The Corinthians passage just quoted is immediately followed by St. Paul’s mysterious remark about baptism for the dead. ‘Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?’ [New Revised Standard Version, 1 Corinthians 15:29] Why indeed. Mormons baptize for the dead today, but the Orthodox Christian tradition has quite lost track of what St. Paul was talking about, although he obviously assumed the Corinthians were familiar with the practice. What is clear is that it was thought that something could be done spiritually for those who had died.51

The Revealed Response

J. I. Packer, a prominent Evangelical scholar, recently reminded the readers of Christianity Today that any notion of salvation beyond the grave “is nonscriptural speculation, and reflects an inadequate grasp of what turning to Christ involves.” Further, he added, any idea of a person’s not receiving the gospel in this life and then choosing to receive it hereafter is unscriptural. He pointed out that “the unbeliever’s lack of desire for Christ and the Father and heaven remains unchanged [after death]. So for God to extend the offer of salvation beyond the moment of death, even for thirty seconds, would be pointless. Nothing would come if it.”52

The Lord has, in fact, offered a more excellent hope in our day. The good news, or glad tidings of salvation in Christ, is intended to lift our sights and bring hope to our souls and to “bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1). That hope in Christ is in the infinite capacity of an infinite Being to save men and women from ignorance as well as from sin and death. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is indeed the God of the living (Matthew 22:32), and His influence and redemptive mercies span the veil of death. The Apostle Paul wrote: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

And so what of those who never have the opportunity in this life to know of Christ and His gospel, who never have the opportunity to be baptized for a remission of sins and for entrance into the kingdom of God, and who never have the privilege of being bound in marriage and sealed in the family unit? In a world gripped by cynicism and strangled by hopelessness, the scriptures and revelations of the Restoration bear witness of a God of mercy and vision and of an Omnipotent One whose reach to His children is neither blocked by distance nor dimmed by death.

And so it was that after the doctrinal foundation had been laid, God made known through the Prophet of the Restoration those ennobling truths that pertain to life and salvation, both here and hereafter. Truly, as Joseph Smith explained, “It is no more incredible that God should save the dead, than that he should raise the dead.”53

The doctrine of baptism for the dead, Joseph Smith once declared, “presents in a clear light the wisdom and mercy of God in preparing an ordinance for the salvation of the
dead, being baptized by proxy, their names recorded in heaven and they judged according to the deeds done in the body. This doctrine was the burden of the scriptures. Those Saints who neglect it in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation.”

We, the children, thus participate in the realization of the “promises made to the fathers” and thereby help to preserve the earth from destruction (D&C 2:2–3). Surely no work could represent a more noble cause or a more valiant enterprise. And no labor in time could have more eternal implications.

Notes
2. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 43.
8. Ibid., 45.
10. Ibid., 494.
12. Ibid., 65.
The Pedagogy of a Church Leader: Lessons Learned from Joseph F. Smith’s 1854–1916 Letters to His Sister, Martha Ann Smith Harris

David M. Whitchurch is Associate Professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU.

When Carole Call King lost her mother (1986) and her father (1993), she had no idea of the written legacy they had passed on to her. Actively involved in family history, she was given the family’s genealogical records, but it would be three years before she discovered the significance of all she inherited. Somehow, the contents of one box were overlooked. Upon closer examination, she found hundreds of letters written to her great-grandmother Martha Ann Smith Harris, the daughter of Hyrum and Mary Fielding Smith. Among the letters were nearly a hundred written to Martha Ann from her brother, Joseph F. Smith, including an 1854 letter that was written by Joseph F. from the Sandwich Isles and that contained a lock of his hair.

This newly discovered treasure trove of letters provides a fresh and personal view into the lives of an early leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and of his sister during a unique era of Church history. After the death of Mary Fielding Smith, the bond between her children was solidified and assuaged, to a small degree, through the medium of pen and paper. Seven decades of correspondence demonstrate the tremendous devotion between her children as they shared their innermost feelings, joys, heartaches, determinations, and family happenings. Their correspondence imparts a wealth of insights into the personal, caring nature of Joseph F. Smith and of the love he and his sister shared.

The letters range in dates from 1854, when Joseph F. Smith was a fifteen-year-old missionary in Hawaii, to 1916, just two years before his death. Additional Joseph F. and Martha Ann letters have been collected and added to those in the possession of Carole King. To date, 164 Joseph F. Smith and 48 Martha Ann Smith Harris letters have been collected and transcribed. The following chart summarizes the origin and number of letters sent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time Written</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph F. Smith</td>
<td>Sandwich Isles</td>
<td>1854–58</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nauvoo Legion/</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salt Lake City Area</td>
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<td></td>
<td>European and British Isles Mission</td>
<td>1860–63</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sandwich Isles</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Salt Lake City</td>
<td>1865–74</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>European and British Isles Mission</td>
<td>1874–75</td>
<td>9</td>
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A letter collection such as the one above provides multiple opportunities for researchers and interested historians to understand better the personal nature of Joseph F. Smith in the cultural/sociological framework of the early Church of Jesus Christ. The entire letter collection, along with its historical context, will be forthcoming in a book coauthored with Richard Neitzel Holzapfel. This article will examine some of Joseph F. Smith’s pedagogical methods as seen throughout his letters to Martha Ann. The categories and teaching methods are broad and yet somewhat limited—partially because of missing letters (especially those from Martha Ann Smith Harris) as well as difficulties of interpreting behavior changes through written correspondence. Nevertheless, the insights gained regarding Joseph F. Smith’s personality and his talent as a teacher still provide considerable personal reflection and insight into his teaching capabilities. First, a brief background of Joseph F. Smith and his sister Martha Ann Smith Harris will be provided, followed by a general discussion on pedagogy. Finally, a small sampling of the letters themselves will be used to demonstrate some of Joseph F. Smith’s teaching methods.

**Background of Joseph Fielding (Joseph F.) Smith**

In the spring and summer of 1836, Parley P. Pratt traveled in the vicinity of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith Jr. Elder Pratt successfully arranged a meeting at a local farmhouse where a number of neighbors had gathered to hear his message. Included among his listeners was a man by the name of Joseph Fielding and “his two amiable and intelligent sisters,” Mary and Mercy. Elder Pratt’s message of the Restoration bore fruit, resulting in a number of baptisms, which included the Fieldings. Shortly after their conversion to the Church, Mary Fielding moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where she met and soon married the widower Hyrum Smith. Hyrum’s wife, Jerusha Barden, had recently passed away, leaving him to care for their five children.

Mary Fielding Smith’s life was filled with hardship and trial. In the fall of 1838, persecution against the Church and its members forced Hyrum and his family to move from Kirtland, Ohio, to Far West, Missouri. On 1 November, just two days after the Haun’s Mill massacre, Hyrum, Joseph Smith Jr., and others were arrested and imprisoned. Their incarceration lasted nearly six months, leaving Mary Fielding to give
birth to her firstborn child and care for Hyrum’s five children without him. Joseph F. was born 13 November 1838. Mary spent much of the next four months weak and bedridden. In January 1839, she traveled to Liberty, Missouri, in the back of a wagon so she and Joseph F. could visit Hyrum.

Continued harassment required Mary to move to Quincy, Illinois, in mid-winter. After Hyrum’s unexpected release from Liberty Jail, they left Quincy and moved to Commerce (Nauvoo), Illinois, where, for the next five years, they enjoyed a slight respite. It was during this lull that Mary gave birth to her second child, Martha Ann. She was born 14 May 1841 in Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois.

In the spring and summer of 1844, the persecution against the Church again intensified. On 27 June, Hyrum and Joseph Smith Jr. were martyred while jailed at Carthage, Illinois. Over the next two years, a series of events led to another exodus of the Saints. By the fall of 1846, Mary and her family left Nauvoo and moved to Winter Quarters (Florence), Nebraska, where they remained until the spring of 1848. Circumstances were such that when the family moved west with other migrating Saints, nine-year-old Joseph F. drove one of the family wagons to the Great Salt Lake Valley. Four years after their arrival, Mary Fielding Smith died from illness brought about by exhaustion and lack of proper nutrition.

A year and a half after Mary Fielding Smith passed away, Joseph F.’s life took a dramatic turn. It was during the April 1854 general conference that President Brigham Young, speaking from the pulpit, read the names of those being called to serve missions for the Church. Without any previous inclination or advance notice, Joseph F. heard his name called as a missionary to go to the “Pacific Isles.” The 13 April 1854 Deseret News reported the names of missionaries being sent to England, the United States, the Pacific Isles, Ireland, and British North America (that is, Canada). The Deseret News reported: “The following persons were then appointed and unanimously voted to go on missions, viz. . . . To the Pacific Isles: Orson Whitney, John Young (son of Lorenzo), Washington B. Rodgers, Simpson M. Molen, George Spiers [sic], Joseph Smith (son of Hyrum), Silas S. Smith (son of Silas), Silas Smith (son of Asahel), Sextus Johnson, John T. Caine.”

The difficulty and challenges of Joseph F.’s mission proved to be a superb training ground for his lifelong service in the Church. As previously mentioned, his time in the Pacific was also the beginning of an exchange of letters between himself and his sister. After nearly four years in the Sandwich Isles, he returned home in 1858 and joined the Nauvoo Legion in the Church’s effort to thwart Johnston’s army from coming into the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Following a peaceful negotiation between Brigham Young and the United States government, Joseph F. Smith turned his attention to other matters, including marriage. On 5 April 1859, he married Levira Smith, a daughter of Samuel H. Smith. Other wives followed, including Julina Lambson (1866), Sarah Ellen Richards (1868), Edna Lambson (1871), Alice Ann Kimball (1883), and Mary Taylor Schwartz (1884). From these marriages came a total of forty-eight children.

After serving two more missions, one to the British Isles and another to the Sandwich Isles, Joseph F. was called at age twenty-seven by Brigham Young as an Apostle and was named second counselor in the First Presidency. A little over a year later, Joseph F. was set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Joseph F. Smith’s service as a counselor in the First Presidency continued under Presidents John Taylor and
Lorenzo Snow. Passage of antipolygamy legislation and Joseph F. Smith’s high profile caused him to go into exile and remain in hiding from August 1884 until President Benjamin Harrison granted him amnesty in the fall of 1891. On 17 October 1901, Joseph F. Smith was sustained as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where he served until his death at age eighty, passing away 19 November 1918 in Salt Lake City.

**Brief Background of Martha Ann Smith Harris**

Martha Ann Smith was born 14 May 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois. Although we have less recorded history of her than we do her better-known brother, she must have endured the same trials as the rest of her family of living at Winter Quarters and of crossing the plains. After her mother’s death, Martha Ann and Joseph F. moved in with a close family friend, Hannah Grinnells, where they remained until Hannah died a little more than a year later. Martha Ann then moved in with her mother’s sister, Mercy Fielding Thompson. Soon afterwards, Joseph F. received his mission call to the Sandwich Isles. From the letters of Joseph F. and Martha Ann, it appears that Martha Ann also lived with Hyrum Smith and Jerusha Barden's son, John, prior to her marriage. Heber C. Kimball married the fifteen-year-old Martha Ann to William Jasper Harris on 21 April 1857. Two days later, William left on a mission to the British Isles. Martha Ann moved in with her mother-in-law, Emily Harris Smoot, the plural wife of Bishop Abraham O. Smoot. William returned home early from his mission in 1858 when missionaries were called from the mission field because of concerns over Johnston’s army.

During the early summer of 1859, tragedy befell the Harris family. William was struck by lightning while plowing a field in Salt Lake City. Besides being badly burned, he was caught in the reins and dragged unconscious by runaway horses. Martha Ann nursed him back to health as best she could, but William never fully recovered, remaining weak for the rest of his life.

Eight years after this incident, Martha Ann and William moved to Provo with their five children. While in Provo, they added six more children to their family. The Harrises struggled financially much of their lives. William worked a variety of jobs. He served as a bodyguard for Brigham Young, worked in freighting, served as a policeman, and participated in mining activities. Martha Ann frequently supplemented the family income by sewing buckskin gloves and temple clothes. William Jasper Harris died on 24 April 1909 after being hit by a team of horses. His wife, Martha Ann, died 19 October 1923 at age eighty-three.

**The Transcription Process**

The primary objectives that guided the transcription of the Joseph F. Smith and Martha Ann Smith Harris letter collection were readability and accuracy. Transcriptions for each letter retain the original spelling, punctuation, superscripts, underlined words, and strike throughs whenever possible. The transcribers have done as little editing as possible, although minimal punctuation was added for clarity. To minimize reader distraction, we lowercased many letters that were written in capitals. For example, Martha Ann Smith Harris inconsistently used the capitals “D,” “F,” “J,” “L,” “M,” and “S,” and Joseph F.’s inconsistencies were most frequently seen in the letters “A,” “J,” “L,” “M,” and “S.” For readability purposes, editor discretion was used to standardize these letters.
Pedagogy of Joseph F. Smith

After the passing of Mary Fielding Smith, circumstances dictated that Joseph F. function, in some regards, as both brother and parent to his younger sister. Not surprisingly, Martha Ann seems to have accepted the role of child as well as that of sister. She willingly listened to Joseph F.’s counsel and did her best to do what he asked. For example, from an extract of a letter written by Joseph F. (age seventeen) to Martha Ann (age fourteen) dated 18 February 1856, he wrote:

Now then may I give you a little advice in regard how to act. Well the first is, do not seek to exalt yourself above your companions nor you must not try to act refined when you know nothing about refinement, but act stedy, mild, and be humble, meak and lowly in heart, and continually pray for the spirit of god to abide with you, for I tell you Martha Ann the spirit of god will Teach you the perfect rules of deacency, for it embodies no hypocrisy, no superflues desines nor nothing of the sort, prayerfulness, humility, percivereance in righteousness, diligence, and long suffering combined will perfect us, and nothing els will enable us to attain to the glory and blessings prepaired for the faithful in the kingdom of God.

I receivd your letter and was glad to hear so kind and affectionate a letter it done me good to read it and it always does do me good to read a letter from you for I always learn something new that does me good. . . . I know what you want and and I will strive to do the best I can and the best I know how. I do not feel above taking your council but I want you [p. 2] to advise me what to do for you are older than I am and hav been tried mor than I hav. I considder from whence your good advice comes I consider that it comes from a brother who wishes me wel and who I had rather re as live receive advice from as any boddy in the world.

Throughout Joseph F.’s correspondence with his sister, it becomes increasingly evident that Martha Ann looked to him as a confidant, adviser, and mentor. Each of these words denotes teaching. The word teacher comes from Old English and means “to show the way (as in a person); to direct, conduct; or guide.” Additional insights into the role of a teacher can be found if we examine its Greek counterpart pedagogue from which the word pedagogy is derived. In the component parts of the word pedagogue, pais connotes “child” and agoge means “to lead out or away.” When these terms are combined, the result suggests that pedagogy was originally concerned with the training of children.
When such definitions are applied to Joseph F. Smith, the result is his exemplification of an ideal teacher. Although he received little formal education and was only two and a half years older than Martha Ann, the death of their parents, his missionary experiences, and his ability to communicate seem to have placed him in the role of a teacher for Martha Ann. The techniques and principles discerned throughout his letters to her are much the same that modern educators espouse. Standards of effective teaching do not tire with age. Numerous studies have examined quality teaching. At one time or another, surveys have been directed at groups such as school administrators, teachers, and students to examine the characteristics and traits of an ideal teacher. Educators James Banner and Harold Cannon reported, “Qualities that make for effective teaching are neither mysterious nor possessed by only a few exceptional instructors. They’re inherent in all of us. One need not study those qualities so much as become aware of and employ them. . . . What teachers do cannot be distinguished from who they are.”

