To Learn and to Teach More Effectively
Elder Richard G. Scott

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The Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies: Reflections of a Modern Pioneer
David B. Galbraith and Blair G. Van Dyke

Cultivating the Proper Classroom Climate
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‘He Healed Them All’: Understanding Mental Illness in the Classroom
Barbara Morgan and Alvin W. Morgan Jr.

Profiles of the Prophets: Ezra Taft Benson
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‘Follow the Prophet’: Eight Principles from 1 and 2 Kings
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Jeremiah and the New Paradigm of the Gathering
Ray L. Huntington

The Prophet-Leader
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Speaking with Purpose and Peace: Interview with Elain Witt
Celeste Elain Witt and Elizabeth A. Pinborough

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“There are a multitude of available paths through which
we may learn and be perfected.”

Elder Richard G. Scott
“Joseph Smith is a motivating example of an individual who throughout his brief life continually sought knowledge and willingly shared it with others, even though it would cost him his life to do so.”

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Editor’s Note

One name is now missing from the editorial staff list at the back of this issue. My good friend, mentor, and colleague Ted Stoddard, associate editor, is moving on to other pursuits. Ted has been with the Religious Educator since my assignment as editor. I immediately contacted Ted to discuss the audience and purpose, lay down some ground rules, and recruit authors. Since that time, he has worked tirelessly and without compensation to make sure each issue was well written and inspiring. Ted, we will miss you.

We begin with Elder Richard G. Scott’s Education Week address from last August. Elder Scott shares personal insight into how we can tune our minds and hearts to receive personal revelation. Then he suggests the value of acting on those promptings and keeping those sacred impressions in a secure place.

Joseph Fielding McConkie then offers ideas to glean the most from our scripture study.

Many Saints want to know about the Jerusalem Center, and Blair G. Van Dyke has interviewed David B. Galbraith, a pioneering faculty member who had a major impact on the center.

Then we continue with an Old Testament theme with Ronald E. Bartholomew’s article “‘Follow the Prophet’: Eight Principles from 1 and 2 Kings,” Matthew O. Richardson’s “The Prophet-Leader,” and Ray L. Huntington’s “Jeremiah and the New Paradigm of the Gathering.”

We print a thoughtful article by Barbara Morgan and Alvin W. Morgan Jr. suggesting how teachers can sensitively handle issues such as depression, a topic of growing importance in this increasingly complicated world.

How can teachers cultivate the proper classroom climate or speak with power and peace? Two authors offer guidance for teachers and anyone involved in public speaking.

We close with a Profiles of the Prophets article featuring Ezra Taft Benson.

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
Editor
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Photo by Jaren Wilkey/BYU
To Learn and to Teach
More Effectively

Elder Richard G. Scott

Elder Richard G. Scott is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. This address was given at the Campus Education Week on August 21, 2007.

With you I sense the excitement and anticipation of inspiring events as we begin the eighty-fifth annual BYU Campus Education Week. I congratulate you for your decision to participate in this extraordinary activity that you may learn and develop from the experience shared here. There is nothing quite like it in scope and quality in all the world. I share with you a constant, continuing thirst to improve and grow through all of the various means of learning that the Lord has provided for us.

As I travel throughout the world, it is evident that knowledge is power. Some use it to their own personal advantage. Many of these employ knowledge improperly, severely limiting others in the use of their agency. Yet there are those whose learning, experience, and talent are used to lift, encourage, motivate, and bless others around them. I feel confident that you are among that group. Not only will you benefit from your invested time and effort here, but others will likewise be helped by how you apply and share what you learn. You are following the admonition of the Lord: “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; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

This year’s theme, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day,” is so appropriate. It emphasizes the wonder of the Restoration of the gospel in this dispensation. Any student of history is aware that the Restoration of the Church with its pure doctrine, priesthood authority, and divine
guidance initiated an avalanche of discovery, enlightenment, and inventions that continue to powerfully lift mankind. How grateful I am to our Holy Father for the restoration of truth that came through the Prophet Joseph Smith to benefit all mankind. Joseph Smith is a motivating example of an individual who throughout his brief life continually sought knowledge and willingly shared it with others, even though it would cost him his life to do so.

My intent is to share thoughts of how to learn and how to teach effectively.

**How to Learn More Effectively**

There are a multitude of available paths through which we may learn and be perfected. Some of these include formal study, pondering, analysis, personal experience, careful observation, mentoring by others, observing outstanding role models, serving willingly, and learning from our own mistakes. It would be unrealistic to attempt to identify, even in headline form, the multitude of avenues through which knowledge flows and experience is gained. For that reason I have chosen to speak of what for me is the most effective path to truth and to the inexhaustible source of guidance and inspiration from our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son. That path is by spiritual guidance through the prompting of the Holy Ghost. Together we will lay a foundation to understand spiritual guidance and to discuss how to obtain it and how to share it. My sincere desire is to provide motivation for you to expand your capacity to gain knowledge, for your eternal benefit and the blessing of those with whom you will share it.

Also, there will be mentioned some of the important truths I have learned from seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And since I recognize that many of you are motivated to be here by the desire to help others learn and live truth, I will suggest ways that you might teach these truths. It would be much easier for me to do this if we could have two-way communication. Fortunately, you will almost always have the privilege of encouraging interaction with those you teach, even if it is one-on-one with a family member. Your instructions will be more beneficial and enduring when you promote that participation.

As we begin I will share a gospel truth that, if communicated effectively and used consistently in your life, would entirely justify every effort you have made to be at Education Week, if that is the only thing you do here. It will help you obtain the most benefit from this hour together, from the balance of your participation here, and in other significant events throughout your life. I notice that many of you have
come prepared to take notes on what you hear. While that is of great benefit, I will share a pattern that will provide you even greater access to truth. It is summarized in this statement of principle:

_Throughout the remainder of my life, I will seek to learn by what I hear, see, and feel. I will write down the important things I learn, and I will do them._

I suggest that you write this down. If I were to end this message at this point, you would have received one of the most meaningful ways to learn that I could impart. If the principle just shared doesn’t seem that important, think again. Many of the vital lessons I have learned and treasured, I have learned by carefully following it.

**How to Respond to Spiritual Promptings**

You can learn vitally important things by what you _hear_ and _see_ and, even more, by what you _feel_, as prompted by the Holy Ghost. Many individuals limit their learning primarily to what they _hear_ or _read_. Be wise. Develop the skill of also learning by what you _see_ and particularly by what the Holy Ghost prompts you to _feel_. Consciously and consistently seek to learn by what you _feel_. Your capacity to do so will expand through repeated practice. Significant faith and effort are required to learn by what you feel from the Spirit. Ask in faith for such help. Live to be worthy of such guidance.

Write down in a secure place the important things you learn from the Spirit. You will find that as you record a precious impression, often others will come that you would not have otherwise received. Also, the spiritual knowledge you gain will be available throughout your life. Always, day or night, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, seek to recognize and respond to the direction of the Spirit. Have available a piece of paper or a card to record such guidance.

Express gratitude to the Lord for the spiritual guidance you receive and obey it. This practice will reinforce your capacity to learn by the Spirit. It will enhance the guidance of the Lord in your life. You will learn more as you act upon the knowledge, experience, and inspiration communicated to you by the Holy Ghost.

Spiritual guidance is direction, enlightenment, knowledge, and motivation you receive from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is personalized instruction adapted to your individual needs by One who understands them perfectly. Spiritual guidance is a gift of incomparable worth bestowed upon those who seek it, live worthy of it, and express gratitude for it.
The scriptures define how to qualify for spiritual guidance. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wisely counseled, “However talented men may be in administrative matters; however eloquent they may be in expressing their views; however learned they may be in the worldly things, they will be denied the sweet whisperings of the Spirit that might have been theirs unless they pay the price of studying, pondering, and praying about the scriptures.”

Over time, through prayer and pondering applicable scriptures, I have found the following pattern for gaining spiritual direction helpful.

To acquire spiritual guidance and to obey it with wisdom, one must:

- Seek divine light in humility
- Exercise faith, especially in Jesus Christ
- Strive diligently to keep His commandments
- Repent constantly
- Pray continually
- Harken to spiritual guidance
- Express gratitude for guidance received

May that suggestion be of some benefit in your quest for spiritual guidance.

**Teaching Others to Learn from the Spirit**

Now we will review how others could be taught the principle of learning I mentioned earlier that you can use. First, I would encourage each one taught to write down the principle: *Throughout the remainder of my life, I will seek to learn by what I hear, see, and feel. I will write down the important things I learn, and I will do them.*

Then I would explain how to use each of the three avenues of communication, to hear, to see, and to feel. Further I would seek to commit each one to live that principle, for every student who would consistently do that would be blessed with greater inspired direction in his or her life.

I would then illustrate with the following series of graphics how to enhance learning.

1. My intent is to show some ways you can help others to qualify to be led by the Spirit and to realize that when that direction comes, it should be recorded and obeyed.
2. Those you teach live in a world subject to challenges and temptations. I am convinced that without the help of the Spirit an individual will have difficulty avoiding transgression in the world today. Should the wrong choices be made, that person becomes bound by sin.

3. You can encourage a student to live so as to be influenced by the Spirit and to recognize its guidance in order to be blessed by obedience to its direction. You can play a vital role in that process.

   As you teach the appropriate doctrine and help explain how the Lord communicates through the Spirit, your students will experience being led by the Spirit. They will learn the principles upon which such communication is based. As they apply those principles, they will make the correct choices in life.

4. All too often a teacher’s relation to a student is one of giving counsel with little or no interaction. Often there is no explanation of the reasons why there are commandments, rules, and standards. The teacher becomes just a talking head.

   Most of the teaching in the world is based on one of the five senses—hear, see, touch, smell, or taste. In your classroom, you can teach by the power of the Spirit.

5. Such communication begins by your encouraging each one you teach to participate rather than be a passive listener. In this way you can assess their understanding of what is taught, create a feeling of ownership, and also learn from them. More important, their decision to participate is an exercise in agency
that permits the Holy Ghost to communicate a personalized message suited to their individual needs. Creating an atmosphere of participation enhances the probability that the Spirit will teach more important lessons than you can communicate.

6. That participation will bring into their lives the direction of the Spirit. When you encourage students to raise their hands to respond to a question, while they may not realize it, they signify to the Holy Ghost their willingness to learn. That use of moral agency will allow that Spirit to motivate and give them more powerful guidance during your time together. Participation allows individuals to experience being led by the Spirit. They learn to recognize and feel what spiritual guidance is. It is through the repeated process of feeling impressions, recording them, and obeying them that one learns to depend on the direction of the Spirit more than on communication through the other five senses.

7. Your capacity to teach is enhanced by the direction you receive from the Holy Spirit. Simply stated, truth presented in an environment of true love and trust qualifies an individual for the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit.

8. If you accomplish nothing else in your relationship with your students than to help them recognize and follow the promptings of the Spirit, you will bless their lives immeasurably and eternally. To do this you must constantly seek the guidance of the Spirit to know what to say and how to say it.