A similar case might be made for any good person—regardless of his or her education or chosen profession. A thoughtful examination of the apostles and prophets in our dispensation from Joseph Smith Jr. to Gordon B. Hinckley reveals individuals who have the ability—as stated earlier—to “direct, conduct, or guide”—in other words, to teach. Several studies were examined to help identify what makes a good teacher. The lists generated from the various surveys were often too lengthy or unwieldy for the purposes of this paper. Also, included in many of the surveys were items such as fair grading, the encouragement of class discussion, suitable classroom environment, and classroom administration. Those deemed unsuitable for the circumstances of Joseph F. Smith and Martha Ann Smith Harris were eliminated. A shortened list was generated, and teaching traits were selected that were frequently reported as important in a majority of the studies examined.

The following five general teacher characteristics were identified and used to guide the rest of this article: (1) genuine concern or love for the persons being taught; (2) the ability to motivate; (3) the ability to communicate effectively; (4) the treating of others with respect; and (5) knowledge of the subject.

**Genuine Concern or Love for the Persons Being Taught**

In Helen Keller’s autobiography, she described the following incident:

> The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrast between the two lives which it connects. It was the third of March, 1887, three months before I was seven years old. . . .

> I felt approaching footsteps. I stretched out my hand as I supposed to my mother. Some one took it, and I was caught up and held close in the arms of her who had come to reveal all things to me, and, more than all things else, to love me.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks in a 1999 general conference address confirmed the essential ingredient of caring. He said, “A national author wrote a book about his greatest teacher. At the heart of this college teacher’s powerful impact on his student was the student’s conviction that this teacher really cared for him and wanted him to learn and do what
would help him find happiness."

24 Martha Ann found such an individual in her brother. In the following letter that Joseph F. Smith wrote to his sister on 22 June 1864, he fondly reminisced about Hyrum, her ten-month-old son, and shared the great love he had for her and her family. The letter is written from the Sandwich Isles. Joseph F. had recently returned to Hawaii to help Elder Lorenzo Snow and other Church leaders respond to the apostate Walter Gibson.

My Dear Sister Martha Ann:— . . .
I sincerely hope that little Hyrum is better. I can hardly bear to think of seeing him changed in any way from his little, picture in my minde. I can always see him, streight and portly, strung up to the highest point of nerve, full of animation and life—& in a commanding manner & tone issuing weighty orders, that cannot be regarded lightly—or slighted with impunity, by the most majestic of his small but growing Empire! As he stands—in photograph—upon the tablet of my memory—he “is monarch of all he surveys,” he knows no fear, no equel, he commands and—is obeyed, or woe! befall us!!! well he is my ideal—of male baby perfection! of genuine infantile nobility, & magnanimity!!

You well know I love the babies, they are all interresting to me from two months old, and upward. I wonder of Willie and Joseph will forget me, I guess not. kiss all of them for me, & tell them that I think of & pray for them often. that they may grow up—worthy of the great mercies of Him whos Image they so nobly bear. I think you have great cause to be proud of your boys. If they are not good men, it will not be their fault. The soil is your own, see that it lacks not cultivation.

In another letter written 23 December 1869 from Salt Lake City, Joseph F. expressed both encouragement and his desire to see Martha Ann. In this letter, he mentioned his second wife, Sarah, to whom he had been married for about a year. Only the last paragraph is quoted:

Martha Ann
My Dear Sister:— . . .
Sarah getting breakfast ready. I have dated this for tomorrow morning. Sarah gets things ready over night, and in the morning gets breakfast in 3/4 of an hour. I wish you could come and see us, and that I know how you are getting along. I have felt considerable anxiety for you, but I have not known how to avoid it, or in other words how to change fate. I feel condemned sometimes when I see the comfortable situation of my family and know that my own sister does not enjoy as much. I wish it were otherwise, but who can change it? Cheer up my sister something whispers to me it will not always be thus with you, and it may not even with me. There is allways a bright hope for the good, and a sure promis of reward. God bless you and yours. I will send you some paper and pens the first chance.

Although only two examples are provided of Joseph F.’s love for Martha Ann and her family, the letter collection offers ample evidence of a lifelong commitment to her—both in word and deed. King Benjamin’s words find a fitting example in Joseph F. Smith as Martha Ann’s surrogate parent, as he heeded the counsel that parents are to care for their
children and “teach them to love one another, and to serve one another” (Mosiah 4:14–15). Besides expressions of praise, encouragement, and love, the letter collection indicates that Joseph F. frequently provided monetary help to his sister. His willingness to share becomes more remarkable when we consider the economic challenges he faced in meeting the needs of his own large family.

**The Ability to Motivate and to Communicate Effectively**

The delineation between motivation and communication can be difficult to assess, especially since effective communication is so integral to pedagogy. Joseph F. Smith’s letters and his ability to communicate stand on their own merit. His success and his ability to motivate others are grounded in effective communication skills.

Motivation manifests itself in many ways. Whether it be money, prestige, or the need to belong, motivation is typified in change. This change can be brought about by simple factors such as thirst on a hot summer’s day. How much is ice-cold water worth? It often depends on how thirsty the potential customer is. Another powerful motivator of change is love. The scriptures simply state, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). One author put it this way: “We work hard and go that extra mile for those we love.”

Studies have shown that students who like their teachers are much more likely to work harder and perform better than those who don’t.

In responding to the question, “What does good teaching involve?” Robert Leamnson, author of *Thinking about Teaching and Learning*, stated, “I see the major elements as exposing, and inspiring.”

Joseph F. Smith adeptly addressed areas that he felt Martha Ann needed to improve on. There is little question about Martha Ann’s love and commitment to her older brother. How much influence his counsel had on her is impossible to measure; yet, because of her love for him, we can assume only that Martha Ann carefully listened to her older brother and responded as best she could. For example, when Joseph F. was just sixteen years old, he penned from the Island of Maui the following letter (dated 28 January 1855) to his thirteen-year-old sister, encouraging her to live a life worthy of God’s blessings. Still displaying his youth and lack of formal education, he wrote:

> My Dear and affectionate <Sister> Martha.

> Haveing jest finished writing a letter to Jerusha. I thought that I would try and write one to you also thinking that a fiew lines from me would be acceptibal to you. I am well and Harty. and Have grew considerable since you saw me last and I have no reasons to doubt but what you have grew much larger you ware when I last saw you. if you have you Have got to be quiet a woman and I supose that you have got so that you can look over the heds of your Sisters. and now I would like to give you some little council, if you will take it and that is this. be Humbel and prayorful, and be kind to your connections and you will Have the Spirit of the Lord abiding with you at all times and the lord will bless you and you will give up in the footsteps of your Mother and you will be blessed with every thing even as your Mother was. and you will neve[ ] lack for the comforts of life if you will only growe up in the footstep[ ] of our Mother who has gon before us. only be kind to your Sisters and mind what they say to you and never git above them for they are your older Sisters, and it is for them to give council and also for our oldest Brothers. you be kind to them and
do what they and donot get cross. and study your books. and stop at home as much as possible and do not think because you have not the priveliges of meny that you are slited but be sober and prayorful, and you will groe up in the footsteps of our Mother. and I would rather groe up in the ways of my Mother than to have all the riches in this world, and be wild and rude, and unprayorful. for if you groe up after your Mother you will never lack for the comforts of life. I will ask you a question. did you ever know the time when we were not provided for by the Hand of our Mother [p. 2] I answer, the time never was known. ask those who knows. I could give you much council Moty, that would be benifissial to you as long as you live upon this earth. Only remember what I have alredy sed and se if it will not be good in days to come. I must now bring my letter to close. Preying the Lord to bless you and prosper you all the day long. and I want you to write to me as often as you can and let me know how you are giting along. One thing more never feel down harted but be merry <in your hart,> and joyful. and keepe a prayorful hand and a thoughtful mind and the Lord will L Bless you.

This particular letter demonstrates the tremendous love and esteem Joseph F. held for his mother as well as his personal recognition of the many sacrifices she made for her family. His reference to their mother must have been compelling to a young Martha Ann as she grappled with the challenges of her older siblings (Hyrum and Jerusha’s children) and the insecurities that would naturally accompany the loss of her parents and separation from her brother.

Another means of motivation comes from sharing personal experience. Stories tend to elicit feelings of tenderness and endearment that, in turn, motivate change. Advertisers often use stories to create feelings of acceptance or need. For years, the Church has used a series of short radio and television spots that capture unique family moments to elicit feelings of reflection on the importance of family. The spots usually end with the catch phrase, “Family—isn’t it about . . . time?”

On numerous occasions, the scriptures use stories to teach and motivate. On one occasion, while traveling through Samaria, Jesus stopped at a well in Sychar and spoke with a woman who had come to draw water (see John 4). During His conversation with her, He said, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (4:10). Their exchange led to His personal testimony of His divinity. Many of Jesus’ teaching moments were prompted by circumstances or events—for example, the cursing of the fig tree (Matthew 21:19–22), His disciples’ plucking and eating grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28), and the healing of the woman with an eighteen-year infirmity (Luke 13:11–17).

Joseph F. Smith also used current events and personal experiences to teach God’s providence in his life. Such examples likely helped motivate Martha Ann to live a life worthy of such blessings. Two such examples are provided below. The first comes from a letter written 17 April 1857 from Lahaina, Sandwich Islands. An eighteen-year-old Joseph F. eloquently communicated two personal experiences to his fifteen-year-old sister:

My Dear Sister Martha Ann:—
It is with no ordinary feeling that I seat myself this morning to reciprocate your favor of December 17th '56, it graced my presence on the 28th ultimo, but I have had no oppertunity of answering it untill now, owing to my travels to Conference, &c. which came off on the 7th, 8th and 9th of this month. We had a good time together. I am well and hearty at the present, altho’ I feel verry sore and and dull this morning becaus of sleeplessness, and labor for the last three days and nights.

Eight of us started from the Island of Lanai on Wednesday, and on acount of contrary and high winds we were compelled to return to port, here we slept out doors with nothing but a verry thin mat for a bead, and another one for a covering, our carpet-sacks serving for pillows, at moon rise in the morning, (1 o clock) we went on board of our little Boat and started for this Island. Martha it would make you wonder if you could see us being tossed and driven by the waves of the mighty Pacific, when every wave seemed like it was the next moment going to engulf us in its awful surge, yes, to see us in an open Boat, with a tract of Ocean before us of some 15 miles, and only a one fourth inch of pine boards between us and the tremendous, dreadful, yawning grave of thousands of poor ill-fated beings, who ware not so fortunate as ourselves; when you get with in a quarter of an inch of death itself, then who can save you? Marth, the arm on which we trusted is that which hath delivered, it is ever willing to deliver, and will deliver all who lean upon it, and put all their trust on it, therefore lets be faithful.

Well, we arived at this place, at 10 o clock in the morning of the next day, after we started.—and this morning several of the Brethren started for Wailuku leaving three of us at this place. I have been appointed to preside over the Molokai, conference, which is about 15 miles from this place, and on another Island, so you see I have to cross another strip of Ocean before I get to my field of labor. When we arived at this place we found that 33.50$ of money recieved for Books of Mormon, that has been solde to the Native Saints had been stolen, who the perpetrator of this dead was, we are at loss to know or finde out. certain, it is we are in distress because of it, and that any person who would take money from us, who knew our situation, is wors than a murderer! but it seems that the Devil exerts his utmoste power to thwart every thing that we attempt to do for the prosperity and emelioration of this people. the Lord only knows what will take place next. to impede his moste holy work, who could endure what we have to, but mormon Elders? I do not believe, that man lives outside of the kingdom of God that would begin to endure to allmote indurable trials and privations that seem to beset us on every hand, and that we have to pass thro’ every day of our lives on these degraded lands, yet it is all for the best. I feel to rejoice, Martha, all the day long. I feel buoyant & hopeful, and like pressing forward, notwithstanding the hardships I have to encounter, because I know what I am doing, and for whom I am laboring, it is not as though I was seaking for gane, or secularly striving for the vain things of this world. if it was so,
Perspectives gained through sharing personal trials and experiences often enhance a person’s ability to deal with life’s difficulties. Consider the inspiration and perspective the Old Testament story of Job has had on its readers. With no way of measuring the impact of Joseph F. Smith’s letters on Martha Ann, we may never realize just how influential they really were for her; yet the stories and lessons shared in his letters should not be overlooked. Quality teaching requires an investment of self—a sharing from the heart. The strength and effectiveness of Joseph F.’s letters come, in part, through his conveyance of his extraordinary circumstances. Most teachers anticipate that by sharing such personal experiences, they will influence their students to strive toward some greater good. Hopefully, Martha Ann’s newly acquired perspective from her brother’s letters influenced her in a similar manner.

Another letter of Joseph F. provides a look at how the weather and the two-month anniversary of the passing of his firstborn child triggered memories of early childhood events. Joseph F. was thirty-one years old at the time as he reminisced about Mercy Josephine, his daughter with Julina Lambson Smith. Mercy Josephine was less than ten months old at her passing:

City, Aug. 6th. 1870
Martha Ann
My Dear Sister:— . . .
The weather is very oppressive, and the atmosphere sultry and merky, as tho’ impregnated with smoke. Much as it was on the days memorable as the 27th, of June 1844. And the 21st. and 22nd of Sept. 1852—the day of fathers death, and the death and burial of Mother, I recollect them distinctly. It is two months to day since my own sweet babe joined her grand father and mother in the spirit world, leaving in my hearts affections a void and broken space that time nor earth can ever fill. I mourn the earthly loss of the brightest, purest, dearest, treasure God ever gave me. the one, I prized and cherished most, within the great circle of that greatest gift of God “Eternal Life”, [p. 2] which is incomparable, being “All in All,” and yet as if to compensate in some degree, for my bereavement, fresh sweetness and beauty, increasing inteligence, and love daily develops in my precious, cheerful, merry little “rose bud”, left me to bloom and blossom in my cottage “alone.” O! in the midst of sorrow, I can say, I thank God for my three sweet, perfect little gifts, “one on earth and two in heaven”, the centre of my love, my own sweet “Jode”. The fountain of my tears has never closed when I have permitted them to flow, but I complain only of my own weakness and ignorance.

Martha Ann’s own sympathetic ear must have been stirred as she read her brother’s letter. Presumably, she wrote Joseph F. of her own worries about her children (unfortunately, this letter is not included in our collection). Whatever Martha Ann wrote to him, he responded to her letter with his own letter dated 18 August 1870:

The Lord says he will have a “tried people”, all that [p. 2] is dross must sooner or later be consumed, for only the “gold” will remain. I hope for the sake of parantage as well as for our own sake, and the sake of our
children, we may be proven to be the pure mettal. I must say that Mormonism, or the Gospel in all its parts grows brighter and brighter with me, & this will inevitably be the case the more it is rubbed, and the Devil and all his imps seem bent on polishing us up. There is one consolation, that is, the wicked can do nothing against, but for the cause of truth. My family are well, [ ]y has had several [ ]s of diarhea but nothing serious. Julina is very careful, “burnt child dreads the fire”, we dread sickness or even the slightest illness of baby. O! may God spare here for my sake.