I am convinced that there is no simple formula or technique that I could give you or that you could give your students that would immediately facilitate mastering the ability to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Nor do I believe that the Lord will ever allow someone to conceive a pattern that would invariably and immediately open the channels of spiritual communication. We
grow when we labor to recognize the guidance of the Holy Ghost as we struggle to communicate our needs to our Father in Heaven in moments of dire need or overflowing gratitude. Each time we do that we are taking another step in fulfilling the purpose of our being here on earth.

Our Father expects us to learn how to obtain that divine help by exercising faith in Him and in His Holy Son. Were we to receive inspired guidance just for the asking, we would become weak and ever more dependent on Him. He knows that essential personal growth will come as we struggle to learn how to be led by the Spirit. That struggle develops our immortal character as we perfect our capacity to identify His will through the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. What may appear initially to be a daunting task will become much easier over time as we consistently strive to recognize the feelings awakened by the Spirit. Our confidence in the direction we receive through the Holy Ghost will also become stronger.

Easy things never produce much beneficial fruit. Neither our Father in Heaven nor His Holy Son take delight in seeing you struggle to overcome obstacles, resolve questions, or find solutions to complex and challenging problems. However, they do rejoice when you willingly recognize that these steps are steps to growth which lead to action that molds your character.

**Treasuring Up Sacred Impressions**

Have you learned the enduring value of keeping a journal of the very important spiritual experiences or sacred impressions that the Lord has communicated to you? I do not keep a detailed journal of all the events each day, but I try to keep record of some very important matters. The spiritual ones are in a sacred password-protected journal that no one else can access. When I feel authorized by the Holy Ghost, I take some of the truths learned and put them in my family journal or share them in a public message. This is consistent with a principle that the scriptures confirm is true. Some personal matters are for our guidance and edification to help us grow and improve our character, our devotion, and our testimony. These things are not intended for other individuals. Much like a patriarchal blessing is tailored for the person to whom it is given, such matters should be kept reverently protected because of their inherent sacred nature. Any sacred matter that the Lord wants others to know, He can communicate to them directly through the Spirit if they are worthy and in tune.
To confirm that what I have been talking about is not just pure theory, I will now mention some of the priceless truths I have learned through spiritual guidance over many years.

The scriptures teach and I have been led to confirm that we will never be prompted by the Holy Ghost to do something we cannot do. It may require extraordinary effort and much time, patience, prayer, and obedience, but we can do it.

Repeatedly I have been impressed to learn that to reach a goal never before attained one must do things never before done.

I have been taught that we can make many choices in life, but we cannot determine our final destiny. Our actions do that. It can appear that we control outcomes in our life, but we do not. Worthiness, righteousness, faith in Jesus Christ, and the plan of our Father assure a pleasant productive future, while lying, cheating, or violating the laws of personal purity assure a life of misery here on earth and beyond the veil, unless there is the requisite repentance.

It is important not to judge ourselves by what we think we know of our own potential. We should trust the Lord and what He can do with our dedicated heart and willing mind (see D&C 64:34).

I have been taught by the Holy Spirit and the observation of others that concepts like faith, prayer, love, and humility hold no great significance and produce no miracles until they become a living part of the individual through his or her own experience, aided by the sweet promptings of the Spirit.

We all will have adversity; it is a part of life. We will all have it because we need it for growth and the forging of our righteous character. I have learned that the Lord has a consummate capacity to judge our intent. He is concerned about what we are becoming by the choices we make. He has an individual plan for each of us. This concept is very comforting when we consider how to understand difficult matters such as the early death of someone who seems to be so needed on earth. It is most helpful when we struggle with illness or a severe handicap or try to assess another’s tragic suicide.

I have been led through personal experience to understand an important truth. I know Satan has absolutely no power to force a determined righteous individual because the Lord protects that person from him. Satan can tempt; he can threaten; he can attempt to appear to have such power; but he does not possess it.

I have learned that our mind can strengthen an impression of the Holy Ghost or sadly, can totally destroy it by casting it out as something unimportant or the product of our own imagination. When
spiritual guidance comes, it is well to remember this comment of the
Prophet Joseph Smith, “God judges men according to the use they
make of the light which He gives them.”

When facing adversity we can be led to ask many questions. Some
of them serve a useful purpose; others do not. It really does no good to
ask questions that reflect opposition to the will of God. Willing sacrifice
of deeply held personal desires in favor of God’s will is generally very
hard to do. Yet when done, we are in the strongest position to receive
the maximum help from our loving Heavenly Father. Accepting His
will, even when it is not fully understood, brings great peace and, over
time, understanding.

It is sometimes very hard to discern an answer to prayer for a mat-
ter for which we have very deep personal feelings or something which
causes strong emotions to arise within us. That is why it is important
to receive valid, inspired counsel when one finds himself or herself in
such a circumstance.

In a quiet moment of pondering I learned that there is a relation-
ship between faith and character. The greater our faith in Jesus Christ,
the stronger our character and increased character enhances our ability
to exercise even greater faith.

The Spirit has taught that Satan doesn’t have to tempt us to do
bad things. He can accomplish much of his objective by distracting us
with many acceptable things, thus keeping us from accomplishing the
essential ones. We need to frustrate that distraction by identifying what
is critically important in our lives. We must give the cream of our effort
to accomplish those things. Where there is limited time or resources,
this pattern may require that some good activities be set aside.

On occasion the Lord will give us vital spiritual guidance by inspir-
ing others to share what they have learned. Such mentors can greatly
enrich our life through thoughtful communication of their knowledge
and experience. We also can identify living or deceased mentors by care-
ful study and emulation of their productive lives. I am confident that
the recent passing of President James E. Faust has brought to the mind
of thousands of individuals he has touched personally gratitude for his
encouragement and motivation. He had the exceptional capacity to
lift and build other individuals. He chose valid reasons to congratulate
others as he spoke of them with sincerity and integrity. The result was
to edify, lift, and help them to explore a course of life that would bring
each greater success and happiness. His encouragement was often brief
and concise, yet most effective and enduring.
One of the most memorable and powerful patterns of communication by the Spirit is through dreams. I have learned that when the transition from being fully asleep to being fully awake is almost imperceptible, it is a signal that the Lord has taught something very important through a dream. When this occurs, I recognize the need to ponder what I remember of the dream to seek to understand it and its application in my life. Sometimes the dream is symbolic and prayer is required so that through the Holy Ghost the Lord can interpret or clarify the lessons to be understood and applied.

Throughout the majority of my teenage and adult life, I have greatly appreciated mercy. It was through a vivid dream that I learned also to cherish justice. Justice provides order and control in our Father’s plan of happiness. It assures that whatever we have earned through worthy effort will ever be ours, such as knowledge, the love of dear ones, and the eternal benefits of ordinances, including those of the temple. Justice assures that no power can take these precious things from us. We could lose them through disobedience, but who would want to do that?

The Savior’s injunction to “ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (3 Nephi 27:29) is a gate to spiritual guidance. I have been taught that gentle promptings will encourage us to make the right decisions. When carefully observed, these gentle impressions to our heart can be followed by specific counsel given to our mind. That counsel leads us to know what to do with greater precision. Such detailed direction comes when we readily respond to the initial promptings of the Spirit. At times such spiritual guidance can indicate or imply events that will occur later in life. Our acceptance of such prompting and willingness to obey it does not mean that the will of the Lord will be changed. It does mean that the impact on our life will be different. There will be far more significant consequence because of our willingness to obey the counsel given by such sacred guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There is one last priceless gem of spiritual guidance I would share. It has taken a very long time to recognize. Forced obedience yields no enduring fruit. That is why both our Father in Heaven and the Savior are willing to entreat, to prompt, to encourage, and to patiently wait for us to recognize precious spiritual guidance from Them. Once it took me over ten years to discover the answer to an extremely important matter for which I had prayed consistently and earnestly. The complete answer came as I was able to assemble portions of the solution communicated to me in differing ways and at differing times. I
was not given the answer directly, but I was patiently and lovingly led to find it.

I close with my testimony. I will try to follow the excellent counsel given by President Spencer W. Kimball. He taught: “A testimony is not an exhortation; a testimony is not a sermon; . . . it is not a travelogue. . . . Just tell how you feel inside. That is the testimony. The moment you begin preaching to others, your testimony ended. Just tell us how you feel, what your mind and heart and every fiber of your body tells you.”

I know that the things I have shared are true for I have learned them. They have been confirmed by the gentle promptings of the Holy Ghost. May some of them be of benefit to you. I positively know that Jesus Christ lives and as one of His Apostles bear solemn witness that He is a glorified, resurrected, personage of perfect love. He guides His Church on earth. He loves you. During your presence here He will prompt you. As you seek that prompting to identify it, He will guide your life. He is our Master, our Redeemer, our Savior. I love Him. With every capacity that I possess I bear witness that He lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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Notes

1  Bruce R. McConkie, regional representatives seminar, April 2, 1982.
3  *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 76–77.
Effective scripture study has everything to do with the intensity and consistency of our efforts.
If the heavens were to open today and God were to speak, would you not want to listen to what He had to say? In like manner, were a messenger to come in His stead, would your interest be any the less? If the message were written, would you not want to read it?

A great many faithful people gave their lives so that the word of the Lord as given to His people anciently would be preserved for us. Careful study of this record can only be a source of great blessing to us, while failure to become acquainted with it would be a great loss.

Let Correct Principles, Not Techniques, Direct Our Study

Over the years many of my students and others have come to my office inquiring as to how they might become better students of the scriptures. I have also frequently been asked how men like my father, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, and my grandfather President Joseph Fielding Smith, both of whom had the reputation of being gospel scholars, studied the scriptures. Implicit in such questions is the idea that there is some methodology or secret known to but a few, and that secret gives those who know it a marked advantage in scriptural understanding. Indeed, I will reveal the great and grand secret. It is that there is no secret.

As to my father and my grandfather, their method consisted in not having a method. Methods are not the answer! Effective scriptural study has nothing to do with the marking system you use. It has nothing to do
with the choice of a blue marking pencil over a red one. It has nothing to do with whether you study a particular subject chronologically or topically. It has nothing to do with your using a quad instead of a triple combination. It has nothing to do with the size of the type unless you are getting older.

It has everything to do with the intensity and consistency with which you study. There are no shortcuts; there are no secrets.

There are, however, basic principles that are fundamental to a correct understanding of scripture. I will present seven such principles. Each brings with it additional light. Together they can increase your scriptural understanding sevenfold and more.

**It Takes the Spirit of Revelation to Understand Revelation**

The first and most basic principle of scriptural understanding is that revelation given by the Spirit can only be understood with the Spirit.