Joseph F. Smith seems to have drawn strength and resolve from his knowledge of gospel principles. His very faith reflects his understanding. Measuring motivation is difficult, especially as observed through personal correspondence written so long ago. Even so, Joseph F.’s passion and earnest entreaties conveyed through this letter disclose his feelings of compassion and an understanding of why misfortune and heartache occur. Although we may never know how his letters motivated or helped Martha Ann deal with the hardships of early western living, their capacity to comfort and provide her with new perspective to meet those challenges is readily visible in his writings.

**The Treating of Others with Respect**

Another element of effective teaching is the ability to respect those whom teachers teach. Teachers need to recognize that they often learn as much from their students as they teach them—that is, teaching is a two-way street. Effective teachers demonstrate respect for their students as the teachers listen and interact with the students. Parker Palmer, in an article entitled “The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching,” stated:

> Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.

The Savior demonstrated this principle when traveling in the area of Tyre and Sidon (see Mark 7:24–30). While He was there, a non-Israelite woman pleaded with Him to heal her unclean daughter. Jesus responded by saying, “Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs” (7:27). In essence, he was telling her His mission was not to the Gentiles and that He would not heal her daughter. Not satisfied, the woman reminded the Savior that even household pets receive bread from their master’s table. After hearing her, Jesus responded by healing her daughter. For teaching to be genuine, students need to know that teachers do listen and respond accordingly. Joseph F. Smith demonstrates his own willingness to listen to Martha Ann in the following letter:

*Sandwich Islands*

*June 14, 1857*. . . Dearest Sister. one short sentence in your letter, struck me like the mighty surge of Oceans tempestuous swell! what was it?— “I feel that I am a weak and frail being—and why should not God bless you, who is much
more worthy than I am, for, he has blessd me”—martha, do not tempt me. that language, tho’ simple—speaks louder than the bolts of Heaven, that you do love me. and that you do desire to live humbe, and prayerful. Oh! humility! how beutious are thy influances. how profoundly, deep thy serenity and bliss! this subject, subdews—it melts me!—Martha what you said admonished me. I kindely accept its chastening influance, although quite undirected. when I read it something seemed to whisper gently in my minde, Joseph? “understandest thou what thou readest”? “let him that readeth understand”, these admonishing thoughts came to my minde with the words, “wake up more fully to your duty!” I can look back and see where I might have bettered my course. where I might have been more dilegent in descharge of my duty. but then, these thoughts are dispelled by the strictly varacious adage “time once past never will return, the moment lost, is lost for ever”! therefore why morn for things we cannot help. or in the words of Dear [p. 2] Cousin Josephine, why, “sigh o’er the pleasures now faided. And the joys time can never restore?” there is no use, I am fully resolved to take things as they come, and as they fleet along by with [ ] unchangable goings of time, I feel to say, farewell, thou hurring time. thou industrious time, that wateth not for the sluggard, neither can man stay thy speading progress. but do thy duty in hastening the period when all creation shall reach the end for which they were created.

Martha Ann’s mild rebuff became an opportunity for Joseph F. to examine his heart and make some course corrections in his own life. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines respect as follows: “to treat or regard with deference, esteem, or honor.” Effective teachers demonstrate deference for their students by listening to them and making appropriate changes. Teachers who lack respect for their students may do so for the following reasons:

First, teachers may mistakenly believe that listening to their students somehow makes teachers vulnerable to additional criticism (that is, if it worked once, it might work again).

Second, teachers might be afraid to expose their personal weaknesses to their students because doing so shows that teachers do make mistakes and really do not have all the answers. In reality, however, the drawbacks of such thinking far exceed the benefits. Students who see the humanity in their teachers are much more likely to reciprocate in their responses to teacher demands and expectations. Parker Palmer provides some insight into those teachers who open themselves up to their students:

As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied: the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be.

We became teachers for reasons of the heart, animated by a passion for some subject and for helping people to learn. . . . The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able, so that teacher and students and
subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require.  

Another letter that demonstrates Joseph F.’s respect for his sister can be seen in an exchange of letters on marriage. On 3 May 1857, Martha Ann wrote to her brother to tell him she was married. She was just two weeks from her sixteenth birthday and wrote with some concern as to how Joseph F. would respond:

Dearest brother,

I have an item of news to write to you and my hand trembles when I go to write it for my conscience is guilty before my brother for I fear that he will think I have slided him but for give me dear brother if I say that I have but I fear that it will dampen your feelings but I can not help it now I must say it eny how I am married—to William Harris. I suppose that this will shock you to hear it, it almost shock me to think of it my self when I think of it but it is really now I must tell you the whis and where fors and then I hope you will not blame me so much he had been keeping company with me John gave him leave to do so and I had no objection to it and my I began to think considerable of him and he began to think considerrabe of me. to tell the of the matter my thoughts has been that way for some time for 2 years at the least and my mind has not been among studies as you can plainly see my mind was young and tender and I let it go to far and John notesed it for I did not tell it to enny boddy not even to you who was my nearest and dearst friend and I tried to concal my all could but John found it out in site of me [p. 3] for he could se that I did not learn much and he had to know the reasoning and I had to tell him and John went to brother kimbol about it and he said that we had better git married be fore he went away and John thought that it would be the best and then my mind would be setteld and then I could learn some thing but other wise I could not. and william went up to git his parting blessings and I did not know for certain that I should git married befor he went away. and brother Kimible sent him after me and told him that he had better have it all done up that day and he came and I went and was seald over the alter. and he started to ingland to drag on a mission to drag a hand cart acrosst the plains we was married on tuesday and he started on thursdas so you see that I did not stop long with him and I am glad of it for if he had not have going to away money could not have herd me to have ben married untill you come home for I have long wished for your return with a longing heart that I mght be the same when you come back as I was when you went away. but allass things can not be just as the huane heart would desire. I am just the same as I was onely I am married I will be free for three years yet. and dear brother I beseech of you to treat me as you always did if you dont it will almost break my heart give me council and I will try to abid it I am not perfect yet and I shall thank you for your council and I am not offended to you if I was I thinks I would be a fool and would need castisements for it I am thankful to my father for giving me a brother that cares for mya. wefare for I know that you care for my welfarre more than enny boddy else can feel care fore upon this th O Joseph would to god that I could
express feelings just as they are and I express my thanks to you for your
kindness to me. I can never forget you for ever nor for an hour I have
never forgott you since you left me to far away from your home. I have
thought of you in what ever place I have been no matter where.

On 14 June 1857, Joseph F. wrote a letter to Martha Ann before receiving the above
letter. Interestingly, Joseph F., not knowing that Martha Ann had married William Harris,
wrote a letter that addressed the topic of marriage. A brief excerpt from it provides the
tone:

. . . well, now am I bound to anyone? No, I am not. is any one bound to
me, by her sacred vows for life No, there are non. now what is the
reason?— I will reveal the secret. I have not my life ensured, only by my
own goodness, my own true merit. then God will, or has ensured my life
to enjoy many great blessings. therefor if I am spaired to join my life with
one in whom there is a spark of heavenly fire, that beams and blazes in
the dark hour of adversity and that is willing to share the humble lot
of One whom God knows loves the humble and honest heart. then I will say
to God be the glory, what hour is mine? what moment is my own? at what
time may God say, Joseph, thy soul is required of thee—? can I say no? I
cannot, then I say thank the Lord no soul is bound to mine at stake of
hour. varasity, and vertue, no, I am free as the air, so are <is> every one
free from me, I wish to be tied to no one till I am able to provide and take
care of her, untill then hear ye O—fair ones, ye are free from me,—where
no vows are made no hearts are broken. now the whole amount of this is,
when sumed up. I do not want you to make any vows, with any one if you
can avoid it . . .

We can only wonder exactly how Joseph F. initially responded to Martha Ann’s news,
knowing that he did not want her to get married yet. The letter he wrote to her helps
demonstrate his capacity to respect Martha Ann. The following letter was written 25 July
1857:

Dear Sister Martha Ann:—I received your long letter of May 3rd—about a
week ago, and was very glad indeed to hear from you; I was somewhat
surprised on hearing of your marriage. but as I was not there to participate
in the in the scene, I can only wish you much joy;—and happy life You
have now taken the most important step of your life—or existence—
under the Bonds of the Gospel. upon the step you have just taken is
pending all the social enjoyments—and happiness of your present
existence—and the Blessings of a happy and cheerful home. as well as an
obedient and God-like posterity,—or the miseries and heart-rending
scenes: of discontent,—discord & bitter unhappiness;—I almoste quake
when I think upon this all absorbing subject—to the center. when I look
around me and reflect upon the many direful circumstancs accruing from
day to day,—among the great and the Learned, the Small and the Ignorant,
as well as the Rich and the Poor;—of “heart-Broken” women, distracted
husbands, “Jealousy” in all its hideous forms—suspicion with all his train
of poisonous rancour. with his drawn daggar and un-cheathed vengense.
ready to spill the hearts Blood of “Wives”, “Husbands”, & “Children”! I
shrink with horror from the scene:— It does seem curious in the extreme to me, why folks go so head-long into business that so greatly concerns their future prosperity and happiness on the other hand will bring down upon them ponderous grievance, and a world of trouble,—from which they may never extract themselves—and invariably a bad name—however—with all these considerations—before us—it is not with us, as it is with the World at large—we have the the light of the Gospel the influence of the Holy Spirit—the teachings of the Prophets & servants of God, to “Lead us into all truth” and teach us our duty—If you have adhered to counsel—it is all right—and you will come off victorious. You will certainly leave off Girl-ism now. I hope you will remember your position, and let your actions and conduct in all things, and at all times be such as will store up for you Respect, Esteem, and Friendship in the heart of every honest and good person. now, do you want me to tell you the way to attain to this desireable position?—prayer—with faith, and hope on Jesus and his Gospel, will alone do it. a person that holds your stateon in the True Kingdom of God, need never fear the face of “Clay.”

Rather than chastise or condemn Martha Ann for getting married, Joseph F. demonstrates his maturity by wishing her joy and happiness followed with gentle and kind counsel. His respect for his sister is even more remarkable when we consider he was just eighteen years old at the time he wrote this letter. Effective teachers recognize where their students are in life and, rather than judge them harshly for decisions they make, turn life’s circumstances into opportunities to teach. The doctrinal insights Joseph F. Smith shared in the latter portion of this letter demonstrate just how much gospel knowledge he had gained at such a young age. Throughout his life, he used this knowledge to bless others.

Knowledge of the Subject
Joseph F. Smith’s lifelong commitment to knowledge and his practical talent to share it resonate throughout his letters to Martha Ann. Solomon stated, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). The latter half of this poetic couplet suggests that wisdom requires knowledge. The dictionary corroborates this assertion, as its definition comprises words like “practical knowledge” or “understanding.”

Few would argue that teaching requires at least a limited amount of knowledge, but most realize and fully recognize that effective teaching—the kind that brings about real change—demands wisdom. President Boyd K. Packer said, “I have long believed that the study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than talking about behavior will improve behavior.”

From the time that Joseph F. Smith left on his mission, he demonstrated a precocious understanding of the Restoration and its truths; with this knowledge, he sought to bless others by bringing positive change into their lives. Although his life was filled with many hardships and heartaches, he must have taken great delight in testifying of Jesus Christ and the truths of the restored gospel. At just sixteen years of age, he wrote the following letter to Martha Ann from Maui, Sandwich Isles, on 9 June 1855:

My Dear and affectionate
Sister, Martha Ann. . . .
be a Mormon out, and out, and you will be pl blessed, I find that there is nothing that will try a person so as to tell this world that he is a mormon, but I feel first rate. I am fat, and stout, I feel like I could through all the hays down that there is in the valesys. (but I donot know how it would be if I should try it)

I am a Preaching (Marty) like a good one, (you had ought to here me) or (or my voys, (I suppose if you wase any whare nee the Islands you could)

we had a good meeting this morning, and I was caled upon to Preach, I acordingly, made an attempt.

As Joseph F’s enthusiasm and ability to teach the gospel matured, he also learned to take personal comfort in his knowledge and conviction of the plan of salvation. In a letter dated 26 August 1883, he wrote from Salt Lake City following the death of his son, Albert Jesse Smith:

My Dear sister Martha Ann,

Once more, and now for the sixth time, by the inexorable will of an inscrutable providence we have been called upon to part with one of our dearest, most precious treasures. This time the pitiless monster, death, has chosen for his “shining mark” our beautiful, intelligent, bright and lovely little Albert Jesse. His death occurred yesterday at 11.35 a.m. after an illness of about 13 days, most of which time I was absent from home, travelling thro’ the settlements north with Pres. Taylor. I arrived home on thursday morning having been sent for, and being honorably released by the President. I had the [p. 2] sorrowful pleasure of watching and waiting upon him, my darling boy, for 52 hours, with heart-felt prayers and scalding tears not a few, but the heavens were brass over our heads. our crys and tears fell alike to the earth and all were buried this day with the lifeless, beautious form of our hearts’ treasure in the grave! and yet not all were buried, for still our cry would assend, why is it so? O. God why had it to be? and still our tears seak the earth to releave if not to bury our heart-aches in its feelingless bosom.

If for the sorrows of parting with our little, innocent ones in this world, we are to be rewarded with joy in the near or distant future, then may I not hope for a rich reward hereafter! Have I not laid up treasures in heaven? Sarah Ella, Mercy Josephine, Heber John, Alfred Jason, Rhoda Ann, and now Albert Jesse, all hold out their loving arms to “Papa,” from the other side. What a happy meeting awaits me! and I trust, that in that ransomed [p. 3] throng no hearts nor hands will welcome me more warmly than those of Father, Mother, Hyrum, Mary, (whom we knew not) and Sarah, and Lovina, and hosts of Kindred dead who being “dead yet live”, they having tasted of the living waters of christ, and died in Him. By far the greatest number are beyond the vail, the ties which draw us thither are fast becoming stronger than those which bind us here. Yet I look upon my little flocks now drawing upon me for their daily food, and none in store, but trusting in providence, and depending upon my mortal life for <their> help and protection and I breathe the earnest prayer, O! let me stay to battle with the ills and ups and downs of life yet a little longer
in the world for their dear sakes. Were it not for this, now while my soul is cleansed by poignant grief I would rather go than stay. and yet I half feel that I am neither good enough to go or stay. It seems not [p. 4] always an easy task to acknowledge the hand of God in All things. yet I will do it. and my heart says, “tho’ He slay me yet will I trust in Him,’’9737 for “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”9238 I would rather have to pass through the the scenes of the past few days, harrowing as they have been, to the heart and soul, time and time again than never to have had my precious boy. Our aim can be no higher or nobler than to aspire to be worthy of an eternal union with, and possession of the pure, innocent trusting and loving little souls, such as those with whom God has blessed me only for so such short and happy periods of time. God help us to be worthy of them. Joseph

Any parent naturally feels the loss and pain that accompany the death of a child. Through that loss, Joseph F. Smith’s knowledge of the gospel provided hope and a determination to live worthily so he could be reunited with his family in the life to come. Few dimensions of the gospel hold more importance. We do not know how Martha Ann reacted to her brother’s grief; yet we can suppose that she, too, felt the sorrow and hopeful resolve to live a life worthy of eternal reunion. Conclusion

Joseph F. Smith’s pedagogical talent provides an ideal example of what teachers can and should be. As indicated earlier, the standards of effective teaching do not tire with age. Although a limited number of teaching traits and characteristics were explored in this paper, Joseph F. Smith’s letters confirm his capacity to teach as he helped direct, conduct, and guide Martha Ann in her intellectual, social, and spiritual progress. His letters clearly show that his depth of gospel knowledge, along with his profound ability to love, respect, motivate, and communicate effectively, were an integral part of Martha Ann’s development.