An acceptance of scripture as such requires a belief in the principle of revelation. It requires a belief that God can and does convey His mind and will to us. Most scripture is written only in the hearts and minds of people. This form of scripture is known as the Light of Christ. It is universal to the children of men and always has the purpose of preparing them to receive greater light. Scripture also embraces all that is spoken under the influence of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a revelator. As the third member of the Godhead, His purpose is to teach and testify of the truths of salvation. Thus, the voice of the Holy Ghost is reserved for a higher order of truths than those dispensed through the Light of Christ.

While right to the Light of Christ is universal, revelation from the Holy Ghost requires faith in Christ and compliance with principles of righteousness. Nephi teaches the principle in this language:

> 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—[Note that it was faith in Christ that granted Nephi the right to the companionship of the Holy Ghost.] 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 time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.

> For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; and the way is prepared for all men from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him.
For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round. (1 Nephi 10:17–19)

Among the countless revelations that have come from the God of heaven some few have found their way into writing. Among their number fewer still have found their way into a collection of such writings that have been preserved for us in book form. One such collection of inspired writings is known to us as the Holy Bible. The word bible comes from the Greek biblia, which means “the books.” Thus, the Bible is a library of books believed to be sacred or holy.

It is important to note that Catholics, Protestants, and Jews disagree as to which books ought be included in this collection. The Latter-day Saint library of sacred books contains appreciably more scriptural records than is found in the libraries of other faiths. While others cannot agree among themselves as to which books ought be in the Library of Faith—or the Bible, as we call it—they regard our adding to that library as an act of heresy.

We, on the other hand, believe that if we have the same faith the ancients had, we will receive revelation that is immediate to our situation just as they did. The ancients were edified by the revelation given to people who had preceded them, but they were not limited to old revelation. As it was with them, so it is with us. Indeed, this principle is fundamental to our understanding and interpretation of all we read in the canon of scripture. By breaking communication with the heavens—that is, by saying that the library of revelation is closed—we lose not only the opportunity to receive additional revelation but also the key to understand all we possess. Nephi explained the principle in these words:

Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more!
And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God! For behold, he that is built upon the rock receiveth it with gladness; and he that is built upon a sandy foundation trembleth lest he shall fall.
Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!
For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him
that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have.
(2 Nephi 28:27–30; emphasis added)

Never in all the eternities has the Lord revealed that there would be no more revelation. To do so would rob us of the ability to understand the revelation He has already given us. He would hide the evidence of His existence and camouflage gospel truths.

The Bible is a very different book in the hands of someone who rejects the spirit of revelation than in the hands of someone who is open to that spirit. The words are the same, but the vision is entirely different. A book that came by revelation is only revelation to people who have the spirit of revelation.

The spirit you bring to the reading of a book predetermines what you are going to get out of it. The Gospel of Matthew read by one man may be scripture but, when read by another, may not be scripture. They may be in the same room together sharing the same book, and it may be scripture to one and not to the other. The difference is not in what has been written but in the spirit in which it is read. Holy writ read in the spirit of contention is not scripture; it is not the voice of the Lord, and it does not represent His Spirit. It is simply black ink on white paper. If the spirit in which something is read is not right, then the interpretation of what was written cannot be right either.

Let me share two classic scriptural texts that teach this principle. The first comes from a revelation given to teach us how to discern truth and error, good spirits from bad spirits, correct doctrine from false doctrine. As we begin our reading, the Lord, the master teacher, provokes thinking on this matter of discerning spirits with a question:

Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained? [Then in response to His own question, the Lord says,]

To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.

And then received ye spirits which ye could not understand, and received them to be of God; and in this are ye justified? . . .

Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter, in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? [Note that the text assumes that what we are teaching is true—that is not the issue—the issue is the Spirit in which it is being taught.]

And if it be by some other way it is not of God.

And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?

If it be some other way it is not of God.
Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth? (D&C 50:13–21)

Did you see it? The truths of heaven are not the truths of heaven if we attempt to justify them in any manner other than by the spirit of revelation. If we are to be “edified and rejoice together” we must both teach and learn by the spirit of revelation.

As a second illustration of this principle, consider the words of an earlier revelation, a revelation given to the Quorum of the Twelve six years before they were called. Speaking of the Book of Mormon, the Lord says, “These words are not of men nor of man, but of me; wherefore, you shall testify they are of me and not of man; for it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you, and by my power you can read them one to another; and save it were by my power you could not have them; wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words” (D&C 18:34–36).

The principle does not confine itself to the Quorum of the Twelve. No gospel principle does. We only have one gospel, and it must apply to all who are honest in heart in like manner. When you or I read or study scripture under the direction of the Lord’s Spirit, we are hearing the voice of the Lord and can so testify. To read scripture without that Spirit is an entirely different matter.

Thus, the first principle of scriptural understanding is that scripture must be understood by the same spirit by which it was written. Without the spirit of revelation, there is no scripture. Some would say this is circular reasoning, and so it is. It takes life to give life. You cannot read in the dark. You cannot see and hear the things of the Spirit without the Spirit. As light cleaves to light, so darkness is the parent of the deeds of darkness.

There Is But One Gospel

Our second principle centers on the eternal nature of the gospel. All gospel principles are absolute; from eternity to eternity they are the same. They were the same in our pre-earth life as they are in this our second estate. They do not change in the world to which our spirits go at death, nor will their weight and measurement be any more or less in the Resurrection. There are no principles of salvation that were not decreed before the foundations of the earth. The Lord declared His house to be a house of order, not a house of confusion. In a revelation
given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord dramatizes this principle by asking three rhetorical questions. First, “Will I accept of an offering . . . that is not made in my name?” Second, “Will I receive at your hands that which I have not appointed?” And third, “Will I appoint unto you, . . . except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?” (D&C 132:9–11).

The answer to each of these questions is a resounding no. Their purpose is to dramatize that there is but one gospel, one plan of salvation, one system of authority, and one organization in which legal and lawful administrators can be found. If God’s house is a house of order, it will not be governed by laws of someone else’s making, and it will not honor offerings made to other gods, nor will ordinances performed without its permission or authority be accepted.

I cannot become your heir by reading your journal and learning of the promises your father made to you. In like manner, you cannot be God’s heir by reading the promises He made to people in an earlier day. Your salvation and mine requires revelation that is immediate and personal.

It would be equally true that if people could legitimately claim the right to teach the gospel and act in the name of the Lord by reading the Bible, they could also become the president of the United States by reading our nation’s Constitution.

“Seek Learning, Even by Study and Also by Faith”

I take our third principle from the curriculum given by the Lord to the school of the prophets: “Seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). The statement first affirms the importance of study and then suggests the necessity of reaching beyond our study to embrace the principle of faith.

Let me illustrate what is involved here. The Prophet Joseph Smith was studying the book of James when he came to a passage that directed him to ask of God and to do so in faith with nothing wavering (see James 1:5–6). When he set the book down and went in search of a quiet place to pray, his faith supplanted his study, and by that faith he was able to do what his biblical mentors had done: open the heavens.

My faith that the Book of Mormon has a proper place in the library of sacred books grants me a great host of knowledge that I would not otherwise enjoy. It restores to me the knowledge of the plain and precious things that were taken from the Bible. From it I learn that the peoples of the Old Testament had what is known to us as the Melchizedek Priesthood. They also had baptism, the gift of
the Holy Ghost, and all other saving principles and ordinances of the
gospel. From the Book of Mormon I can gain more knowledge and
understanding of what was taught in Old and New Testament times
than I can from reading all the scholarly commentaries ever written on
the matter.

From the book of Abraham, I learn that the peoples of the Old
Testament had the Abrahamic covenant with the promise of the con-
tinuation of seed and the eternal family unit. By faith in Joseph Smith’s
translation of the book of Moses, I learn that Jesus—the Messiah—was
known to Adam, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham and that the plan of sal-
vation they knew is the same as the plan of salvation we know today.

This is not a retreat to the anti-intellectual stance common to much
of the historical Christian world. It is the bold declaration that bring-
ing faith to the act of study is like a loving couple bringing a child into
the world. The child is a living thing who brings to his or her parents
a depth of love and understanding that they never could have known
before. Similarly, my faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the long-sought Mes-
siah, Savior, and Redeemer of mankind gives me an entirely different
understanding of the Old Testament than I could otherwise have.

All things produce after their own kind, and so it is that faith begets
faith. Faith in one gospel principle will infuse faith in another. My faith
in the Resurrection—that is, the inseparable union of body and spirit
(an idea that is not scientifically defensible)—infuses faith in the story
of the Creation (a matter over which there are endless scientific argu-
ments).

It is only by adding faith to our scripture study that we capture the
essence of what we read. True religion is a living thing. It demands that
signs follow believers. It speaks of miracles so that we will know that we
can work miracles. It describes the voice of God so that we will know
His voice when we hear it. It reports the ministering of angels so that
we will know that we may entertain the same; if we have planted the
same seeds as did those of whom we read in holy writ, then we may
harvest as they harvested.

Keep Things in Context

The fourth principle I would call to your attention is the need to
keep things in their proper context. Context gives color to or changes
the color of everything we or anyone else says. When my wife tells me
that I ought to say “I love you” more often, she does not mean that I
should say it to other women. Every scriptural text has two contexts:
the immediate moment or circumstance that evoked the statement and
the larger context in relation to all other correct principles or utterances. An obscure or isolated statement will not be called on to bear the weight of the gospel or to assume the responsibility to establish any principle essential to salvation.

When Christ said, “In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage” (Matthew 22:23–30), we need to know whether He was speaking of every soul that ever lived or of the Sadducees (who had rejected Him as their Messiah), who had asked the question that sparked Jesus’s response.

When He said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow” (Matthew 6:34), was He speaking to you and me, or was He speaking to the Twelve who had been called to the full-time ministry?

When He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), did He have in mind the Roman soldiers who drove the nails in His hands and feet, or did He mean everyone throughout all history who seeks to crucify Him afresh?

When Christ said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15), was He giving a commission to everyone who feels so inclined, or was He speaking to the Twelve whom He had commissioned and trained?

When the Apostle Paul said, “If they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn” (1 Corinthians 7:9), was he suggesting that marriage is for people who are innately weak and lack moral character, or was he suggesting that those then laboring as missionaries ought to wait until they had completed their missions before they married?

When John warned that none were to add to or take from what he had written, was he forbidding others from tampering with the words of his epistle, or was he announcing that all other inspired writing had ceased? (see Revelation 22:18–19).

The immediate context answers each of the questions just raised, but if we are still confused, we must defer to the greater context of all that has been revealed on the matter in question.

As a young man, I served as a chaplain in the military. Whenever our unit received orders to go into combat, some of the soldiers discovered that they were conscientious objectors and could not take up arms. Their claims were always treated with respect, and among other things they were sent to see the chaplain to seek his aid in establishing their case, if indeed they had one. In such cases I would ask if they had ever done anything that could be cited as evidence of their newly professed belief. None of them were ever able to do so. The second question I
would ask was if there was any religious basis for their profession. The only answer to this question I can remember being given was that God commanded Moses, saying, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13).