The greatest explanation for Joseph F. Smith’s teaching success may simply be that he was a successful person who loved God and did all in his power to bless the lives of those around him. No less should be expected from any disciple of Jesus Christ. The charge given by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland regarding teachers helps remind us all of our duty to be effective teachers:

Now, at a time when our prophet is calling for more faith through hearing the word of God, we must revitalize and reenthrone superior teaching in the Church—at home, from the pulpit, in our administrative meetings, and surely in the classroom. Inspired teaching must never become a lost art in the Church, and we must make certain our quest for it does not become a lost tradition. . . .

When crises come in our lives—and they will—the philosophies of men interlaced with a few scriptures and poems just won’t do. Are we really nurturing our youth and our new members in a way that will sustain them when the stresses of life appear? Or are we giving them a kind of theological Twinkie—spiritually empty calories? President John Taylor once called such teaching “fried froth,” the kind of thing you could eat all day and yet finish feeling totally unsatisfied. . . .
Whether we are instructing our children at home or standing before an
audience at church, let us never make our faith difficult to detect.
Remember, we are to be teachers “come from God.” . . . Give scripturally
based sermons. Teach the revealed doctrine. Bear heartfelt
testimony.93

Notes
1. Her mother, Verna Passey Call, died 8 October 1986, and her father, Anson Bowen
Call Jr., died on 1 June 1993.
110.
3. Ibid., 128.
4. Francis M. Gibbons, Joseph F. Smith: Patriarch and Preacher, Prophet of God (Salt
3:1350.
6. Ibid.
8. Deseret News, 13 April 1854; emphasis added.
12. Ibid., 130–32, 181–82.
14. Sarah Harris Passey, History of Martha Ann Smith Harris, unpublished manuscript, 4;
Sarah Harris Passey is a daughter.
15. Carole Call King, History of William Jasper Harris, 1836–1909, unpublished
manuscript, 2; Carole Call King is a great-granddaughter.
16. Ibid., 5–6.
17. Passey, History of Martha Ann Smith Harris, 5–6.
2000), 123.
20. James M. Banner Jr. and Harold C. Cannon, “The Personal Qualities of Teaching,”
Change 29, no. 6 (November/December 1997): 43.
21. For example, see Teresa Pica, Gregory A. Barnes, and Alexis Gerard Finger, Teaching
Matters: Skills and Strategies for International Teaching Assistants (New York:
HarperCollins, 1990), 166–67; Banner and Cannon, “The Personal Qualities of
Teaching,” 40; Gary Gordon, “Teacher Talent and Urban Schools,” Phi Delta Kappan
81, no. 4 (December 1999): 4; Peter G. Beidler, “What Makes a Good Teacher,” in
Inspiring Teaching, ed. John K. Roth (Boston: Anker, 1997).
22; emphasis added.
25. Robert Lemnson, Thinking about Teaching and Learning (Stirling, Virginia: Stylus,
J. R. Kearl

J. R. Kearl is the A. O. Smoot Professor of Economics at BYU and Assistant to the President for the Jerusalem Center. He is a former Dean of General and Honors Education and Associate Academic Vice President.

Each year, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints join much of the Christian world in celebrating Christmas. And each year, the approaching holiday season causes me to think about the contrast between Christmas and Easter—the other great celebration of Christ’s life. I invite you to join me in reflecting on the distinctive spirit of the Christmas season and its associated celebration of Jesus’ birth. In particular, I invite you to think about the words and associated memories that come to mind when you think of the word Christmas. For me, words like expectation, anticipation, hope, potential, awe, wonder, spontaneity, joy, and curiosity capture some of the feel of Christmas.
Now think for a moment about the word *Easter*. Are your thoughts the same as when you reflect on the meaning of *Christmas*, or do you see in your imagination and feel in your hearts something slightly different? I do. When I think of *Easter*, words like *fulfillment*, *realization*, and *triumph* seem to best capture my feelings.

For me, the difference between Christmas and Easter parallels the music we commonly sing at Christmastime: “Silent Night,” “With Wondering Awe,” “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” or “Away in a Manger.” These traditional Christmas hymns have a softness and tenderness that whispers, “Shush—there’s a babe over there lying in a manger.” By contrast, when I think of moving or inspirational Easter hymns, I think of “He Is Risen,” “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” or similar majestic anthems that in their voicing proclaim, “Christ is triumphant!”

This difference between the quiet potential of Christmas and the acknowledged realization of Easter is also manifest in scriptural records. Consider, for example, the account of angels announcing the Messiah’s birth to a few shepherds in the hills near Bethlehem. While these same angels joined heavenly hosts in singing “Glory to God,” they apparently did so to only a handful of earthly observers, as we find no scriptural evidence of a widespread understanding that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had just come to earth as a mortal infant.

By contrast, at the beginning of the last week of His life, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey, through streets mobbed by people spreading a carpet of palm fronds at His feet. While some would abandon Him by the end of the week and demand His crucifixion when offered the choice between freeing Him or Barabbas, at the beginning of the week, there could not have been many people in Jerusalem or in the surrounding area who did not know that Jesus had arrived in the city.

For me, the difference between Christmas and Easter is also illuminated by a stunningly beautiful painting I first saw in the Louvre nearly twenty years ago. I was wandering around at the end of a long morning, a bit numb and almost overcome by a museum as large and rich in visual delights as the Louvre. As I turned a corner, I saw the painting by Georges de La Tour. It is entitled *Christ with St. Joseph in the Carpenter’s Shop*.

From the first moment I saw this painting, I was completely enthralled by its beauty and peace. Obviously, thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—of nativity paintings and other images depict Jesus as an infant, typically with His mother Mary. Probably an equal number are devoted to His ministry, His suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross, and His subsequent Resurrection and ascension into heaven.

But the de La Tour painting is one of only a handful of works of Jesus as a boy. It has become my favorite painting. If I am in Paris, I make something of a pilgrimage to the Louvre to be inspired and calmed by it. I am so taken by it that a couple of years ago when my three eldest children were returning from study at the Brigham Young University Jerusalem Center, I agreed to pay for a hotel in Paris for a couple of nights on the condition they find this painting in the Louvre.

La Tour portrays the youthful Jesus looking at His stepfather with deep affection as Jesus holds a candle to light the work of the man who was known in His community and, for much of Jesus’ life, as His father. The painting conveys a sense of love, deep affection, peace, innocence, and purity—each a wonderful attribute of Christmas and of childhood. For me, La Tour has captured much of what Christmas represents. He does so through the
eyes of a young boy, an innocent young boy. Don’t all of us, in a way, see Christmas through the eyes of children?

Given that we most often see Christmas in this light, I am surprised at how little attention is actually paid to Jesus’ childhood. It is not just art that ignores His childhood and focuses primarily on His birth, later ministry, atoning sacrifice, and Resurrection. The scriptural story of Jesus’ earthly sojourn is also mostly silent from the flight into Egypt at around the age of two until He begins His ministry by journeying to be baptized by John in the Jordan River as a mature man, perhaps thirty years old. The notable exception is the scriptural appearance of Christ at about age twelve when the group He and His family had joined to journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem left Jerusalem for the long journey back to Nazareth without Him. Listen to the voice of Mary, who is clearly, in this instance, not the mother of Jesus the Son of God but the mother of Jesus the child, almost to be a teenager:

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.
And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back to Jerusalem, seeking him.
And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple. . . .
. . . and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. . . . And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. (Luke 2:42–51)

How many of us have heard that voice in our own mothers’ expressions of concern about our being out a bit too late on a date or driving on snow-packed and icy winter roads? Beyond this single account, we know virtually nothing else about Jesus’ life between the ages of two and thirty. Isaiah does tell us that Jesus’ childhood and young adulthood would not be easy: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good” (Isaiah 7:14–16). “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2).

“Butter,” probably better translated as “curd,” is not meant in this scripture to imply wealth or luxury but just the opposite: the harsh and difficult conditions of the poor at the time. Archaeological and other evidence suggest that life at the time was probably short—not more than forty years if a person survived early childhood. Evidence also suggests that nutrition was inadequate. However, Isaiah suggests that growing up in Jesus’ particular environment was important in forming the person who subsequently chose to take upon Himself our sins.

We know that Jesus grew up in a very small village of perhaps two to four hundred people, most of whom were probably part of His extended family. He was known as the son of a carpenter: “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matthew 13:55) and as Joseph and
Mary’s son. Mark tells us that Jesus was himself a carpenter: “Is this not the carpenter?”

(Mark 6:3).

*The Son of a Carpenter,* by Francois Lafon, 1896.
Church of St. Joseph, Nazareth, Israel.
Imagine Jesus as an apprentice in Joseph’s workshop. The painting that comes to my mind at this point, one more of a few of Jesus as a child or young adult, is from St. Joseph’s Church, built over the traditional site of Joseph’s shop in Nazareth. While not as powerful as the La Tour painting, it does convey the notion of apprenticeship and of parents gathered around and working with a maturing boy. Even in the La Tour painting, Jesus is at work with Joseph. La Tour has Joseph bending over with a primitive brace and bit, drilling on the dimly lit beam at his feet while Jesus shields the candle flame from any breeze as He lights his stepfather’s work.
We also know from the scriptural record that Jesus grew up in a fairly large family. Both Mark and Matthew tell us of four brothers—James, Joses, Juda, and Simon—and unnamed sisters (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55–56).
Finally, we can infer from the scriptural record that Jesus had affection for Nazareth, the village where He grew up. We can see this in a kind of backhanded way when, in the excitement that many of us understand about returning as an adult to our childhood home,
He is disappointed and clearly very pained by His reception in Nazareth. Listen to His voice on this occasion: “And he went out from thence, and came into his own country. . . . And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? . . . And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house” (Mark 6:1–4).

Significantly, we know almost nothing about the period between Jesus’ birth and the beginning of His ministry thirty years later. The absence of a scriptural record is, I believe, neither an accident nor an oversight. While working through divine inspiration, Joseph Smith expanded and corrected the Bible, leaving the account of Jesus’ childhood untouched. This was not an oversight, as the Prophet clearly felt comfortable expanding, to a considerable degree, the scriptural account of Melchizedek’s life. The difference between his treatment of Melchizedek’s life and Jesus’ early life suggests that God, Jesus’ mortal father, clearly wanted His Only Begotten Son to grow up in the kind of environment typical for children and young adults of the time—protected and sheltered from the adult world He would enter, but only as an adult.

Think about it for a moment. Jesus Christ, the literal Son of God, virtually disappears from the scriptural record from the age of two to the age of thirty. What does He disappear into? He disappears into childhood, into teenage years, and into young adulthood in a small village in the hills near the Sea of Galilee, there to grow up among brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and friends.

I believe that this disappearance of Jesus into childhood was not by chance but happened by heavenly design. There is something so important that occurs during these formative years that our Father in Heaven wanted His Son to experience it. In other words, it was important for Jesus to be not only the Son of God but also the child of Mary and Joseph and the brother of James with other brothers and sisters around Him. Something very significant about childhood warranted this extraordinary occurrence in which the Son of God literally disappeared into childhood and did not reappear until He was an adult.

In Conan Doyle’s Silver Blaze, Watson asks Holmes, “Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?” Holmes replies, “To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.” Watson observes, “The dog did nothing in the night-time.” Holmes responds, “That was the curious incident.”

For Holmes, silence was a clue. Similarly, the silent scriptural record is, I believe, a clue to at least two things about Jesus’ life from age two to age thirty. First, Jesus had a protected childhood. Indeed, it remains protected in precisely the sense that we know virtually nothing about it and are clearly not supposed to. Second, Jesus had an extended childhood. If ever there was a child who could have matured quickly and assumed His divinely appointed role and mission, it is Jesus Christ, the literal Son of God. Yet, with what must be seen as great patience, His earthly and heavenly fathers allowed Jesus to mature slowly—in short, to have a childhood.

We live, unfortunately, in a world that intrudes on childhood and that wants to deprive it of innocence, charm, faith, trust, hope, and even peace and security—all the things that make childhood rich and important. We live in a world that literally wants to rob children
of childhood. In doing so, the world robs them of the joy that comes to children only when they are able to live protected to some degree from the world with innocence, faith, trust, and security.

Kiku Adatto, director of the Children’s Studies Program at Harvard, noted: “We’re obsessed with children, but that doesn’t mean the same thing as upholding the idea of childhood. In fact, we’re obsessed with it [children] precisely because all the barriers between childhood and adulthood are breaking down.”952 As an example of this breakdown, Adatto’s group at Harvard studied photos of children taken throughout this century and found that children’s pictures that once paid homage to childhood innocence have increasingly given way to sexualized images of ever-younger childlike models in ads for cologne, underwear, jeans, or the like.963

Stephanie Coontz, author of *The Way We Really Are,* notes that for years children were excluded from adult knowledge and participation in the adult world. “Now,” she says, “we try to exclude them from participation, but we’re unable to exclude them from knowledge. It’s the most pathological situation [imaginable].”974

Kay S. Hymowitz, who wrote “Tweens: Ten Going on Sixteen,” suggests that absentee parents—due primarily to parents working long hours away from home—and a “sexualized and glitzy media-driven marketplace” have pushed young children into settings where peer expectations encourage choices regarding dress, language, and behavior that were once confronted by young people five, six, or even ten years later.985

There is legitimate concern and much hand-wringing these days about a world that intrudes with adult themes and issues in our homes and in our children’s lives. I’m hardly the first to point to what appears to be an unrelenting assault on childhood. It is important that, as prophets have counseled, we fortify our homes against these intrusions—that we protect our children’s childhoods. There is much that we can and ought to do in this effort. Though it goes beyond the purpose of this essay to do more than encourage all of us in this effort, it is worth taking note of Isaiah’s counsel: “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isaiah 54:13).

This is a remarkable promise. If we teach our children of—that is, about—the Lord and teach them to love the scriptures and the words of prophets that testify and teach of Him, our children will have peace. Note that the promised reward of “peace” is for our children as children, not as adults, and not for us as parents, at least directly. Note also that the scripture can be read to suggest that our children will, if we create the environment, be taught by the Lord.

However, we make a mistake if we believe that it is we against the world in protecting childhood. Indeed, I want to suggest that we are often coconspirators with the world in robbing our children of their childhoods. “How so?” you might ask. My answer is that we are coconspirators because we relentlessly push our children to grow up too fast. As noted earlier, it was not simply that Jesus had a protected childhood; He also had an extended childhood. We are aware of a world that would intrude on childhood. Are we equally aware of our own efforts to shorten childhood? Think of the stereotypical example: Little League—a game in which boys dress like men and are pushed to perform like men while their fathers stand on the sidelines and act childish. Don’t we too often give extraordinary attention to children who seem particularly precocious—that is, to those who seem particularly adult?
There is a pride, a false pride, in boasting about our children being the “youngest” to have accomplished such and such (typically adult) feats. Thus, while we bemoan the encroachment of the world into our homes, complaining that an intrusive adult world forces our children to confront adult themes and adult issues before we think they ought to, at exactly the same time, we push our children out of childhood and out of important teenage experiences. In short, we push them to act like adults, to take on adult activities, and to perform like adults well before they are adults. In doing so, we rob our children of their precious childhoods just as surely as does a world that seems hostile to childhood. Here is an example of what I’m suggesting. A few years ago, I held an administrative position at Brigham Young University where I dealt with appeals from parents on admissions matters. Among the most difficult for me were appeals from parents whose children had been denied “early admission”—that is, from those parents who believed that the proper place for their children who were fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen years old was with young adults in a university setting. The common complaint was, “There’s nothing left for them to do in high school.” On occasion, I responded, “Well, except to attend the junior prom.”

This answer, meant to be semiserious and not flippant, always drew an icy silence from the other end of the telephone line. I note, parenthetically, that I have five children. Over the past decade or so, I have had five fifteen-year-old teenagers living in my home. So I can understand the natural urge of parents, on occasion, wanting to have their teenagers somewhere else or, perhaps, anywhere else. But it’s precisely because I sometimes wanted my children somewhere else that I came to understand the realities of such thinking. Maturing takes time—even apparently for the Son of God—and the development of the attributes that really matter requires both a protected and an extended childhood.

With regard to this urge to push our children through schooling as rapidly as possible, what is it about the world of adult work that makes us so anxious to push our children into it? Do we really believe that entering the world of full-time work or embarking on a career as soon as possible results in a better life than experiencing and enjoying teenage years and then entering the workforce and beginning a career in a timely fashion after high school, college, or technical training is completed?

Curiously, adults often look back with nostalgia at precisely the teenage years in their own lives and yet seem so eager to push their children quickly through this time period. Michael and Diane Medved frame this situation nicely when they suggest that a protected and extended childhood allows children the luxury to concentrate on really important things while, by contrast, adults are forced to give attention to those things that are merely urgent.99

The murder several years ago of seven-year-old Jon Benet Ramsey was shocking. It was shocking because no child ought to be deprived of life in that manner and at that age. But wasn’t it also shocking to see a child dressed up to effect the look of a twenty-year-old woman? Whatever one thinks of beauty pageants or contests for twenty-year-old young women, there is something deeply upsetting and disturbing about a seven-year-old child made to pretend that this is her world. Perhaps what stunned people about this tragic murder is that the photo was a caricature, or even a mirror, in which we saw something of our own efforts to force our children to grow up too quickly and before their time.
Surely, if ever a precocious child has lived on the earth, that child is Jesus Christ, the literal Son of God. Yet our Father in Heaven apparently wanted His Son to mature slowly—to enjoy childhood, teenage years, and even young adulthood, protected from an untimely entrance into the adult world. We have no evidence that He was pushed to become something before He was an adult, although surely Jesus could have been anything He wanted to be at almost any time during those years. Abundant evidence exists to show that He was protected. In fact, the lack of a scriptural record speaks eloquently, in its silence, to this fact.

Where the scriptural record does speak, it clearly suggests that He grew up. Luke records that after Jesus’ birth, the family “returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:39–40). Then, after the journey to Jerusalem in which Jesus was left behind and after His frantic parents searched for three days, we read that He “came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:51–52). Note that Luke’s first observation is about the period between Jesus’ birth and His appearance in the temple at about the age of twelve and that the second refers to the period after His visit to the temple—that is, the period when He would have been a teenager.

Paul observed, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered”—that is, experienced (Hebrews 5:8). And from a modern text written by John and revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, we learn: “And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace . . . [and] continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God” (D&C 93:12).

Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the Bible provides some additional insight: “And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh” (JST, Matthew 3:24–26).

The clear sense of these passages is that Jesus grew up by passing through a childhood and youth that were the norm for His day.

In regard to our own children’s growing up, Neil Postman, author of *The Disappearance of Childhood*, argues that an “adult knows about certain facets of life—it’s mysteries, its contradictions, its violence, its tragedies—that are not considered suitable for children to know. . . . As children move toward adulthood, we reveal these things to them.” But we do so slowly and in a timely fashion. In this regard, Mitchell Kalpakgian argues that for children to become intellectually complete adults, they need “a true childhood [that] provides leisure and light-mindedness—an atmosphere of play that stimulates the creative imagination and nourishes the inner life of the mind and soul.”

I don’t want to be misunderstood. We protect childhood not by nostalgic indulgence but by a recognition that while childhood exhibits attributes that are extraordinarily important and wonderful, children are also born impulsive, self-centered, and irresponsible. An important part of an extended childhood is helping children to learn to value and cooperate with others, to delay gratification, and to establish realistic connections between their behavior and its consequences. This maturing process requires both biological maturation and years of sustained parental effort. It is not easy to teach
children to be considerate, empathetic, and moral or to behave ethically and with a
generous heart and spirit. The crucial learning environment to develop these attributes is
one that combines affection, discipline, example, emotional space, and, very importantly,
time. That is to say, the crucial learning environment is an extended, as well as a
protected, childhood.
I also don’t want to be thought to be Pollyannaish or naive or to be understood to be
arguing that we should not prepare, in a timely way, our children for the world in which
they will live. But I confess that I cringe a bit when I read or hear a public service ad that
asks, “Have you talked with your child yet about sexually transmitted diseases?” or
“What have you talked with your child yet about drugs and drug abuse?” Perhaps such
discussions are necessary; but, if so, it’s surely a damning indictment of our age that they
are. Moreover, the argument that our children are going to have to face such and such an
issue at some point anyway so they may as well face it now is specious and
wrongheaded. It is an argument that invariably brings adult issues and concerns into our
children’s lives at earlier and earlier points. Might it not be true that precisely because our
children will have to face certain specific issues at some point, they ought to be protected
from those issues as children? That is, isn’t it likely that an extended and protected
childhood best equips them for the world they will have to confront as adults?
The Christmas season is a wonderful season—one that gives us the opportunity to see
once again what a beautiful and extraordinary world this is when seen through the eyes of
children. Christmas not only is “for children” but also is a holiday in celebration of
childhood. Christmas is in its transcendent meaning also a celebration of Jesus’ mission
of redemption. The child who holds the candle to light the work of the father Jesus knew
in Nazareth, as reflected in the La Tour painting, becomes literally the light of the world
when He enters it as an adult, fully prepared by His heavenly heritage and by a protected
and extended childhood in the hills of Nazareth.
Although redemption is the central, glorious, and sublime message of Christmas, in its
particulars—that is, its language—and in the memories and images that Christmas
evokes, Christmas is also a celebration of childhood. I hope that at each Christmas season
we may reflect on this fact and pause to think not just about how we might protect our
children’s childhoods from an intrusive world but also about how we can protect our
children’s childhoods from our own inclinations to push them to become adults too soon.
This wonderful season gives us the opportunity to see, once again, what a beautiful and
extraordinary world we live in when it is seen through the eyes of children. I pray that,
whatever our age, we might seek to see it in this way, particularly at this time of the year,
and that we might rejoice in those attributes that make children, as children, so special.

Notes
2. Peter Applebome, “No Room for Children in a World of Little Adults,” New York
   Times, 10 May 1998, 9.
3. Ibid., 10.
4. Ibid.
“Seek Learning, Even by Study and Also by Faith”: The Relationship between Personal Religiosity and Academic Achievement among Latter-day Saint High-School Students

Brent L. Top and Bruce A. Chadwick
Brent L. Top is Professor of Church History and Doctrine and Associate Dean, Religious Education, BYU. Bruce A. Chadwick is Professor of Sociology at BYU.

From the earliest days of the Restoration, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have placed a high premium on the acquisition of learning—both secular and spiritual. The revelations of the Lord made it clear that education was needed both on earth and in eternity. It was seen as a spiritual pursuit as much so, if not more, than merely a practical necessity.

Education is not separate from theology but rather is a unique and important aspect of both the doctrinal teachings and the religious life of Latter-day Saints. “The glory of God is intelligence,” the Lord declared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1833 (see D&C 93:36). Earlier, the Prophet had been directed to establish schools for the educational benefit of both children (see D&C 55:4) and adults (D&C 88:127–41). Such schools, whether they were for children or the adult school of the prophets, were deemed to be a unique blending of the secular and the spiritual. “And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom,” the Lord commanded, “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

Gaining intelligence through study and faith is to be a religious pursuit—not just an intellectual exercise. Latter-day Saint theology teaches that education affects the spirit and the progress and destiny of the soul beyond this life, not just the mind in mortality. “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (D&C 130:18–19).

Latter-day prophets and apostles continue to counsel members of the Church, young and old, to get as much formal education as they can and to make the acquisition of learning a lifetime pursuit. “We have in the Church a strong tradition regarding quality education,” President Gordon B. Hinckley observed. He then further admonished Latter-day Saints: “Get all the education you can. . . . Education is the key to opportunity. The Lord has placed upon you, as members of this Church, the obligation to study and to learn of things spiritual, yes, but of things temporal also. Acquire all the education that you can, even if it means great sacrifice while you are young. You will bless the lives of your children. You will bless the Church because you will reflect honor to this work.”
Outside observers—those not familiar with Latter-day Saint theology and practices—may be somewhat surprised by the Church’s heavy emphasis on education and learning since “out in the world,” higher education generally leads to secularization and a decline of religious practices and personal spirituality. A rather extensive body of research documents the secularizing effects of education on religiosity. A recent article lamented that social scientists “have long ceased troubling themselves with exclusive investigations of the relationship between formal education and religious belief. . . . They could simply assume as a matter of course that formal education induces a weakening of faith.” Why then would the Church encourage its members to obtain higher education since such would lead them out of the Church?

Interestingly, recent studies have shown that contrary to worldly trends, the more education Latter-day Saints achieve, the higher is their religiosity—the more committed they are to their beliefs, the more active they are in Church participation, and the deeper their personal spirituality. One possible explanation for the amazing positive link between higher education and fervent religiosity of Latter-day Saint men and women suggests that rather than slowly eroding religious faith, education results in a critical clash between secular and religious perspectives. An individual is forced to choose one or the other perspective—to be either religious or scientific. This choice does not imply that religious individuals give up or repudiate their education. Rather, their overall view of the world is dominated by a religious perspective, within which they fit their education. Research indicates a large proportion of highly educated Latter-day Saint men and women chose a religious view rather than a scientific perspective, which is manifest in their high levels of religious devotion.

Youth who are still in their formative years are thought to be secularized (made less religious and spiritual) by their education—just like adults—but also for other reasons. Youth are seeking independence from their parents and family; they desire to forge their own unique identity. As a result, teens may decrease their participation in family-encouraged religious activities.

The few studies that have examined high-school students generally conclude that religion is not related to academic achievement. However, a recent study reported that participation in Church activities was related to higher scores on standardized achievement tests and to higher educational expectations. Because of the doctrinal significance of scriptural and prophetic statements concerning education and because of the remarkable finding concerning adult members, we designed an empirical study to test the relationship between religiosity and educational achievement among Latter-day Saint high-school students.

Most social-science studies examining the effects of religion on behavior of either adults or adolescents have measured religiosity by whether the person is affiliated with a religious organization or by attendance at church meetings. Our studies of the link between religiosity and delinquency have revealed that there are other dimensions of a person’s religious life than merely affiliation and attendance. As a result, in this study we examined religious beliefs such as “God lives”; private religious behavior such as personal prayer; public religious behavior, especially Church attendance; spiritual experiences; the importance of religion in people’s lives; acceptance of the youth in their local ward by leaders and other youth; and family religious behaviors.
We realize that teenagers’ lives are complex, with many forces influencing performance in school. To test the relationship between religiosity and educational achievement in a more real-life situation, we added to the model peer pressures to engage in behavior counterproductive to educational performance such as skipping school and defying teachers.

We also added important family characteristics to the model, including parents’ education, family structure, and maternal employment. The father’s education has traditionally been identified as one of the most important predictors of the educational achievement of children. In addition, parent-child behaviors were included in the model predicting academic achievement. “Connection between parents and children” refers to the emotional bond that develops through expressions of affection and the loving support parents offer their children. Family regulation involves the setting of family rules, monitoring compliance to the rules, and administering appropriate discipline when rules are broken. Finally, psychological autonomy refers to the degree to which children are allowed to come to know and express their own thoughts, feelings, and opinions. It is allowing them, after teaching correct principles, to be themselves. This is not to be confused with behavioral autonomy, such as the freedom to come and go and do. Behavioral autonomy would be granted as part of family regulation through the establishment of family rules and expectations, as well as consequences for disobedience. Rather, psychological autonomy is the freedom teens feel in sharing their thoughts and ideas with their parents. It is the process of becoming confident in their own ability to make competent judgments.

**Research Objectives**

This study had two specific research objectives. The first was to compare the academic achievement of Latter-day Saint high-school students to that of other students to ascertain the impact of students’ membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on academic achievement and educational expectations.

The second objective was to test a model predicting academic achievement of Latter-day Saint high-school students from religiosity, peer influences, and family characteristics and processes.

The model is presented in Figure 1. The intent was not to test a comprehensive model completely explaining all possible reasons for why youth succeed or fail in school. Rather, we wanted to demonstrate the relationship between religiosity and educational achievement within the significant context of peer and family influences.
Data Collection
With the cooperation of the Church Educational System and the approval of the respective area presidents, we administered questionnaires to nearly five thousand Latter-day Saint high-school students (ninth through twelfth grades) in four different geographical regions—the east coast of the United States, the Pacific Northwest states of Washington and Oregon, Utah County, and the British Isles. These geographical areas were selected because each is a unique religious environment.
A random sample was drawn in each area from the potential seminary student lists generated by the membership records in the respective Church units. The questionnaire was mailed to those selected for the study along with a self-addressed return envelope. The cover letter assured students of complete anonymity. The questionnaire asked about educational achievement, educational aspirations, religious beliefs and practices, involvement in various kinds of delinquent behaviors, and the degree to which the Latter-day Saint youth experience peer pressure to engage in inappropriate activities. Also examined were various aspects of these teens’ family life like family structure and parenting practices. Several publications have reported our findings concerning the effects of friends, religion, and family relationships on delinquency among Latter-day Saint youth.108-7

Measurement
Academic achievement was measured by four questions: (1) the student’s average grades, (2) the importance of good grades, (3) how well the student likes school, and (4) the student’s aspirations for post-high-school education. The response categories for grades ranged from “mostly A’s” to “D’s and F’s.” The five response categories for liking
school varied from “I like school very much” to “I dislike school very much.” A set of four response categories ranging from “Extremely important” to “Not important” was used for answers about the importance of grades. Finally, educational expectations were measured by six categories ranging from “I don’t expect to finish high school” to “I expect to get an advanced degree after graduation from college.”

Peer influences were determined by five questions about their friends engaging in antischool activities. The questions are (1) “Have your friends cheated on a test?” (2) “. . . skipped school without a legitimate excuse?” (3) “. . . openly defied a teacher or official at school?” (4) “. . . purposely damaged or destroyed things at school?” and (5) “. . . been suspended or expelled from school?” The four-response categories ranged from “none of my friends” to “all of my friends.” The first four questions were repeated, in which the students were asked whether their friends had ever pressured them to engage in the antischool behaviors. The response categories were “yes” and “no.”

Religious beliefs were measured by ten questions about traditional Christian beliefs as well as beliefs unique to Latter-day Saint theology. For example, we asked whether they believed “Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God.” Private religious behavior involved four questions about the frequency of personal prayer, scripture reading, payment of tithing, and monthly fasting. Public religious behavior included five questions about attendance at various church meetings. A sample question is “I attend sacrament meeting.” Spiritual experiences were determined by three questions about feelings of spiritual guidance, comfort, and forgiveness. “I have been guided by the Spirit with some of my problems and decisions” is a sample question. Eight questions measured feelings about the importance of religion. For example, students were asked to respond to the statement, “My relationship with God is an important part of my life.” Three items measured social acceptance by asking how well the students were accepted in Church settings by their peers, leaders, and adult members of the congregation. An example is “I seem to fit in well with the people in my ward.” Finally, family religious behavior was ascertained with three questions about frequency of family prayer, family scripture reading, and family home evening.