Without detailing all the discussions I had with these young men, I note that without exception they were surprised to learn that the word translated *kill* in this text comes from a Hebrew word meaning *murder*. They were further surprised to learn that the penalty for murdering in the days of Moses was death. They were equally surprised to learn that Moses himself was a great general who repeatedly led the army of Israel to battle against their enemies whom they killed in rather staggering numbers.

The point here is that this is the greater context for the sixth commandment. It places it in an entirely different context than the young men I worked with had previously understood.

**Balance Correct Principles**

Our fifth principle concerns the balance necessary among gospel principles. Correct principles often conflict with each other—a difficulty we can trace all the way back to Eden. God deliberately placed Adam and Eve in a position in which they had to make a choice between conflicting commandments. They had been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth, something they could not do without partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they had been commanded not to do. Their situation required them to make a choice and then live with its consequences. Wisely and properly they chose to keep the greater of the two commandments, that being to have children, which, of course, required their partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We refer to this event as Adam’s *transgression*, not Adam’s *sin*. Transgression involves the breaking of a law. Sin, on the other hand, is willful disobedience. In this matter there was no sin, but there was a broken law. The consequences of this broken law, known to us as the Fall, created the need for Christ and His Atonement.

What I desire to call your attention to in the context of our discussion is that on occasion—appreciably more often than we would like—correct principles conflict with each other. We, like Adam and Eve, are often faced with conflicting commandments. Like them, we too must make a choice as to which is the greater and which is lesser, and, like our first parents, we too must live with the consequences of those choices.

Consider these illustrations. On the one hand we want to be
honest; on the other we do not want to be hurtful or insensitive. Both are virtues, but any virtue overdone becomes a vice. We are taught to be forgiving and merciful, and yet, as any good bishop knows, mercy cannot deny justice. Were it to do so, it would destroy personal responsibility, the doctrine of repentance, and ultimately the entire plan of salvation.

There is a letter of the law and a spirit, and a time and place for each to take center stage. So it is that there is a balance to maintain between gospel principles. The doctrine of grace, as marvelous as it is, cannot be allowed to become a bully and chase all other gospel principles out of the chapel. We cannot get so infatuated with one principle that it overshadows the others. The world is full of examples of this kind of gospel mutiny, wherein the ship of faith has been taken over by one principle, and the others are either enslaved or forced overboard.

What must be remembered here is that no principle remains a correct principle when used incorrectly. Any principle that is isolated from the body of principles becomes corrupted in its isolation. What frequently happens is that we are invited to give a lesson on a particular principle. So we isolate it from its companion principles for study. We then do such a good job of explaining its importance that when we are through, it has been inflated to the point that it no longer fits in with the other principles, so they have to be evicted to make room for it. The recipe of gospel principles does not permit the omission of one ingredient to be made up with a double dose of another. All principles, properly understood, must remain in their proper relationship with all other gospel principles.

Thus life is full of choices, and even the best of choices comes with consequences. Indeed, the best of choices generally comes at a high cost. We did not come to this earth to see how many difficulties we could avoid or how long we could rest in the shade, but rather to see if we would choose to stand in the light and labor energetically in the cause of truth.

Use Commentaries and Common Sense

The sixth principle of scriptural study is to freely seek help from sources that may exceed your knowledge on any particular matter. We have a number of excellent helps provided for us in the Church’s latest edition of the scriptures. Chapter headings not only give a concise summary of chapter content but also often contain explanation and commentary. The footnotes can be helpful, but do not suppose that they themselves are scripture. In the Church’s English edition of the Bible, the Topical Guide, Bible Dictionary, lengthy extracts from the
Joseph Smith Translation, and the maps are also very helpful. Secular commentaries can be helpful in matters of history and geography. In doctrinal matters the help they give is very limited. As for Latter-day Saint commentaries, no one is going to be right about everything, but that does not mean they cannot help in some things.

It has frequently been said that the best commentary on scripture is scripture. Certainly this is the case, but it is not just a matter of using one verse to interpret another; it is seeing that the Old Testament is a marvelous commentary on the New Testament and that the New Testament is equally important in unlocking or understanding the Old Testament. Additionally it is not sufficient for us as Latter-day Saints to see the Book of Mormon as “Another Testament of Jesus Christ”; we must also recognize that it is a key with which we unlock the true meaning of the Old and New Testaments. It is the stick of Joseph spoken of by Ezekiel that was to become one with the stick of Judah for the purpose of gathering scattered Israel (see Ezekiel 37:19).

Thus Joseph of Egypt said: “Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write [speaking to those of his own seed]; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins of Judah, shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of my covenants, saith the Lord” (2 Nephi 3:12; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 50:31).

The point is that the message of the two books is the same. Properly understood, they are teaching the same principles, testifying of the same God, and leading us to the same end. The Book of Mormon restores to our understanding many of the “plain and precious things” that were lost or taken from Bible manuscripts before they were printed in book form. No book of scripture is threatened by another book of scripture. Though they differ in detail, the Gospels sustain each other. So it is with what we call the standard works. They are not competitors; they are companions.

I have heard many disparaging remarks about commentaries. Remember that much of scripture, if not most, is commentary on other scripture. Anything written or said about the gospel is commentary on the gospel; even the statement that we should not use commentaries is a commentary.

It might also be noted that few things are more important in understanding scripture than common sense. No scriptural passage cannot be
misunderstood, and perhaps no scriptural text has not been misused. Bad causes and bad politics are often sustained with scriptural quotations. It was with scriptural arguments that those of Jesus’s day rejected Him. To those who sought His death, Christ said,

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they [that is, the scriptures] are they which testify of me.
And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.
I receive not honour from men.
But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.
I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.
How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?
Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.
For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.
But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?
(John 5:39–47)

As for scriptural mischief, the grand key is to declare the figurative literal and the literal figurative. In so doing, you can profess a love for scripture while turning its meaning upside down.

In the book of Moses we read that Adam was created from the “dust” of the earth (see Moses 3:7). Some would argue that the first man was made from clay. However, the same text states that you and I “were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit,” which God had made “and so became of dust a living soul” (Moses 6:59). The same author who used “dust” to describe Adam’s birth uses it to describe yours and mine also.

In this same context, we read that Eve was created from Adam’s rib (see Moses 3:21–22). The text does not bother to tell us that this is figurative, that it is a metaphor to teach that the place of the woman is at the side of man. Scripture does not tell us this. We must deduce it. Our understanding comes from the “doctrine of common sense.” Little girls are not made from sugar and spice, nor are they made from their husband’s rib. Some things we are just left to figure out on our own.

When we studied algebra, we learned we could take the known and use it to solve for the unknown. We can do the same with gospel principles. If, for instance, we know that a people had the Melchizedek Priesthood, then we know they also had the gift of the Holy Ghost because it is the Melchizedek Priesthood that bestows this gift.
I have had students ask for evidence that the principle of eternal marriage was practiced in Old Testament times. Would it not stand to reason that if we got the authority to perform eternal marriage from Abraham or someone from his dispensation that the authority must have existed in that dispensation? In like manner, we would reason that if baptism is an ordinance of the Aaronic Priesthood, then a people having the Aaronic Priesthood would also have the ordinance of baptism.

Knowing that God is eternal and that the saving principles that come from Him are absolute, repeatedly opens the scriptures to our understanding. It defies, for instance, the idea that there was one plan of salvation for people in Old Testament times and a different plan of salvation for people in New Testament times and still another for people living in the present era. It surely sets aside the idea that there was no Church of Christ before New Testament times.

“Liken Them unto Yourselves” (1 Nephi 19:24)

The seventh and final principle that I would suggest to enhance your scriptural study is that of applying, or likening, the scriptures unto yourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23–24). In a number of Doctrine and Covenants revelations the Lord says, “What I say unto one I say unto all” (D&C 93:49). For instance, Doctrine and Covenants 25 records a revelation to Emma Smith in which He calls her “an elect lady” (v. 3). She is given the specific assignment to compile a hymnbook for the use of the young Church and then is given some general counsel. At the conclusion of this revelation, the Lord says, “And verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my voice unto all” (D&C 25:16). Thus, every member of the Church has equal claim to this revelation. It is as much ours as it is Emma’s.

Understanding this principle requires a little of the common sense of which we have spoken. The Lord did not intend to have every member of the Church compile a hymnbook, but rather we should all avoid the temptation to “murmur” about our lot, we should seek the Holy Ghost to aid in our learning, and we should lay aside the things of this world and seek for the things of a better one, as Emma was instructed to do. In so doing, we have the same promise that Emma did—we will receive a “crown of righteousness” with all the blessings that go with it.

In like manner, the Lord gave a revelation to Joseph Smith Sr. It is a revelation on service, and it is found in the fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Missionaries quote it frequently when they meet together, but the revelation really belongs to all of us. It is ours
because the principles in it apply to us in exactly the same manner they applied to Joseph Smith Sr.

So it is that we take the cloth of scripture and tailor it to fit our own circumstances. We do so with integrity, laying hold to eternal principles and leaving to the primary subject of each revelation the promises that were his or hers alone.

**Conclusion**

This brings us full circle. It welds our seven principles together. We began with the idea that scripture, meaning revelation, is only revelation when it is attended by the spirit of revelation.

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery provide us with a remarkable illustration of this principle. After John the Baptist had restored the Aaronic Priesthood to them and after they had been baptized and the Holy Ghost had fallen upon them, Joseph Smith said, “Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understanding, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages *revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of*” (Joseph Smith—History 1:74; emphasis added).

We add to that a second principle, the idea that gospel principles are everlastingly the same. All scripture comes from the same source, has the same purpose, and teaches the same doctrine. The gospel of Jesus Christ did not and does not evolve. It is not subject to change; it is absolute and eternal. The doctrine by which Adam and Eve found salvation is one and the same with the doctrine by which each of their children through all generations of time will find salvation. It will center on the same Savior, the same Atonement, obedience to the same laws and ordinances, and require the same priesthood.

As there is but one Savior, so there is but one gospel. When the resurrected Christ visited the people in the New World, He did as He had done in the Old World. He went to His temple, He called and ordained twelve men to be special witnesses of His name, and He taught the same gospel He had taught to those of His own nation. The gospel and its covenants and promises remain everlastingly the same. There was not one gospel for the pioneers and another for us, or one for apostles and prophets and another for the rest of the Church. We only have one gospel just as we only have one Savior. Each of us makes the same covenants, and each of us receives the same promise of blessings. In this context the promises in the revelations are ours; they were given to us; we can read our names into them.
Our third principle was that of seeking learning by both study and faith. It must be obvious that the only way we can truly learn faith is to exercise it. The idea that we are to seek learning by both study and faith suggests that faith does not require us to leave our minds at the door when we go to Sunday School class or when we seek to learn about the gospel. It does suggest, however, that it would be a puny gospel that did not reach beyond the bounds of our understanding and the knowledge we have accumulated. The same revelation that tells us to seek learning by faith also tells us that God, not nature, is the author of all laws. This revelation declares that all law, light, and life come from God and that He is above them all. He is their maker, not their copartner.