The response categories for questions about religious beliefs, importance of religion, spiritual experiences, and social acceptance varied on a five-point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The response categories for the behavioral questions ranged on a five-point scale from “never” to “very often.”

Family structure was determined by our asking with whom the students lived. Responses were coded into two-parent, stepparent, and single-parent families. Maternal employment was measured by our asking the students whether their mothers worked outside the home. Responses included “no,” “yes, part time,” and “yes, full time.” Family connection was determined by responses to ten questions originally developed by Shaefer and tested by Barber and his associates. “My mother makes me feel better after talking over my worries with her” is a sample question. Family regulation asked how much parents know about their teens’ friends, afternoon and evening activities, spending habits, and use of free time. Previous research has revealed that these five questions provide an excellent measure of family regulation. Psychological autonomy was measured through ten questions about parents’ use of psychologically controlling behaviors such as withholding love from a disobedient teenager.

Statistical Analysis
We computed frequencies to demonstrate the levels of specific academic achievement activities reported by the students. Factor analysis was used to combine answers to several questions into a single scale score. For example, grades, importance of grades, liking of school, and educational aspirations were combined via factor analysis into a single academic achievement score for each student. The reliability of each scale was determined by our computing an alpha coefficient.

A sophisticated statistical procedure known as structural equation modeling was used to test the model predicting academic achievement. This procedure first calculates the error in measuring the academic achievement, religiosity, family, and peer variables and suggests ways to strengthen the measurement. It then allows the several independent variables to compete to explain educational achievement and provides an estimate of the amount of academic achievement accounted for by the factors in the model. Structural equation modeling also tests the indirect as well as the direct effects of all the factors in the model on academic achievement.

Results

Each year a national study is conducted among graduating high-school seniors. The survey examines many different factors including academic achievement, post-high-school plans, drug and alcohol usage, premarital sex, as well as demographic items. The results are published in an annual report entitled *Monitoring the Future*. In light of the unique doctrinal emphasis on education and learning for Latter-day Saints, we wanted to know how our students’ academic performances compare with national averages. The results were remarkable. As seen in Table 1, the Latter-day Saint seniors received significantly higher grades than the national average for the same age group.112

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Young Men</th>
<th>National Sample</th>
<th>Young Women</th>
<th>National Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDS (N=326)</td>
<td>National Sample (N=7398)</td>
<td>LDS (N=419)</td>
<td>National Sample (N=8101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bs</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cs</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ds</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100.1%</td>
<td>100.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, Latter-day Saint seniors had much higher expectations for post-high-school education than the national average. As seen in Table 2, the educational expectations of Latter-day Saint young men were considerably higher than the national sample of young men. Over half of the Latter-day Saint twelfth-grade boys reported that they expect to obtain a graduate or professional (for example, law or medicine) degree compared to less than 20 percent of seniors in the national study. Although the post-high-school educational expectations among Latter-day Saint young women were somewhat higher than those expressed of young women in the national study, the gap is not as large as for young men.

| Post-High-School Educational Expectations of LDS and National Samples of Seniors |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| TABLE 2                         |                                 |
As noted earlier, most research dealing with the academic achievement of adolescents has cited father’s educational level as one of the most significant factors in predicting academic achievement. Table 3 compares the reported educational level of the fathers in both our sample of Latter-day Saint seniors and the national sample of graduating seniors. The educational level of the fathers of the Latter-day Saint students was generally higher than that of the national sample. Over three-fourths of the Latter-day Saint twelfth graders reported that their fathers had obtained at least some college education as compared to only about half in the national study. It is interesting that for some unknown reason, young men report their fathers have higher education than do young women.

Table 3: Educational Level of Fathers of the LDS and National Samples of Seniors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Young Men LDS (N=326)</th>
<th>National Sample (N=7398)</th>
<th>Young Women LDS (N=419)</th>
<th>National Sample (N=8101)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade School or Less</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The models predicting academic achievement for young men is presented in Figure 2 and for young women in Figure 3. Although we expected religiosity to be a significant factor, we were somewhat surprised that it emerged as the strongest predictor of academic performance for both young men and young women. The beta coefficients of 0.463 and 0.425 indicate a powerful relationship. In other words, the more religious a Latter-day Saint youth is, the more likely he or she will do well in school and have high aspirations for continued education and learning. These findings certainly refute the secularization hypothesis advocated by many social scientists. Among Latter-day Saint young people, at least, education does not make a person more secular, more irreligious, less active in church activities, and less spiritual in personal life. In fact, these findings show just the opposite to be true.

Peers also had an effect on academic achievement; and since we measured behaviors detrimental to school performance, the relationship is negative. In other words, if a
Latter-day Saint teen’s friends are low academic achievers and place little value on education, the Latter-day Saint youth will be less likely to do well in school. It was very encouraging to see that the negative influence of peers’ low academic achievement is quite small, especially in comparison to religiosity. It would be interesting in future research to include measures of peer pressures and examples supportive of school in addition to the negative behaviors. It is anticipated that the effect may be larger than that for negative pressures.

We were surprised that family characteristics had only limited direct impact on academic performance. None of the family factors were directly related to school performance for young men, and only family connection and granting of psychological autonomy were significant for young women. It was especially surprising that father’s education was insignificant since this is contrary to what has been found in extensive research with national samples of American youth.

One of the advantages of structural equation modeling is its ability to identify indirect effects. As can be seen in the two figures, family factors do have powerful indirect effects on school behavior. For young men, parental regulation—the setting of rules, monitoring compliance, and administering appropriate discipline—emerged with strong indirect influence through both religiosity and the influence of friends. Family regulation was especially influential for young men in the process of the selection of friends and in strengthening their ability to resist pressure to skip school and engage in other inappropriate behaviors. In other words, the higher the parental regulation, the less likely
the young man would associate with youth in trouble at school and the greater would be his religiosity, both of which would enhance the young man’s academic achievement.

As mentioned above, family connection and psychological autonomy were directly related to the school behavior of young women. Importantly, both also made indirect contributions as well. Thus, connection and autonomy directly impacted achievement and indirectly did so through religiosity and friends’ influence. In addition, family regulation and father’s education made indirect contributions to predicting academic achievement. It should be noted that mother’s employment was insignificant in the context of the other family characteristics. Most important, however, was the fact that for both the young men and young women, religiosity was the strongest predictor of success at school.

Given that religiosity has such a powerful impact on academic success, we determined the relationship between the specific dimensions of religiosity and achievement. Bivariate correlations provide information about how strongly one religious factor, by itself, relates to academic achievement. Table 4 reports the bivariate correlations between the various dimensions of religiosity and academic achievement. Each of these various dimensions of religiosity showed strong, statistically significant correlation with academic achievement. It is important to note that the strongest bivariate correlation for both young men and young women was private religious behavior—praying privately, reading the scripture on their own, fasting, and those other activities that are between the individual and God alone.
### Bivariate Correlations between Religious Factors and Academic Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Young Men</th>
<th>Young Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=1557</td>
<td>N=1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Religious Behavior</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Religiosity</td>
<td>.392</td>
<td>.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Religion</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>.396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance at Church</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>.266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Religious Behavior</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Experiences</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Religious Activities</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic Achievement factor computed from grades, importance of grades, liking school and educational aspirations. All figures had a .001 significance level.

It was somewhat surprising to us that, although statistically significant, family religious activities (such as family prayer, family home evening, family scripture study, etc.) showed the least powerful correlation with academic achievement (0.147 for young men and 0.187 for young women). We will discuss possible explanations for this result later in this article.

In the “real world,” the several factors influencing academic achievement do not work in a bivariate manner—one on one. They work simultaneously and interact together. Three dimensions of religiosity were found through factor analysis to be so closely related (in other words, measuring much the same thing) that they were combined into a single factor. Private religious behavior, importance of religion, and spiritual experiences were combined into the factor *personal spirituality*. To ascertain the relative strength of each of the remaining five dimensions of religiosity as they compete against each other to predict academic achievement, we computed additional structural equation models. The results are shown in Figures 4 and 5.
Model Predicting Academic Achievement with Specific Dimensions of Religiosity
(Young Men)

- Personal Spirituality: 0.612
- Religious Beliefs: NS
- Public Behavior: NS
- Acceptance in Ward: NS
- Family Religious Practices

Academic Achievement
\[ R^2 = 0.310 \]
\[ X^2 = 656 \]
AGFI = 0.931
RMR = 0.062

Figure 4
Although each of the various dimensions of religiosity was found to be statistically related to academic achievement when bivariate correlations were computed, this was not the case when they had to compete against each other in a multivariate model. For both young men and young women, personal spirituality was such a strong indicator of academic achievement that all the other dimensions of religiosity were statistically insignificant. The beta coefficients for personal spirituality on academic achievement of the young men and young women were respectively 0.612 and 0.657. This is an extraordinarily powerful effect. In other words, the most significant factor, by far, in determining how well Latter-day Saint youth will do in school and how much they value education is their own personal spirituality—the degree to which they have internalized gospel teachings and experienced spiritual things in their lives. This is contrary to the study noted earlier arguing that the social support received at church was the important religious factor. **Conclusions**

So what do all these findings mean to us? What things have we learned from this study that can benefit religious educators, parents, and anyone interested in helping youth in their transition from adolescence to adulthood?

First, we have learned that religion is much more powerful in affecting the lives and academic achievement of youth than many people and publications have acknowledged in the past.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this finding is that religiosity has usually been examined only as an external factor, such as religious affiliation and/or church attendance. What we have learned over and over again is that the real power of religion is found in religious convictions and personal practices, for both young and old. The external dimensions of
religiosity—affiliation and attendance—have power in a person’s life only when they become means to an end, not the end themselves. The “end” they must lead to if they are to have any meaningful impact on a person is internalization of gospel principles, individual testimony, and personal experience with spiritual things. All that we do—whether in our classrooms, with our families, or through our service in the Church—should focus on that “end.” Those we teach and serve must come to know for themselves, by learning and spiritual experience, the truths and goodness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then, religion has real power in the lives of youth.

The second major lesson we learned from this research was the unique and significant relationship between religious education and secular education of Latter-day Saint teens. Just as the statistical link between the two is unique to Latter-day Saints, so too is the theology of learning and education. Latter-day Saints are quite unique in their belief that education—both religious and secular—has eternal significance. Each type of education is linked to the other. Literacy and secular learning open doors for religious education. The better able a person is to read the scriptures, the more likely he or she is to gain greater gospel knowledge and experience the workings of the Spirit. From our research, we see a definite link the other way as well. Religious education and spiritual development encourage greater academic achievement. The relationship becomes cyclical—greater academic achievement leads to higher spirituality, greater spirituality leads one to more learning, and so on.

Yet the question may arise, “Which comes first?” That is the age-old chicken-and-the-egg paradox. It is probably impossible to isolate which factor comes first, as both are inextricably linked (at least to Latter-day Saints). What we do know, however, is that the greater the personal spirituality (religious internalization) of a Latter-day Saint youth, the higher his or her academic achievement. Why is this?

There are probably many reasons—both theological and sociological. It is highly unlikely, however, that Latter-day Saint youth consciously make the link between religiosity and academic achievement. No one is likely saying, “I am going to get a personal testimony so I can do better in my math class!” The effects are more subtle than that. It appears that academic achievement, zeal for learning, and aspiration for further education come as a natural by-product of increased religiosity.

This research suggests that as young Latter-day Saint students increase in gospel knowledge, obtain a personal testimony, and experience the workings of the Spirit in their lives, they have a greater desire to live in a way that will please God. This spiritual quest for excellence impacts more than just a youth’s “religious life” or church experience. When a young person possesses the “light of the gospel” deep within his or her soul, the desire to “walk in the light” spreads into all aspects of life, including education. The more we feel and experience the light, the more we will seek after light and truth—intelligence, which is the “glory of God.”

In a special fireside for youth and young adults, President Hinckley urged young Latter-day Saints to “be smart.” His admonition was as much spiritual as it was practical: You belong to a church that teaches the importance of education. You have a mandate from the Lord to educate your minds and your hearts and your hands. The Lord has said, “Teach ye diligently . . . of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which
are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and kingdoms—that ye may be prepared in all things” (D&C 88:78–80).

Mind you, these are not my words. These are the words of the Lord who loves you. He wants you to train your minds and hands to become an influence for good as you go forward with your lives. And as you do so and as you perform honorably and with excellence, you will bring honor to the Church, for you will be regarded as a man or woman of integrity and ability and conscientious workmanship. Be smart.\(^{113}\)

We can help the young people with whom we labor to fulfill this “mandate from the Lord” by remembering that religious education and secular education go hand in hand. If we want to strengthen the youth academically, we will work to strengthen them spiritually. Testimony, personal prayer, private scripture study, feeling the Spirit in heart and soul, and striving to live the principles of the gospel that have been learned all work together to enhance educational achievement—both here and hereafter.

Notes
Andrew C. Skinner, Dean of Religious Education, BYU

BYU photo by Mark A. Philbrick

The Foundational Doctrines of 1 Nephi 11–14

Andrew C. Skinner

Andrew C. Skinner, Dean of Religious Education, BYU.

This article is adapted from a presentation given at the Annual Church Educational System Religious Educator Conference on 14 August 2001 at Brigham Young University.

My suggestion is simple but important—Father Lehi’s visions and Nephi’s summary vision of all that Lehi had seen form the foundation upon which most everything in the Book of Mormon is built, doctrinally and spiritually. Positioned where they are, describing what they do, teaching the way they teach, and, most importantly, presenting the doctrines they present, these panoramic dreams and visions of a father and son prophet-duo are the fountain from which all else flows in the Book of Mormon. They inaugurate a new gospel dispensation much like our own dispensation, where revelations of the Godhead counter the decay of an apostate world. We have a grand opportunity to help our students understand the powerful lessons presented in these opening visions and revelations of the Book of Mormon.

Four important questions naturally arise out of this assertion:

1. How do we know Lehi received many visions and manifestations, and where is the summary description of those visions?

2. What precepts and doctrines are taught in that sweeping summary?
3. How do we know that Lehi’s and Nephi’s dreams and visions constitute the foundation on which most everything else rests, doctrinally and spiritually, in the Book of Mormon?

4. How can and should Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions and revelations impact our teaching of the Book of Mormon? **Question 1: How do we know Lehi received many visions and manifestations, and where is the summary description of those visions?**

Lehi’s experience is described in the opening verses of the first chapter of the Book of Mormon:

Wherefore it came to pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

And it came to pass that he returned to his own house at Jerusalem; and he cast himself upon his bed, being overcome with the Spirit and the things which he had seen.

And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun and noon-day.

And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament.

And they came down and went forth upon the face of the earth; and the first came and stood before my father, and gave unto him a book, and bade him that he should read.

And it came to pass that as he read, he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord. (1 Nephi 1:5–12; emphasis added)

We note at least three significant teaching points in this passage. First, Lehi prayed “with all his heart, in behalf of his brethren” (1 Nephi 1:5). Great things happen when we pray for others, especially when we pray with all our hearts. Prayer unlocks the powers of heaven, just as Lehi, Enos, and others teach us (1 Nephi 8:12; Enos 1:9). As the Lord’s brother James explained, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 4:16).

Second, as Lehi prayed, a pillar of fire came and dwelt before him “upon a rock” (1 Nephi 1:6). Why a rock? What is the symbolic significance of a “rock” in the scriptures? It refers to none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who is the “Rock of Heaven” (Moses 7:53; see also Helaman 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:1–4). Could it be that this symbolic image was intended to point Lehi to the very being who would occupy center stage in Lehi’s subsequent visions and revelations?