Our fourth principle noted that everything has its proper context. All gospel principles have an immediate context and a more general context which is the fulness of the gospel. No gospel principle was intended to stand alone. Isolating any principle from the congregation of principles that constitute the gospel is perverting that principle. The gospel does not consist of grace alone, love alone, faith alone, or any principle alone. Gospel principles sustain each other.

Thus we noted as our fifth principle the balance necessary among gospel principles. Ignorance cannot nurture faith, nor can the intellect substitute for it. The Bible remains a sealed book to those who worship at the shrine of their own intellect. Its meaning and purpose are also lost upon those who reduce its message to a few phrases that they endlessly quote to justify the shallowness of their understanding and the quickness with which they embrace that which has no place in the household of faith.

Our sixth principle encouraged seeking the wisdom and help of any and all sources that lead us to a greater understanding. No source would exceed the voice of a living prophet; indeed, the united voice of all past prophets tells us to listen to the living prophet.

We observe in our seventh and final principle that we seek the same destination as did the faithful of ages past, and thus the path they marked in their writings is of great value to us. To be of help to us, we must align the map they have given us with the same principles known to them and read it by the light of the same Spirit known to them.

Anytime anyone interprets a passage of scripture, we get a measure of their common sense and their spiritual integrity. What you do with scripture, including the neglect thereof, is a wonderful way for the Lord to get a measure of your soul. That each of us might give Him a good measure is my prayer.
David B. Galbraith

Courtesy of Blair G. Van Dyke
The Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies: Reflections of a Modern Pioneer

David B. Galbraith and Blair G. Van Dyke

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In the history of the Church in the Near East, the contributions of David B. Galbraith are on par with other Latter-day Saint pioneers in the region, such as Jacob Spori and Joseph W. Booth. David Galbraith was born in Raymond, Alberta, Canada, and spent most of his adult life focusing on the history, issues, events, and cultures of the Near East. In 1961 he moved to Israel to study Hebrew and live on a kibbutz. It was there that he met Frieda Kruger, a native of the Netherlands, whom he later married. Upon completing his bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Brigham Young University, the Galbraiths moved to Israel in 1969 so David could pursue doctoral studies in international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Specifically, he studied and wrote extensively about conflict resolution in Arab-Israeli relations.

In 1972, Brother Galbraith was appointed resident director of BYU’s Study Abroad program in Israel. In that year he was also called to serve as the first branch president of the Church in Jerusalem. He personally oversaw the Study Abroad experience of thousands of students who came to the Holy Land through BYU. As time passed and the program grew, the First Presidency asked Brother Galbraith to oversee developments that led to the acquisition of property and the construction of the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. In 1987 he was named as the first director of the Jerusalem Center.
Van Dyke: This interview commemorates the twenty-year anniversary of Brigham Young University Study Abroad students moving into the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies on March 8, 1987.

Brother Galbraith, please describe your relationship with President Harold B. Lee and explain the role he played in the eventual construction of the Jerusalem Center.

Galbraith: My first contact with President Lee was when he came to the Holy Land in 1972. I received correspondence indicating that he was coming. He was accompanied by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley and President Edwin Q. Cannon (president of the Swiss Mission, of which Israel was a part). Their wives (Freda Joan, Marjorie, and Janath, respectively) also accompanied them. The significance of President Lee’s visit was that he was the first prophet, seer, and revelator in two thousand years to visit the Holy Land. Prior to his visit, many General Authorities had come through, but never a prophet. The small community of Saints living in that land were steeped in the prophecies of the last days, and we looked forward to the signs noted in the scriptures. We would single out these brethren who were passing through and question them about whether we were in the middle of prophecy being fulfilled. We had hoped their visits were part of those prophecies. We were perhaps a bit naive, young, and immature in the gospel, but we were excited
with every visiting member of the Twelve. Eventually, they all came through, but this visit was different—this was the prophet himself.

One of the first things we asked, in a simple way, was, “Can we meet on the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) for worship services instead of Sunday?” And as we might have expected, he said no. He said there was no precedent for this, and clearly Sunday is the Lord’s day. But before he left, President Lee asked, “Would you please write a letter and address it to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve and explain why you made that request?” President Lee continued, “I have felt in the course of our visit to this land that that question was too important to answer on the spur of the moment.” We explained to him that for investigators to come to church on a Sunday was nigh unto impossible because Sunday is a normal workday and they would have to miss work. To bring their children to Sunday School or Primary they would have to take them out of school. Also, we all had obligations on Sunday. It was a normal school day for us at the university or wherever we were engaged.

We gulped at his negative response and started wondering how we could make this work. We had been meeting on Saturdays without authorization from Church headquarters; it felt good and we felt justified. There seemed to be something very right about going to church on Saturday in Israel, especially Jerusalem, with all the Jewish families walking hand in hand to the Wailing Wall or to a nearby synagogue. There was no traffic, no bustle. It was a beautiful Sabbath day. We could learn a lot about keeping the Sabbath from our Jewish friends. There were no sports or other distracting activities. Saturday seemed perfect for our Sabbath. We recognized it was a unique request and would not be binding on anyone else in the Church.

It took a couple months to get a response to that letter, but it came back positive authorizing us to meet on Saturdays instead of Sundays and allowing the small Church community in Egypt and other Muslim lands to meet on Fridays at the same time, because they too were struggling with similar problems (Friday being the Muslim holy day). In the letter, President Lee referred us to Doctrine and Covenants 124:49, indicating that we were freed from the obligation to meet on Sunday. Even more to the point, he referred us to Romans 14, the entire chapter. That was exciting because it speaks of the Sabbath day and our dietary preferences and that we must not destroy someone’s faith over things that are not paramount to our personal righteousness. It is a nice way to look at ourselves. So we were formally authorized to worship on Saturday, and for us that authorization was a big thing.
Another request we made of President Lee involved Elder Orson Hyde. We asked, “Could we have your blessing to create a memorial to honor Orson Hyde in some way?” He authorized us to start looking. He was thinking more in terms of a statue on a tiny parcel of land. Statues don’t go well in Israel, not among the Jews and certainly not among the religious Jews. There are no statues in that country that are erected by Jews. It’s deemed by many as a form of idolatry. They have many artistic monuments in parks and squares honoring the memory of significant people but never a statue of a human being. So, the search began for land where an appropriate monument to Orson Hyde could be created. At the same time, President Lee also authorized us to search for land upon which we could build a chapel where our members could meet and call their own. You cannot even imagine with what joy and enthusiasm we began to search.

Some time after our search began, Jerusalem’s mayor, Teddy Kollek, called me and said, “Do you think your church would be interested in a five-and-a-half-acre plot of ground in the heart of the Mount of Olives to honor your Orson Hyde?” And on the basis of my assurances, he asked whether the First Presidency would receive a delegation from the mayor’s office. After I had done my homework, I assured him they would, but I wasn’t quite sure why it would take a delegation. It turned out in the end they were hoping for a considerable sum of money. It was a million-plus dollars that was finally donated, not from the tithes of the Church, but from private donations of hundreds and hundreds of people—mostly, but by no means all, Church members. Donations were gathered through the Orson Hyde Foundation, which was established by the Church for the project. It was headed by LeGrand Richards of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Looking back on President Lee and Elder Hinckley’s visit, it struck us that this was a milestone in the history of the Church in the Holy Land, and whenever this history is written, it needs to focus on the visit of these brethren.

In the course of that visit, President Lee organized the first Jerusalem Branch at a meeting of the small body of Saints held at the Garden Tomb. We had previously been meeting just as a group of Saints. The organization of the Jerusalem Branch was a very memorable occasion, and looking back with the advantage of hindsight, it was an amazing experience to have the organization of the branch established by the prophet of the Lord.

Also, President Lee endured what might have been life-threatening health problems while he was in the Holy Land. The prophet and his
party stayed on for several days and insisted on a one-day tour to Galilee. We only learned later that his back was giving him much discomfort and pain. The ride to Galilee and back was a very long trip to make in one day. We didn’t realize the agony he was in because he was full of questions, stories, and good humor throughout the trip. Upon our return that night, he suffered terribly and coughed uncontrollably. When he could take it no longer, he called Elder Hinckley for a blessing. As the result of that blessing, he was miraculously restored to good health.

President Lee and Elder Hinckley had an interesting visit with the two chief rabbis of Jerusalem. It was protocol that the leaders of other churches call on the chief rabbis when they visit Israel. I had set up the meeting and noted the reluctance of the chief rabbis to meet with President Lee and Elder Hinckley. I did not fully appreciate their concerns. I thought protocol was protocol, and even though we did not see eye-to-eye on certain matters of faith, I felt the meeting was appropriate. I briefed President Lee and Elder Hinckley just prior to the visit by telling them that I had sensed discomfort on the part of the chief rabbis concerning their visit. Nevertheless, President Lee reassured everyone it would be fine. And in violation of protocol, I suppose, before hospitable greetings were even shared, one of the rabbis asked, “Does your visit signal the desire of your faith to proselytize in Israel?” The response by President Lee was inspired! He said, “We do not come in through the back door to any land but through the front door invited.” I saw those two rabbis relax, and I could see them thinking to themselves, “Well, we will never invite you, and you won’t come through the back door, so we can be friends.” The meeting went on for a half hour, and it was delightful.

The promise that we would come through the front door only after being invited to proselytize was very significant. It guided the thinking of Church leaders and Brigham Young University administrators as they entered into legal agreements years later. This concept was first used in our application to be officially recognized as a church in Israel. Second came the promise that we would not use the Jerusalem Center for missionary purposes. In both these cases, the wording of the many legal documents were written in the same spirit of President Lee’s response to those rabbis in 1972. After all these years, we are comfortable that we have made legal agreements with the Israeli government that are fair and did not compromise the position of the Church doctrinally regarding our missionary interests. One day we will take the gospel to the Jews throughout the world, but as President Lee stated, that will never happen in Israel until we are invited to come in
through the front door.

**Van Dyke:** *In addition to President Lee, what other Church leaders were instrumental in the establishment of the Jerusalem Center?*

**Galbraith:** While it is always interesting to recognize “firsts,” many General Authorities that would follow were at least as intimately involved with developments in that land as President Lee. A succession of Church Presidents, including Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, Howard W. Hunter, and Gordon B. Hinckley, all played key roles, as did Elders N. Eldon Tanner and Thomas S. Monson, BYU presidents Dallin H. Oaks and Jeffrey R. Holland, and Church Commissioner Henry B. Eyring. It would take chapters to do justice to their respective contributions toward the establishment of the Jerusalem Center. However, Elders Howard W. Hunter, James E. Faust, and Jeffrey R. Holland formed an executive committee appointed by the First Presidency to oversee the establishment of the Jerusalem Center. Ultimately, however, President Gordon B. Hinckley, who accompanied President Lee on his initial visit, was more intimately involved with recommendations, approvals, and final decisions than any other President.