Third, note the phrase “saw the heavens open” (1 Nephi 1:8). God works through patterns and parallels throughout history, and we ought to teach our students to look for them. Lehi’s experiences fit a pattern and parallel the experiences, even the very language, of other great prophets in various dispensations:
• In the Old Testament, Ezekiel says, “The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (Ezekiel 1:1).
• In the New Testament, Stephen says, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).
• In the Book of Mormon, Alma says, “Methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne” (Alma 36:22).
• The Prophet Joseph Smith begins D&C 137 with the statement, “The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God” (D&C 137:1).

After telling readers about Lehi’s inaugural visions, Nephi describes the intensity of his father’s visionary experience: “And now I, Nephi, do not make a full account of the things which my father hath written, for he hath written many things which he saw in visions and in dreams; and he also hath written many things which he prophesied and spake unto his children, of which I shall not make a full account” (1 Nephi 1:16; emphasis added). Here we are told that Lehi received many visions and dreams early on—to too many to be summarized at this point. What is the content and focus of these first visions and personal writings, particularly those involving the book from which Lehi symbolically read (1:11–12)? These visions center on none other than Jesus Christ, just as 1 Nephi 1:19 plainly teaches: “And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him [Lehi] because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world” (emphasis added).

All the visions and manifestations that Lehi received point to one overarching truth—that a Messiah would come into the world to redeem the world. In other words, these founding revelations of the Book of Mormon center on the Messiah. Father Lehi was a mighty prophet who taught first and foremost of Jesus Christ, who is a universal redeemer—one who would save the whole human family. This is a different kind of Messiah than He in whom the Jews were accustomed to believing. Lehi’s message was revolutionary to many minds of his day—a message of a Messiah who was not a military conqueror or a political deliverer but rather a Messiah who would conquer sin and death and redeem the whole world!

We do not emphasize this enough in our teaching. Some students think that Nephi honored Lehi because he saved his family from destruction. This is true, but Lehi was more than just a messenger of truths that saved his family. He was a messenger of the fundamental truth that will save the entire human race from destruction. Lehi was Judaism’s seventh-century b.c. premier witness of and mouthpiece for the Lord Jesus Christ. Lehi was one of the great prophets of the ancient world, and we can only imagine the truths that were recorded in his own book—the 116 lost pages of manuscript, the book of Lehi. Lehi was to the people of his day what Joseph Smith is to us. Each prophet was the head of a new gospel dispensation, and that new dispensation was founded on revelations of the Godhead and new scripture. Lehi’s vision parallels Joseph Smith’s first vision as well as Paul’s. Again, it is important to point out these parallels to our students.

Nephi helps us understand how and why he not only became like his father but also became a witness for his father: “And it came to pass after I, Nephi, having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things
which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, Nephi, was desirous also that I might 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, as well in times of old as in the times that he should manifest himself unto the children of men” (1 Nephi 10:17; emphasis added).

Here we see that Nephi knew about the Messiah through his father’s testimony and that his father had done such a thorough and powerful job of instructing him that he now wanted to see, hear, and know for himself. Nephi was no longer content to rely solely on his father’s sure witness; he wanted a sure witness of his own. Thus, Lehi was not only the model father but also the model teacher. Now notice what follows: For it came to pass after I had desired to know the things that my father had seen, and believing that the Lord was able to make them known unto me, as I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away in the Spirit of the Lord, yea, into an exceedingly high mountain, which I never had before seen, and upon which I never had before set my foot.

And the Spirit said unto me: Behold, what desirest thou?
And I said: I desire to behold the things which my father saw.
And the Spirit said unto me: Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?
And I said: Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father. And when I had spoken these words, the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God; for he is God over all the earth, yea, even above all. And blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God; wherefore, thou shalt behold the things which thou hast desired. (1 Nephi 11:1–6; emphasis added)

After receiving a heavenly tutor, Nephi reiterates his desire to know for himself all that his father knew and had seen (see 1 Nephi 11:3). We are struck by how the angel frames the question that follows Nephi’s stated desire. The angel asks, “Believest thou that thy father saw the tree of which he hath spoken?” (11:4; emphasis added). Nephi wants to know the things of heaven. He wants to know about the Messiah, the heart of his father’s manifestations, and the angel starts by asking about trees.

Nephi answers his heavenly guide with “Thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father” (1 Nephi 11:5). Does the angel then say, “Hosanna, we have someone who believes in trees?” No, the angel exclaims, “Hosanna, . . . blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God” (11:6; emphasis added). What is, or rather, who is the tree? The tree is Jesus Christ. And what is the core of Lehi’s visions and dreams? The center of all that Lehi saw and experienced is the Son of the Most High God!

The summary of Lehi’s visions begins with 1 Nephi 11:8. It is important to note that immediately after Nephi is told he will be able to see all that his father saw, he is told in no uncertain terms by his personal heavenly guide that, of necessity, the focus of this summary will also be “the Son of God”: “And behold this thing shall be given unto thee for a sign, that 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 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).
Though chapter 11 will now be the focus of attention, note that the panoramic summary of Father Lehi’s visions received by his son Nephi on this separate occasion did not end with chapter 11, as indicated in the subsequent chapters:

1 Nephi 12:1—And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise.

1 Nephi 13:1—And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld many nations and kingdoms.

1 Nephi 14:5—And it came to pass that the angel spake unto me, Nephi, saying: 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.

In these chapters, Nephi makes it clear that his grand, panoramic vision of all that his father had seen and heard took him through the latter days. His vision did not stop with the founding of America and the Restoration of the gospel; rather, it included a clear view and description of the end of the world as well as an understanding that those images were the same ones that John the Revelator would also see and write about in the book of Revelation. In other words, the times in which we are now living are those that Nephi saw near the close of his summary vision. And these times are those that Father Lehi saw as well, six hundred years before the first coming of the Messiah, the Son of God, the Almighty Jehovah in the flesh.

Thus, Nephi concludes the description of his vision as follows:

And behold, the things which this apostle of the Lamb shall write are many things which thou hast seen; and behold, the remainder shalt thou see.

But the things which thou shalt see hereafter thou shalt not write; for the Lord God hath ordained the apostle of the Lamb of God that he should write them. . . .

And I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel.

And behold, I, Nephi, am forbidden that I should write the remainder of the things which I saw and heard; wherefore the things which I have written sufficeth me; and I have written but a small part of the things which I saw.

And I bear record that I saw the things which my father saw, and the angel of the Lord did make them known unto me.

And now I make an end of speaking concerning the things which I saw while I was carried away in the spirit; and if all the things which I saw are not written, the things which I have written are true. And thus it is. . . .

And it came to pass that after I, Nephi, had been carried away in the spirit, and seen all these things, I returned to the tent of my father. (1 Nephi 14:24–25, 27–30, 15:1; emphasis added)

Question 2: What precepts and doctrines are taught in that sweeping summary?
The chapter headings of 1 Nephi 11, 12, 13, and 14 give an idea of the sweeping nature of Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions. The list of doctrines and principles included in these chapters is staggering in its breadth.

1 Nephi 11—Nephi sees the Spirit of the Lord and is shown in vision the tree of life—He sees the mother of the Son of God and learns of the condescension of God—He sees the baptism, ministry, and crucifixion of the Lamb of God—He sees also the call and ministry of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

1 Nephi 12—Nephi sees in vision: the land of promise; the righteousness, iniquity, and downfall of its inhabitants; the coming of the Lamb of God among them; how the twelve disciples and the twelve apostles shall judge Israel; the loathsome and filthy state of those who dwindle in unbelief.

1 Nephi 13—Nephi sees in vision: the church of the devil set up among the Gentiles; the discovery and colonizing of America; the loss of many plain and precious parts of the Bible; the resultant state of gentile apostasy; the restoration of the gospel, the coming forth of latter-day scripture, and the building up of Zion.

1 Nephi 14—An angel tells Nephi of the blessings and cursings to fall upon the Gentiles—There are only two churches: the Church of the Lamb of God and the church of the devil—The Saints of God in all nations are persecuted by the great and abominable church—The apostle John shall write concerning the end of the world.

Frankly, these headings constitute an impressive description of the history of salvation as it has unfolded on this earth.

Does a central thread run through all of this? The Lord’s direct involvement in the affairs of the human family is at the heart of all that Lehi and Nephi experienced. And what is the single greatest act of God in human history? Is it not that He literally entered human history by becoming a human being? Both Lehi and Nephi not only saw the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh and the appearance of the resurrected Lord to their descendants at the land Bountiful but also, according to the Apostle John, as recorded in the book of Revelation, saw the end of the world, the second coming of Jesus Christ, the millennial reign of the Savior, and the celestialization of the earth.

Remember, Nephi was forbidden to record everything he saw, but the angel told him that John the Revelator would do so (1 Nephi 14:25). This record of John the Revelator, the Apocalypse, or the book of Revelation, even preserves the symbol of the tree of life, a symbol forcefully emphasized by Lehi and Nephi in their reports of their visions of the earth’s salvation history (see Revelation 2:7). And we know that other great prophets also saw the same things as Lehi, Nephi, and John the Revelator. In 1 Nephi 14:26, the Lord told Nephi that others had also been “shown all things,” that they had written down those things, and that they were “sealed up to come forth in their purity . . . in the own due time of the Lord, unto the house of Israel.”

We do not have a complete list of those “others” who were “shown all things”; but we do know who some of them are: the brother of Jared (see Ether 3); Moses (see Moses 1); and Adam (see D&C 107), to name a few examples. And we know that there are many records to be brought forth by the Lord in His own time. Many records have been discovered in the twentieth century: the Nag Hammadi manuscripts from Egypt, the Dead
Sea Scrolls from Qumran, the Ras Shamra tablets from Ugarit in modern Lebanon, and others. If these records have taught us anything, it is that we can expect other scriptural records to come forth from the ground. Helaman 3:15 tells us that “there are many books and many records of every kind, and they have been kept chiefly by the Nephites” (emphasis added).

The famous “cave story” told by President Brigham Young in 1877 while in Farmington, Utah, teaches that many ancient records will come forth in the latter days. In the story, President Young related an incident from the life of Oliver Cowdery wherein Oliver said that after the Prophet Joseph Smith received the plates, he was instructed by a heavenly messenger to carry them back to the Hill Cumorah. Oliver accompanied Joseph, and when they arrived, they walked into a large and spacious cave. They saw a pile of plates at least two feet high under a table, and “there were altogether in this room more plates than probably many wagon loads; they were piled up in the corners and along the walls.”

Elder Heber C. Kimball also referred to the cave story and then stated the following: “Joseph and others . . . went into a cave in the hill Cumorah, and saw more records than ten men could carry[]. There were books piled up on tables, book upon book. Those records this people [the Latter-day Saints] will yet have, if they accept of the Book of Mormon and observe its precepts, and keep the commandments.”

With this background, contemplate the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie:

We are in the process of receiving all that God has spoken by the mouths of his holy prophets since the world began. Only a small portion has come to us so far; we do not, as yet, begin to know what the ancients knew. . . .

Except for a few things relative to salvation for the dead, we have not yet received one syllable of scripture, one trace of truth, one gospel verity, one saving power, that was not had anciently.

The time is yet future—it will be Millennial—when the Lord reveals to us those things which have been hidden from the foundation of the earth and which have never as yet been given to man. . . .

What we have so far received is to test our faith. When we repent of all our iniquity and become clean before the Lord, and when we exercise faith in him like unto the brother of Jared, then the sealed portion of the ancient word will be translated and read from the housetops.

Before becoming engrossed in idle speculation about the additional records we will be given, note that the primary purpose behind the creation and preservation of these records is to testify of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Holy Lamb of God, the great Jehovah who condescended, who came to earth as the babe of Bethlehem to work out the infinite and eternal Atonement and make possible Heavenly Father’s great plan of happiness.

Prophets kept records, saw visions, and received manifestations to teach of Jesus Christ and His relationship to the whole human family that we may know that people in all ages knew of the need for and reality of the infinite and eternal Atonement. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we know that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is the most important event in all eternity. According to Elder McConkie, “from creation’s dawn through all the ages of a never-ending eternity,” nothing ever has or ever
will be as important or significant as the infinite redemptive sacrifice that was wrought by the shedding of the blood of God. As a discussion of the Savior’s monumental act of mercy, which is the central doctrine of the Book of Mormon, few chapters in all scripture equal the beauty, majesty, and depth of 1 Nephi 11. Since this chapter has so many foundational doctrines and principles that could be discussed, what should we point out to our students?

First, chapter 11 gives us a window of insight into the role of symbols and metaphors in the Lord’s economy of teaching (such things as trees, fountains of pure water, the iron rod, rocks, and so forth). Undoubtedly, the Lord uses symbols and metaphors for many reasons, at least two of which must surely be to conceal or reveal depending upon the spiritual capacity of the student (and we are all students) and to convey multiple layers of meaning associated with a single image. Nothing will help our students more than teaching them to start thinking in symbols and metaphors. We sometimes assume the development of the “metaphorical mind” will happen automatically, but like Nephi, each of us needs personal tutors and guides to help us through the revelations of God. The Holy Spirit and gifted teachers are some of these mentors. They help us understand why the Lord frequently uses symbols.

Second, chapter 11 teaches that the role of prophets is to learn and testify of Christ and His Crucifixion, whether before or after His coming in the flesh. Nephi wanted to know all that his father saw and heard, yet how does the Lord begin teaching Nephi? He begins with the foundation: God and His Only Begotten Son. Reflect on this for a moment. A knowledge of God and His Only Begotten Son, the Messiah, constitutes the inaugural revelations of the Book of Mormon. It is this knowledge that is revealed to a father and his son (perhaps also a pattern to show that heavenly things have an earthly likeness).

Third, chapter 11 teaches that prophets sometimes have heavenly guides as their tutors and mentors. This follows the ancient Near Eastern pattern found in several apocryphal and pseudepigraphical accounts of manifestations, as well as patterns in Jewish mysticism.

Fourth, chapter 11 teaches that the Spirit of the Lord is in the form of a mortal man (see 1 Nephi 11:11). I take this to mean that the Holy Ghost is in the form of a man, though I am aware that others have believed it to be the preexistent Christ, such as is described in Ether 3:14–17.

Fifth, chapter 11 teaches that the tree in Lehi’s vision is the great symbol of the earthly Messiah. As reported in verses 8–20, after Nephi sees the tree and desires to know “the interpretation thereof,” he is first shown the cities of Jerusalem and Nazareth; next, a beautiful virgin; then, the condescension of God; and finally, the virgin bearing a child in her arms. These are the words that immediately follow: “And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: 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” (1 Nephi 11:21–22). From the Apostle John’s New Testament witness, we come to understand that God’s love became tangible in the gift of His Only Begotten Son, born into mortality as the babe of Bethlehem (John 3:16).

Thus, chapter 11 teaches the doctrine of the condescension of God like no other book or chapter of scripture in our collection. Reflect on the word condescend: con means with and descend means come down. In other words, to condescend is to come down with the
people. How can we be anything but awed and humbled when we realize that God Himself gave up His celestial abode to come down to this telestial earth, to be born a mortal human being just as you and I. President Joseph Fielding Smith stated, “Our Savior was a God before he was born into this world.”119 Thus, the all-powerful one became a helpless baby, to bruise His shins and stub His toes, to learn to crawl, walk, and run, to relearn what He had forgotten as a result of His human birth and the veil of forgetfulness, and to suffer hardship and injustice though He was exquisitely and perfectly sensitive to unfairness and sin. This condescension is so majestic and profound as to be incomprehensible to the finite mind. I hope we give this doctrine its full due when we teach.