More than General Authorities played an essential role. A brief overview such as this interview does a terrible injustice to the literally hundreds of individuals who go unnamed, whose contributions to the establishment of the center were critical. For example, who can ever forget the role of Robert C. Taylor, who we will speak of later, or of two former BYU vice presidents, Fred S. Schwendiman and his wife, Nonie, and Robert J. Smith and his wife, Lola? They were in charge of construction and finances, respectively. Both couples sacrificed four or more years in Israel away from family and friends. Or the resident leaders in Israel who administered the day-to-day study programs, such as D. Kelly Ogden, who, together with his wife, Marcia, and their young family, lived in Israel for over thirteen years? Or Dann W. Hone, who played a key role in curriculum development both at BYU and in Israel? Or Arthur Nelson, a noted Salt Lake attorney, who was appointed by the First Presidency to go to Jerusalem and be their legal adviser in the delicate matters regarding the final wording of the lease document? How could we tell the story of the Jerusalem Center without understanding the ongoing administrative role of James R. Kearl? These people imbued the academic offerings of the Jerusalem Center with a spiritual quality that changed countless lives. And the list goes on.

**Van Dyke:** *Explain the significance of the Church’s receiving the status of an officially recognized church in Israel in 1977. How unique is it to be recognized as a religion in Israel, and how did that allow us to move*
forward to the eventual construction of the Jerusalem Center?

Galbraith: To be landowners and have banking privileges and deal in large sums of money, we felt we needed to be formally recognized by the government of Israel as a church with legal status, and we later determined that Brigham Young University should acquire that same status. The Church and university are, from a legal standpoint, two different organizations, and the Brethren in Salt Lake were very anxious to keep them separate. So we retained an attorney, Jacob Cohen, who had some experience in these things, to help the Church gain legal status. The Church legal department came out and prepared Cohen and helped him understand our intentions.

There were five old non-Jewish religions that were recognized in Israel: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Baha’i, and Anglican. They were not interested in new upstarts working into their elite group. The Baptists and others had tried and failed. Our attorney explained that we would likely never attain to the status of the original five, whose presence predated the state of Israel, unless we could also show a similar official presence existing before Israel’s establishment in 1948. At the time, we felt we had to make the attempt because we could not accomplish all we wanted to do without having that status. We were excited knowing the history of the Church and knowing of the missionaries, Elder Adolf Haag and Elder John Clark, who died while serving missions in Haifa and were buried there in the 1890s. We also knew there had been a mission home in Haifa before the establishment of the state of Israel. In fact, the history indicates that a mission home was authorized to be purchased in Haifa. So we visited the Haifa land registry to find evidence that we were landowners before the state of Israel was established. We wanted to be able to show that we not only had a presence but also that there were two men buried in the Haifa cemetery that sacrificed their lives preaching the gospel.

As it turned out, the land registry could not help us. We had the dates, we had the street, we had the building, we knew the corner as we do to this day, but they found no evidence in any of their documents that we had owned land outright. In the meantime, we were making good progress on preparing the document and other pieces of evidence we needed to become a legal entity. Recognition as a legal entity in Israel was based on a document known as the Articles of Association. The wording of this document was critical because it defined the bylaws, rules, and regulations of the organization—how it was to be governed, its purposes, and so forth. The Interior Ministry, together with the legal department, would scrutinize it and sign off
on it if it met the rigid requirements for a public and legal entity in Israel (Amuta in Hebrew). In the end, the Articles of Association sailed right through without complication. Although we did not acquire the status of the original five, we had met the requirements of Israeli law for modern associations. A lot of faith was exercised, and many prayers were offered pleading that we would be successful. And suddenly we were there—a legal entity with all the rights to go with it, including land ownership. We were so grateful. And with the advantage of hindsight, you can see the hand of the Lord in how all these things came together allowing the Church to be formally recognized. In the telling of the story it doesn’t sound very exciting—for members of the Jerusalem Branch, however, it was a miracle. The Articles of Association were approved on June 16, 1977.

It is of interest that a few years later another Israeli attorney, Joseph Kokia, was retained to successfully guide BYU through the same political minefield in establishing its own legal status in Israel. We also retained a third attorney, a Palestinian, Fuad Schehadeh, to assist us in addressing the concerns of the Arab/Palestinian community.

Van Dyke: While official recognition was sought, you continued to move forward with the Orson Hyde Memorial. Explain how the Orson Hyde Memorial was a forerunner to the Jerusalem Center.

Galbraith: It was gratifying to Mayor Teddy Kollek, the city fathers, and the other municipal and national leaders that we had come forth with such a generous sum to offer (remember, the Orson Hyde Memorial Foundation raised about one million dollars to put toward the memorial). But the story didn’t begin there. The story began with an Italian entity who owned that spot, eight acres of land on the Mount of Olives, and had applied to the city to build a medical facility on that site. The city turned them down, saying you can build your medical facility on all kinds of places in Jerusalem but not on the Mount of Olives. But they had owned that land for decades or maybe even centuries—I’m not sure. They wouldn’t give it up, and they came back to the city and said, “If we are allowed to build our medical facility in the lowest, most northern corner of the site among residential homes and keep it nestled away—we will donate the remaining five and a half acres to the city.” The city agreed, and they built their facility. That building is there to this day, although used for other purposes.

In the meantime, the city had this huge, incredible piece of property on the heart of the Mount of Olives, and it fit perfectly with Mayor Kollek’s plan to surround the Old City of Jerusalem with parks. Mayor Kollek was determined that the Old City would stand out as a
jewel surrounded by green space—parks all around it. It would be an enormous and expensive undertaking, but the offer from the Italian property owners was a great impetus in helping the mayor realize his dream. And we became a part of it. Mayor Kollek came to the Church, and we responded with that million-dollar-plus donation. It wouldn’t take a fraction of a million dollars to beautify the area that would become known as the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden. That did not cost half a million or even a quarter of a million dollars. But the rest of the money would be used to beautify Jerusalem in keeping with Mayor Kollek’s dream. Keep in mind, we do not own that land or even lease it. But we entered into a contract with the city that allowed us to name it and then obligated the city to care for the gardens in perpetuity.

And that is how it happened. Our Salt Lake City landscape architects worked with Jerusalem landscape architects, and they came to a meeting of the minds. They wanted to keep part of it rustic, typical of the Mount of Olives. Over the centuries, the Mount of Olives had been almost completely denuded of olive trees, so we brought in many, many olive trees. Those trees were planted all over the site. Even a few very mature olive trees were brought in. The garden also included an amphitheater in the uppermost part that captures a magnificent view over the city of Jerusalem. It included a large plaque within that amphitheater containing portions of the Orson Hyde dedicatory prayer in Hebrew and English. And because the park runs down the steep face of the mount, a path winds its way from the northern to the southern boundaries, back and forth, back and forth, down to the bottom and exits at Gethsemane. The site was already walled by the Italian foundation that had previously owned the land, so we knew the limits of our property.

The Orson Hyde Memorial Garden had something rather unique for the city at the time—a sprinkler system. This meant that the grasses and wild flowers and blooming bushes would be green throughout most of the year. April is one of the nicest months of the year in Israel. Wildflowers bloom throughout the land. Everything is lush and green. By May, and certainly by June, most everything is dead except for the trees, bushes, and typical desert flora that survive in that arid half of the year from June to November. But with our sprinkler system, that five and a half acres was beautiful, lush, and green throughout the hot, arid desert summer.

I was so pleased that one of our first major acts in the city as a Church was to donate so much money, without strings, toward a park for the enjoyment of Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike. The memorial garden was a place to ponder, a place to meditate, a place to get
away from the hustle and bustle of Jerusalem. When Christians visit the memorial, they can see from the amphitheater almost all the sites that were linked to the Savior’s Jerusalem ministry.

It is a marvelous park, and in establishing it, we didn’t meet any opposition like we would meet later with the Jerusalem Center. The dedicatory services were just amazing. Two thousand Latter-day Saints, six members of the Quorum of the Twelve, the prophet, President Kimball, and President N. Eldon Tanner, his counselor in the First Presidency, were in attendance along with many Arab dignitaries and Israeli leaders of government and education. It was very well attended. Loudspeakers were situated so that anyone within the five-acre garden could hear the program. The BYU students, together with many members of the visiting tours, formed an incredible choir. BYU’s Clayne Robison wrote an original piece of music that was marvelous. Teddy Kollek was honored there with a beautiful piece of porcelain depicting Noah receiving the dove with the olive leaf in its beak. It was a memorable occasion.

Now, I’ve talked about some specifics, but you can see the hand of the Lord furthering a softening process. The Orson Hyde Memorial project allowed the Latter-day Saints to become well known, at least in limited circles. And within those circles it was known that our interests were in beautifying the city and finding ways to bring harmony among the different religions in a very positive way.

Van Dyke: Discuss Robert Taylor’s role in planning and building the Jerusalem Center.

Galbraith: Following Robert Taylor’s untimely death, I was asked to speak at his funeral. I used as my text the scripture found in 1 Nephi 5:2, 4, which speaks of Lehi as a visionary man. It was cast in a negative sense, but I used it in a positive way relating to Bob Taylor. He was the vision, he was the strength, he was the glue holding things together when everything would have otherwise collapsed. His initial involvement was bringing Latter-day Saint tourists to Israel. He was the head of BYU Travel Study, and he had a vision of his role—but he had even more of a vision for the role of the Church in that land. As it turned out, he played a very significant part in the building of the center. He was the go-between for presidents of Brigham Young University and the Brethren. Typically at BYU, or in the Church, we do not approach the First Presidency or members of the Quorum of the Twelve individually or collectively. But Bob had an open door, and he was welcomed and encouraged by the Brethren. He was forever assisting the Brethren in traveling to Israel and having the inevitable spiritual experiences that
go with the land. Ultimately he played a significant role in getting many members of the First Presidency, from President Lee right up to our current president, Gordon B. Hinckley, to the Holy Land.

I first met Bob when I was in Israel working on my doctorate. Initially it began with lectures to visiting tour groups and later involved directing tours. Then he made it possible for me, a financially struggling student with my wife and two children, to be a part-time BYU employee. This eventually led to full-time employment. So I got to know Bob as well as or better than most people through constant communication, telephone calls, letters, and e-mails.

Bob was a great go-between with the whole Orson Hyde project. By then Elder Howard W. Hunter had been called to represent the First Presidency in everything happening over there, and he invited Elder James E. Faust to assist him in that work. At about that point in time, Jeffrey R. Holland, president of BYU, became involved, and there was a close relationship between the four of them. The Orson Hyde Memorial Garden project brought all the principal players together, leading to the establishment of the center. It was about this time Bob Taylor started organizing Mediterranean cruises whose major port-of-call was Israel. Entire ships were filled to capacity with six hundred to eight hundred Latter-day Saints. The ships would cruise either out of Italy, Turkey, or Greece. One primary purpose of these cruises was to raise money for a future center. The Brethren were always invited to participate: different Brethren came at different times. There were over nine of those cruises over the years.

Under Robert C. Taylor’s direction, the first Study Abroad program had started with Daniel H. Ludlow in 1968, and Taylor was also intimately involved in the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden, which was dedicated in 1979. So this is a very interesting period, very intense with more and more Latter-day Saints taking tours to Israel. The BYU Study Abroad program for university students kept getting progressively larger with each passing year. With all the growth, the Study Abroad program was bouncing around from one hotel in Arab East Jerusalem to another. As the program grew, we had to look for more and more space. Finally we found Ramat Rahel—a kibbutz with a hostel located on the southern tip of Jerusalem overlooking Bethlehem. Here we were able to settle down for several years—seven to be exact.

During these years there was a growing interest in Israel among Church members. In fact, President Tanner made the remark that is quite well known today: “The 1970s was the decade when the Church discovered the Holy Land, and the 1980s would be the decade when the
Holy Land discovered the Church.” It has really worked out that way.

So Bob Taylor ran the Study Abroad program and his tours and cruises from BYU. He was like a director of a concert: a master in harmonizing the work and bringing so many people together for a common cause. Robert Taylor urged consideration of a three-in-one facility that included a chapel, a BYU Study Abroad center, and a visitors’ center. He asked, “Why don’t we quit looking for a tiny plot and start looking for a much larger parcel of land that would incorporate all three of these needs?” In the end, certain Jewish circles looked upon a visitors’ center with some suspicion that we were preparing to do missionary work on a large scale among the Jews, so that was set aside. Ultimately, the Jerusalem Center concept grew out of Bob Taylor’s inspired and timely efforts working closely with the leaders of the Church. I believe he was raised up by the hand of the Lord to take a leading role, under the direction of the Brethren, in this great project.

Van Dyke: The building of a multipurpose center in Jerusalem was announced at the time of the dedication of the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden. Describe the events surrounding that important announcement.

Galbraith: On the cruise ship sailing toward Israel in 1979, with that enormous group of Latter-day Saints I described earlier, President Kimball and Elder Hunter announced that the Church, together with BYU, would build a center in Jerusalem. At that time we didn’t have the land, but we had a big table-size model of what that center could look like. It received a lot of interest and was picked up by the media—especially the Church News—and the die was cast.

We had been searching for sites for a building in Jerusalem for some time prior to this announcement. In fact, while President Kimball and all those other members that I noted were there for the dedication of the Orson Hyde Memorial, they were taken to the various proposed sites, saving the best one for last. It was an L-shaped piece of property close to where we are now located, but there was a ridge that blocked the site from the view of the Temple Mount and Gethsemane and the Orson Hyde Memorial. We explained to President Kimball and his party, “If we walked about two hundred yards north, there is a big open field. The view from there is spectacular, and it is what one could see from the second or third floor of our center if we build that high on the L-shaped property.” So the whole party walked out to this different site, which we had no intention of showing them, but the view of the Old City was magnificent! That is when President Tanner, tongue in cheek, said, “Well, all in favor of this sight, indicate by raising your hand.” He knew better. I don’t know what prompted him to
say that. I knew that he knew that the site absolutely was not available. However, all eyes turned to see that President Kimball was raising his hand in approval, and we all raised our hands to follow suit. No one was going to disapprove of the site President Kimball approved of. At the time I thought this was humorous because I knew the site was out of the question.

We were not surprised when all our friends in high places told us, “Forget it! There have been far more powerful and influential people than you who have sought to obtain that land for their own building projects—contractors, politicians, Muslims seeking to have it restored to them—and all have failed.”

It was an explosive piece of real estate, and we ceased to pursue it any further. But six months later, when I was visiting Salt Lake City, President Tanner asked how we were doing in acquiring that site. That was a good opportunity to speak one-on-one with him and tell him the problems we would face. To this he said, “I still feel good about it. Would you continue to focus your efforts on obtaining that site?” Of course I agreed. But it was way more than I could possibly do to run the Jerusalem Study Abroad program and deal with the Israeli government to obtain the property, so I got some help from Bob Thorn.

Bob Thorn was of Thorn Construction, a Harvard graduate, and a returned mission president. He came without personal experience in the Middle East, but he was a fast learner and a very eloquent speaker. He came to Israel without his wife or family for about a month to see just what was possible and whether we should even try to obtain this property. He ended up staying for nearly one year. We finally brought his wife, Norma, to Israel. After a number of miracles, we eventually obtained the site.

It is quite a story! And the first miracle, in my opinion, was the process of convincing the city leaders to even entertain our proposal. There were all kinds of committees such as the Beautiful Jerusalem Committee, the Beautiful Israel Committee, citizen committees, and the Jerusalem Land Authority, all committed to ensuring that special sites in Jerusalem were not turned over to ugly high-rise building projects and so forth. Additionally, there were the Muslim community and the Orthodox Jewish community that had to be convinced that the construction of a Christian edifice on the Mount of Olives was agreeable. From the beginning, our project seemed out of the question from every vantage point. Only President Kimball, President Tanner, Bob Taylor, and a select few others had the vision at that point. Because of that, we kept working. That involved countless meetings with the Jerusalem Land Authority
and the Israel Land Authority. They were government offices attached to the Ministry of Agriculture that oversaw all development in Israel and specifically in the city of Jerusalem. We were successful in impressing the Jerusalem Land Authority with our proposal of what we would like to do with the property. That favorable presentation was the crack in the door, so to speak. Without giving us a commitment, the Jerusalem Land Authority and the Israel Land Authority said, “We will work with the Interior Committee, the Planning Committee, and the Planning Commission, and we will see if we can get a positive reaction from them.”

It was just amazing how one committee after another said, “Yes, we could support a project like that.” I remember on one occasion we sat with the city engineer and his committee. We had a large detailed map of the desired site. The map included the nearby Hebrew University and other buildings in the area. The map also included the elevations of the site. We had prepared the city engineer by telling him that we had retained an architect, David Reznik, whom he knew well and highly respected. Reznik and his team were with us in this meeting and explained that we couldn’t really do what we intended to do unless we had at least five acres (the site we wanted was just over five acres). And it was such a precipitous site that we had to show how we would build eight levels into the hill and how we would keep our profile down so it would not be an eyesore on the Mount of Olives. We also had to explain how we would work the gardens into those levels and then extend them out onto the Mount of Olives so it would be like the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Our presentation was convincing, and the city engineer was persuaded that it would be a beautiful place. He took a black felt pen and on the map freehanded the boundaries of the very site on which the Jerusalem Center now stands. He said, “This is the property line if you can get the zoning commission to change the zoning laws for that parcel of ground. If you can do that, we will consider your project on one condition, and that is that you demonstrate to us that what you want to build on the site is worthy of the site.” Well, no architect in the world would miss this opportunity, and David Reznik, working closely with our Salt Lake City architect, Frank Ferguson, was anxious to show that they could design a building on the Mount of Olives that Jerusalem’s city officials would be very pleased with.

But there remained huge hurdles in our path—the biggest was changing the zoning laws. There were so many details involved in changing zoning laws. These included public notices that had to be nailed to every tree and telephone pole. We published our plans in
the official gazette, the Hebrew and Arabic newspapers, and those printed in English, satisfying any and all criticism or outright objection to our project. It was just amazing that, in the end, the project passed through this phase successfully. One complaint was voiced by our soon-to-be next-door neighbor on the Mount of Olives. He was the papal representative of the Catholic Church in Israel. He naturally was concerned about the pending noise and dust that our construction would surely bring. We appeased his concerns. Also, the Beautiful Jerusalem Committee made some demands concerning the height of the building—that it not exceed zoning limitations standards. Their requests were reasonable, and we readily assured them we would work with them to remedy their concerns.

Van Dyke: At what point was the advocacy of Jerusalem’s mayor, Teddy Kollek, indispensable?

Galbraith: Before we ever made any presentations or petitions to the different municipal committees, the Jerusalem Land Authority asked for the mayor’s recommendation concerning us and our project. He gave us his strong and positive endorsement. It carried a tremendous amount of weight that the mayor of Jerusalem—and not just the mayor but Teddy Kollek—was in favor of us building on that site. But his powerful influence was even more helpful to cut through the red tape that every Israeli contractor has to deal with. The project, on a number of occasions, was on the brink of coming to a complete standstill. From the process of getting the zoning laws changed, to obtaining the building permit, and all the way through construction—you can hardly imagine what we had to go through! And Teddy was either there in person or he had his personal representative in those meetings just to keep it moving. He knew that his personal attention was essential to our success. Such red tape is unheard of in the United States but common in Israel. The property was finally rezoned, and we received the necessary permits, and we also agreed upon a price for the lease. Ultimately, we would lease the land but not buy it outright. It seems to me that little, if any, of these arrangements would have been made successfully without the help of Teddy Kollek. Even so, our success was not based on this one man. Our lawyers, architects, Israeli politicians, academicians, and many friends and supporters helped make it possible.

Van Dyke: How did the branch members react to the announcement of the center?

Galbraith: The members of the branch were elated! They were an intimate part of this whole process, exercising faith and praying and fasting each step of the way. I remember Elder William R. Bradford
(counselor to Elder Carlos Asay, who presided over the International Mission, of which we were a part at the time) visited us and said, “You know, we pray for you in generic terms, but the prayers of the Saints in Israel are much more specific, full of faith and desired details. It is your prayers that will be heard and honored.” He said that in a district conference to all the members living in Israel at the time. And we did pray very specifically for the needs of the moment—that was true. Our members prayed constantly for the support and success of the Jerusalem Center project each step of the way. That tiny little congregation prayed their way through every specific aspect of receiving the many building permits. For example, we had to obtain permits from the fire department, from water and sewage, from electricity, and many more. Each permit was critical in its own way, and each of these steps held potentially very difficult obstacles.

At one point when we had cleared many hurdles and it seemed that everything was going smoothly, the Department of Antiquities wrote us a letter that basically said, “Oh, by the way, if in the process of excavations for a foundation you should run upon any relics or antiquities or ruins of any kind, by law you have to instantly cease and desist until the Department of Antiquities gives you permission to proceed—or not!” The point was that all excavating would have to stop while an assessment was made of the importance of the find. In reality, it could have ended all the years of effort to obtain the site. To ensure this, the department placed a man on the site every moment of the day that the bulldozers were excavating. This is because antiquities are viewed as Israel’s heritage and national treasure. The Department of Antiquities continued by writing to the effect that it is in your interest to know that the building site for the Hebrew University, just a few hundred yards from you, was peppered with tombs and antiquities. But it was built at the time when Israel’s antiquity codes were not so strict, and they built over the top of them. But things have changed, and new laws now protect those sites in the national interest of Israel.

So with all the work, all the energy, all the prayers that had already been expended, we learned that it could all be for naught if we came across one grave. And here was a five-and-a-half-acre plot on the Mount of Olives facing the Old City of Jerusalem, what were the chances of not encountering a single tomb? Against all odds, we uncovered no antiquities of any kind and not a single burial site. It was another miracle as though the hand of the Lord had preserved that entire site for us through the centuries.