In fact, the doctrine of condescension in its true and complete sense, as taught in 1 Nephi 11, encompasses two aspects of God. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

> The condescension of God (meaning the Father) consists in the fact that though he is an exalted, perfected, glorified Personage, he became the personal and literal Father of a mortal Offspring born of mortal woman. And the condescension of the God (meaning the Son) consists in the fact that though he himself is the Lord Omnipotent, the very Being who created the earth . . . yet being born of mortal woman, he submitted to all the trials of mortality, suffering “temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue” . . . finally being put to death in a most ignominious manner.120

This twofold nature of the condescension of God is comprehended in verses 18–21 and 26–33 of chapter 11.

Sixth, chapter 11 teaches that the symbolic rod of iron is the word of God, which leads unalterably to the “fountain of living waters.” This was a significant image to people living in the arid Middle East, where iron-age technology was the unmitigated reflection of strength and power and the cool water of unpolluted springs meant, quite simply, life and well-being. But more importantly, 1 Nephi 11:25 recounts the deepest meaning of the fountain for God’s people. It is the same as the tree of life or the love of God; and all these images, in God’s economy, were made to be representations of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Rock, the Tree of Life, the Living Water, and many other things (see John 4:10, 14).

Seventh, chapter 11 teaches that prophets, many hundreds of years before the earthly advent of the Savior, foreknew and foresaw—literally saw—the Savior’s earthly ministry, including the following:

- The baptism of Jesus (11:27)
- The rejection of Jesus by unappreciative multitudes (11:28)
- The calling of twelve apostles (11:29)
- The reality of angels who minister to humans (11:30)
- The healing power of the mortal Messiah (11:31)
- The atoning crucifixion of the Son of God (11:33)

It should not surprise us that Nephi saw all these things, for such things have been shown to ordained servants of the Lord in modern times. Elder David B. Haight described such a personal experience in his general conference address of October 1989. During a catastrophic health crisis in which he lapsed into unconsciousness for several days, Elder Haight witnessed the eternal mission of the Son of God. In language paralleling the very
descriptions of the prophet Nephi, he stated, “I was shown a panoramic view of His earthly ministry: His baptism, His teaching, His healing the sick and lame, the mock trial, His crucifixion, His resurrection and ascension. . . . During those days of unconsciousness I was given, by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, a more perfect knowledge of His mission. I was also given a more complete understanding of what it means to exercise, in His name, the authority to unlock the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven for the salvation of all who are faithful.”

And so it was that Elder Haight’s experience paralleled Nephi’s experience, as well as that of others who have witnessed such scenes while still living in the mortal state. Elder Haight’s experience helps us relate to the experiences of Book of Mormon prophets.

Elder Haight concluded his general conference address with words of testimony that echo the sentiments by which we began our discussion: “I cannot begin to convey to you the deep impact that these scenes have confirmed upon my soul. I sense their eternal meaning and realize that ‘nothing in the entire plan of salvation compares in any way in importance with that most transcendental of all events, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord. It is the most important single thing that has ever occurred in the entire history of created things; it is the rock foundation upon which the gospel and all other things rest,’ as has been declared.”

Finally, 1 Nephi 11 teaches a significant lesson about the nature of rebellion against the Son of God in historical times and even in our day: “And after he was slain I saw the multitudes of the earth, that they were gathered together to fight against the apostles of the Lamb; for thus were the twelve called by the angel of the Lord. And the multitude of the earth was gathered together; and I beheld that they were in a large and spacious building, like unto the building which my father saw. And the angel of the Lord spake unto me again, saying: Behold the world and the wisdom thereof; yea, behold the house of Israel hath gathered together to fight against the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 11:34–35).

Regarding this passage, note that Nephi was shown two groups of people who rebel against the Apostles of the Lamb, and thus against the Savior. The first group is composed of the prideful multitudes of the earth. We know that they are filled with pride precisely because they fill the large and spacious building, which is “the pride of the world” (1 Nephi 11:36). This is no surprise because we have come to expect those of the world to be opposed to the things of God. The second group mentioned in verse 35 is the house of Israel that has gathered together to fight against the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. This ought to be a sobering warning to all of us. We who are members of the Church are of the house of Israel—either by birth or adoption—and we must be ever vigilant to keep ourselves out of the destructive position seen by Nephi.

**Question 3: How do we know that Lehi’s and Nephi’s dreams and visions constitute the foundation on which most everything else rests, doctrinally and spiritually, in the Book of Mormon?**

Look at how the doctrines discussed in 1 Nephi 11–14 relate to the purpose of the Book of Mormon and the place they hold in the rest of the Book of Mormon. Clearly, the coming of Jesus Christ, His life, His Ministry, His atoning mission, and His relationship to the house of Israel are at the heart of all the doctrines and prophecies revealed to Lehi and Nephi. The stated purposes of the Book of Mormon are to convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ and to show the remnants of the house of Israel
the great things the Lord has done for their fathers. In fact, most of the other purposes of
the Book of Mormon (to serve as a spiritual tutor, to teach us to hear the voice of the
Spirit, to show us how we should live and how we will be judged, to serve as a pattern for
the future, and so on) could also be said of 1 Nephi 11–14.
The true doctrine laid out in the Book of Mormon issues forth from the correct
foundation established by Lehi and Nephi through their inaugural visions and revelations.
If the visions received by Lehi constitute his formal call to be a prophet to his people,
then it surely is true that Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 11–14 constitutes his formal call to be
a validation of his father’s teachings and a second prophetic witness to his people. As it
turns out, their visions and manifestations become the founding revelations of an entire
civilization. Succeeding generations of prophets remembered Lehi and Nephi, invoked
their names, and taught their doctrines.
Helaman told his sons Nephi and Lehi that he had given them their names so they would
remember their first parents: “Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep
the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these
words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the
land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may
remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when
ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they
were good” (Helaman 5:6).
In that same speech, Helaman exhorts his sons to remember the foundational doctrine
taught by their ancient fathers Lehi and Nephi: “It is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who
is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation” (Helaman 5:12; emphasis
added).
Mormon, the great prophet-editor of the Book of Mormon, was very aware of his
prophetic heritage and the religious and doctrinal foundation on which his culture rested.
He made a special point of declaring that he was a descendant of both Lehi (3 Nephi
5:20) and Nephi (Mormon 1:5). In fact, he wanted it known that he was a “pure”
descendant of Lehi, and he knew of the special relationship the Savior established with
his forefathers. He states: “I am Mormon, and a pure descendant of Lehi. I have reason to
bless my God and my Savior Jesus Christ, that he brought our fathers out of the land of
Jerusalem, (and no one knew it save it were himself and those whom he brought out of
that land) and that he hath given me and my people so much knowledge unto the
salvation of our souls” (3 Nephi 5:20).
Indeed, the visions and heavenly manifestations of Lehi and Nephi were on the minds of
many prophets hundreds of years after Lehi and Nephi had died. For example, Alma said
he had an experience exactly like Father Lehi’s (Alma 36:22). And, of course, the
contents of Lehi’s and Nephi’s revelations were repeated many times by other great
prophets years later. For example, King Benjamin taught the doctrine of the
condescension of Jesus Christ as well as the panoramic overview of His mortal ministry
in images that take us back to Nephi’s descriptions (see Mosiah 3:5–10).

**Question 4: How can and should Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions and revelations impact
our teaching of the Book of Mormon?**
Although such things as the story line, the principle of obedience, the demonstrations of
faithfulness, and the nature of righteous living (all of which are principles demonstrated
in the first fourteen chapters of the Book of Mormon) are important and should be taught,
Lehi’s and Nephi’s revelations help us understand and teach the importance of the foundational doctrines summarized in 1 Nephi 11–14 in a powerful way. The most important of all these doctrines is a correct knowledge of God, followed by a correct knowledge of the life and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ and His role in the Father’s great plan of happiness. These chapters show that true prophets are first and foremost witnesses of the reality of Jesus Christ—that at the heart of prophecy is a testimony of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 19:10).

We can draw parallels between the founding revelations of Lehi’s and Nephi’s visions and revelations and those of the Prophet Joseph Smith, especially the First Vision. All three prophets witnessed for themselves the nature of the three Gods who constitute the Godhead, even the Presidency of Heaven as it has been called. All three prophets came to understand the nature of Christ’s atoning mission and its central role in the Father’s plan. All three prophets saw our day. And all three prophets were the leaders of new gospel periods or dispensations. As teachers of the Book of Mormon living in the very day seen and longed for by all the prophets, we can make Nephi’s supreme instructional principle a vivid reality. As Nephi said, “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23).

Everything we say and do as Church educators can somehow be geared toward bringing our students to a correct knowledge of God and the atoning mission of Jesus Christ. Perhaps we can figure out how to daily turn our students’ thoughts to the life, ministry, majesty, and place of Jesus Christ in Heavenly Father’s eternal plan of happiness.

Chapters 11–14 of 1 Nephi place the significance of the Atonement of Jesus Christ at the center of the earth’s panoramic history. If we become serious about trying our best to bring each of our teaching sessions back to Christ and His crucifixion, tremendous, unspeakable spiritual experiences will occur.

President Hinckley gave the following counsel in 1997:

> With all of our doing, with all our leading, with all of our teaching, the most important thing we can do for those whom we lead is to cultivate in their hearts a living, vital, vibrant testimony and knowledge of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world. . . . I would hope that in all we do we would somehow constantly nourish the testimony of our people concerning the Savior. I am satisfied—I know it’s so—that whenever a man has a true witness in his heart of the living reality of the Lord Jesus Christ, all else will come together as it should. . . . That is the root from which all virtue springs among those who call themselves Latter-day Saints.123

Nephi is an independent witness of all that his father, Lehi, saw and heard regarding the mortal ministry of the Holy Messiah; and because their witnesses and testimonies are found in the beginning pages of the Book of Mormon, the book itself becomes its own best example of the law of witnesses. That is, in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word of saving doctrine be taught. That saving doctrine centers on God sending His Son to earth to accomplish the infinite and eternal Atonement. Each of us can be the fulfillment of the ancient law of witnesses to our students as we teach of the Savior. Just as Lehi exhorted his children and Helaman encouraged and exhorted his sons, so we must teach our sons and daughters to build upon the same rock of our Redeemer—the only sure foundation. Notes
2. Ibid., 4:105; emphasis added.
5. For further discussion of this point, see Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 116–17.
9. Ibid.

**Religious Studies Center**

Established in 1975 by BYU Religious Education Dean Jeffrey R. Holland, the Religious Studies Center (RSC) is the research arm of Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Since its inception, it has provided funding for numerous projects, including conferences, books, and articles relating to Latter-day Saint culture, history, scripture, and doctrine. The RSC endeavors to use its resources to first, facilitate excellence in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ; second, encourage research and publication that contribute to the mission of the university and its sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and third, promote study and understanding of other religions and cultures within and beyond the Judaeo-Christian heritage.

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One of the primary aspects of the RSC’s mission is to promote a better understanding of divine truth. The interpretation of doctrinal matters rests with The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; therefore, we seek to discover historical background, provide cultural and linguistic details, and explore new avenues of understanding into our faith, history, and way of life. Thus, research into scripture, Church history, and religious matters in general is an important part of what the full-time Religious Education faculty do. Because BYU is primarily a teaching institution, we recognize as our major thrust the classroom experience. We seek, however, to expand our audience through the writing and publication of our research.

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*The Nauvoo Temple: A Story of Faith* (Don Colvin, 2002)


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1  John W. Welch and Doris R. Dant, *The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 60.

1  Ibid., 13.
1  Ibid., 17, 19.


As discussed in Alma 39:5–6, the gravest sin a person can commit is to deny the Holy Ghost, followed by murder and then sexual immorality. Because denying the Holy Ghost requires a person to have made certain covenants, participated in certain ordinances, and have certain knowledge, most individuals cannot commit this sin. Therefore, committing murder and violating the law of chastity are the first and second most serious sins most individuals are capable of committing.

“Called to Serve,” *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), no. 249.


“We Are All Enlisted,” *Hymns*, no. 250.


The term “Belial” is also used to describe those who practice and/or promote such things as false religious practices (Deuteronomy 13:12–15), sexual immorality (Judges 19:22–25), opposition to the Lord’s anointed servants (1 Samuel 10:24–27; 2 Samuel 20:1–2), generally rude and unruly behavior (1 Samuel 25:14–26), or giving false testimony (1 Kings 21:9–14).


Compare further the poor examples of Nephite husbands and fathers during the time of Jacob (Jacob 2:35, 3:10) and of Church members during the time of Alma the Younger (Alma 4:11).

Priests were “called of God” (Hebrews 5:1–4). As representatives of the people and of the Lord, they were anointed, consecrated, and sanctified (Exodus 28:41; 29:33, 44) to offer sacrifices at the temple (Numbers 18:1–7; Deuteronomy 18:1–5) and to teach the children of Israel (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 33:10). As “holy” and “chosen” servants, they were the Lord’s—or “his” (Numbers 16:5). See also Bible Dictionary, 753–54.

See also D&C 93:40–44; Jacob 2:35, 3:10.

Circular letter from the Office of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 11 February 1999. See also 1 Timothy 3:4–5.

David O. McKay, in Conference Report, 4 April 1964, 5.


Helpful ideas and suggestions for parents are available at the Church’s official website (www.lds.org) through the link of “Family Resources.”


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., 43.

Ibid., 45.


Ibid., 494.


Ibid., 65.


48 Gabriel Fackre, in *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 73, 78.


54 Ibid., 193, from a sermon delivered on 3 October 1841.

55 Her mother, Verna Passey Call, died 8 October 1986, and her father, Anson Bowen Call Jr., died on 1 June 1993.


57 Ibid., 128.


60 Ibid.

61 Gibbons, 27.

62 *Deseret News,* 13 April 1854; emphasis added.

63 Gibbons, 45–46.

64 *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* 3:1352.

65 Gibbons, 87.

66 Ibid., 130–32, 181–82.


68 Sarah Harris Passey, *History of Martha Ann Smith Harris,* unpublished manuscript, 4; Sarah Harris Passey is a daughter.

69 Carole Call King, *History of William Jasper Harris,* 1836–1909, unpublished manuscript, 2; Carole Call King is a great-granddaughter.

70 Ibid., 5–6.


76 Banner and Cannon, “The Personal Qualities of Teaching,” 43.
80 Ibid., 54.
82 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “respect.”
84 Third child (oldest son) of Hyrum Smith and Jerusha Barden. He was born 22 September 1832, making him twenty-four years old.
85 Heber C. Kimball (first counselor in the First Presidency).
88 Albert Jesse Smith was born 16 September 1881 and died, as stated in the letter, 25 August 1883.
89 Sixth child of Hyrum Smith and Jerusha Barden; born 2 October 1837; died 6 November 1876.
90 Oldest child of Hyrum Smith and Jersuha Barden; born 16 September 1827; died 8 October 1876.
91 Job 13:15.
92 Job 1:21.
96 Ibid., 10.
97 Ibid.


112 The numbers in the table reflect only those LDS twelfth graders from the three regions of the United States from which we gathered data. We did not include the results from the same-age youth in Great Britain because the school system there is quite different and, as a result, would not have given a valid comparison.


118 For further discussion of this point, see Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 116–17.


122 Ibid.