Van Dyke: At what point did opposition to the Jerusalem Center
erupt?

**Galbraith:** It erupted when the bulldozers actually started cutting into the mountain on August 21, 1984. There had been so many opportunities for those who opposed our presence to have intervened in a very conclusive way. They could have caused us so much grief and maybe precluded our building on that site. For some reason they didn’t. But once we started to excavate the mount for construction (and, for a time, there was a huge white scar on the Mount of Olives) and when all the cranes and heavy equipment moved onto the site, the opposition to our project exploded. And then we went through a miserable three and a half to four years dealing with the opposition.

**Van Dyke:** From your perspective, why was the opposition so fierce?

**Galbraith:** Those who opposed the Jerusalem Center possessed an absolute conviction that the center was way too big—larger than we could possibly need for a Study Abroad program. They were convinced that we couldn’t demonstrate a need for such a huge place. We were then operating out of Ramat Rahel—a kibbutz with a tiny little hostel. And our move into this enormous center just did not add up in their minds. We had made it clear that our building would house our Study Abroad program, and they said, “You don’t need this incredible space for it. What you have told us you’re going to do with the building cannot be true. You must have ulterior motives and ulterior designs.”

Many of the more religious Jews do not read the newspapers or watch television or listen to the radio. They have separated themselves, as much as possible, from modern life. To that extent, they were hard to communicate with. It was hard for us to reach out to them and reassure them, and it was only through the intervention of their leaders at the highest levels, including the chief rabbi of Jerusalem and politicians who were ultraorthodox, that we could even pull a meeting together to give reassurances to them about our earnest motives. But some were not interested in being reassured. They were determined to block our project and prevent us from building there.

On more than one occasion, the government of Israel almost fell over a vote of no confidence regarding our center. At that time there was a political crisis in Israel, and a government of national unity was created that encompassed the right, the left, the in-between, the religious, and the nationalists. It was a big potpourri government with so many voices that it, in certain matters, was largely ineffective. Prime Minister Shimon Peres had his turn as prime minister in those four years, and he put together a special committee to deal with the Mormon question. The committee involved eight ministers of government.
Imagine, the busiest officials in any government—the ministers, not their underlings—to deal with the Mormon question on the Mount of Olives. Four of the ministers were opposed to our project, and four were in favor of the center. They immediately went into deadlock, and in the meantime we continued to build the center.

Nearly two years later, there was a scandal involving one of the eight committee members. He was involved in some personal problems and dropped out of the government. This was a crisis in and of itself, but that left the ministerial committee with four members in favor of our project and three opposed. They proceeded to vote in favor of our presence in Jerusalem and of our building on the Mount of Olives.

Another aspect of the opposition involved the fact that we were Christians. Our opponents felt that such a magnificent parcel of land in Jerusalem should have been set aside for an imposing and magnificent Jewish edifice such as the Supreme Court building.

But when all was said and done, the fear of proselytizing was at the real heart of the opposition against us. Many Jews, not just the Orthodox, could not be reassured that we would not proselytize. The Jerusalem chief rabbi said to Elder Hunter, Elder Faust, and Jeffrey R. Holland (then president of BYU) during one of their visits: “Your young people are so beautiful, your blond girls, your students, they radiate light. You won’t have to proselytize. Our young people will beat a path to your door, and we can’t allow it.” Here we were in the middle of saying we are committed, that we will not proselytize or use the center for proselytizing purposes, and they said, “That is impossible!” So the stalemate continued.

Van Dyke: What marked the turning point in our favor from a public relations point of view? When did the opposition subside?

Galbraith: We hired a public relations firm known as Gitam Image Promotion Systems, and that was a big help. For example, they had us bring our project (and the opposition it was receiving in Israel) to the attention of key members of the U.S. Congress. As a result, a letter was drafted and signed by 154 members of Congress from both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The letter called upon Israelis to stop interfering with the Mormon building project and encouraged them to support it. The letter urged Israeli leaders to support the construction of an American institution in Jerusalem.

This letter had an incredible political impact. We enlarged it and ran center-page ads in the thirteen or so major newspapers circulating in Israel at that time. Every signature and the committee assignments that particular members of Congress held was included. Then we sent
a personal copy of this important letter to every member of the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament). Gitam (the public relations firm) orchestrated this, and it made a powerful impression on most Israelis, including those opposed to our presence.

Another ripple of the story at this time was the announcement of findings from a two-year study of the “Mormon question” conducted independently by the Ministry of Justice. There had been several allegations and accusations against the Church that there had been money passed under the table and that influence had been bought by the Church in high places. We were accused of dirty dealings. However, not only did the Ministry of Justice find us innocent of all charges and accusations, but they also recommended to the government of Israel that we be allowed to proceed without hindrance.

So everything came together within about a two- or three-week period. The convincing and impressive letter from the U.S. Congress, combined with the Ministry of Justice findings in our favor, and being positively voted out of committee, and the positive report issued from the government ministerial committee, allowed us to breathe a sigh of relief. It appeared that we were on our way.

Van Dyke: Discuss the circumstances surrounding Elder James E. Faust’s declaration, “We will never say never.” He made this statement at this time did he not?

Galbraith: Yes, he did. The center was nearly completed. After working for years, we had finally obtained the blessing of the government and had all the necessary signatures from the essential ministries, only to learn there would be one last hurdle. Just when it appeared that we had overcome all the concerns of those who opposed us, and just when the minister of the interior had been told to make all the necessary preparations to turn the land over to the Mormons, we were asked once again to give a legal undertaking not to proselytize in Israel. President Holland had already issued a legal undertaking not to use the center for proselytizing purposes back in August 1985. That legal document was followed a few months later by an official letter from President Ezra Taft Benson to Mayor Kollek, wherein he stated in part: “Your efforts to keep Jerusalem as an open city and a Holy City for Jews, Moslems, and Christians is most commendable. . . . Hopefully the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies of the Brigham Young University will be a bridge of understanding that will help the efforts to make Jerusalem a city of peace. . . . I am confident that the undertaking given by President Jeffrey R. Holland . . . will be honored. We will also continue to honor, obey, and sustain the laws of the State of Israel and
the city of Jerusalem.”¹

Now, May 1988, more than two years later, the Israeli government was asking for a reaffirmation of the earlier documents relating to proselytizing and once again both from the university and the Church. Our Israeli attorneys advised us that BYU should address a second undertaking since it was requested by the government, but that it might be similar, if not identical to the previous one.

Since BYU has nothing to do with the proselytizing arm of the Church, it was easy to comply with such a request. This second undertaking signed by President Holland reads in part:

BYU undertakes on its own behalf and on behalf of its teachers, students and employees, as well as on behalf of its departments and sections, not to engage in any missionary activity in whatsoever form in Israel. “Missionary activity” means organized activity to induce or persuade any person not being a member of the community of the Mormon Church to become a member of the community of such Church, by way of preaching or teaching the tenets of the Church or otherwise.

Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, BYU declares and undertakes that the Center will not be used for missionary activity and its teachers, students and employees shall sign an undertaking not to engage in missionary activity in Israel. Any person in breach of such undertaking shall be liable to be dismissed from the Center and/or study program and shall be liable to be sent back home.²

Our Israeli attorneys were comfortable in recommending that BYU provide a second letter; however, they were embarrassed that the Church was also being asked for another commitment from President Benson, especially since the Church was not a party to the lease agreement between Israel and Brigham Young University. But all concerned knew that the source for the request was really coming from the government’s powerful coalition partners—the Jewish religious orthodox parties.

A carefully drafted letter was issued under the signature of Elder Howard W. Hunter, who was authorized to sign it on behalf of the Church. It was short and to the point:

We, the undersigned, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, hereinafter “the Church”, undertake that the Church will not engage in any missionary activity within the borders of Israel, as long as such activity is not allowed by the government of Israel. For this purpose, “missionary activity” means organized activity to induce or persuade a person not a member of the community of the Church to become a member of the community of that Church, by preaching or teaching the tenets of the Church or otherwise. This obligation applies
to our Church and each of its branches and departments and to every institution under its control.\(^3\)

The Church document makes it clear that if the door to proselytizing in Israel were ever opened, we would welcome the opportunity. It also protects members that get into casual conversations with Israelis over religion, by insisting that “missionary activity” means “organized activity.” “Organized,” in this context, means missionary activity undertaken under the auspices of the Church, which would include a specific calling to engage in such work, followed up by visits with interested parties, distributing brochures and other Church publications with the intent to convert, and seeking personal commitments to change one’s faith.

It is of interest that the Israeli government attorneys objected to the clause in the Church letter “as long as such activity is not allowed by the government of Israel.” They argued that the clause suggests that Israeli policy may someday change and invite the Church to send its missionaries. They argued that since this will not happen, the clause should be deleted, that the Church should state clearly that it would never proselytize in Israel no matter what.

That moment was a solemn occasion. Elder Hunter and Elder Faust felt the responsibility to represent the First Presidency and the fundamental tenets of the Church when they were confronted with this prejudicial demand. I say prejudicial because such a thing had never been asked of any other Christian faith—it was obvious we were being singled out. Elder Hunter and Elder Faust would not yield to the demand, and Elder Faust vocalized the sentiment of them both when he said, “We will never say never.” And no such agreement was ever entered into by the Church.

The Israelis had our earnest guarantee that we would not proselytize without the invitation of the government of Israel. With this commitment, the Jewish people may rest assured that Latter-day Saints will keep their word. On the other hand, the wording of the document (reminiscent of President Lee’s statement in 1972) allowed the Church to abide, in principle, with the divine injunction to take the gospel to all the world.

**Van Dyke:** The students moved into the center quickly and unannounced on March 8, 1987. Why was it expedient that the students move in at the earliest possible moment?

**Galbraith:** We had about seventy students at Ramat Rahel winter semester of 1987. These are the students that moved into the center
with almost no notice. The center was not done. The dormitories were nearly finished, but the offices, library, cafeteria, and other important parts of the building were unfinished. But people in high places within the government of Israel were advising us to move in. There is a law in Israel that once you take possession of a site with a roof over it you cannot be evicted. Even though we had passed through the most difficult stages, we learned that a group opposed to our presence was gathering to make one last attempt to ensure we would never take possession of the building by moving in. So we moved into the center unannounced in one day. We began very early in the morning. The newspapers picked up on our move, and the next day it was a leading story. At that point, opposition began to fade. There was nothing more they could do.

The move into the center required a great deal of cooperation between the students and the Jerusalem branch members to get the job done quickly. The seventy students joined the local members of the branch to form a long human chain. We had moving vans and buses filled with our belongings. Books, desks, supplies of every kind—all the things we had acquired over all those years at Ramat Rahel were passed hand-to-hand up the line and into the building. We moved it all within hours from the lowest part of the center to the top through the eight floors that cascaded down the Mount of Olives. I’ll never forget the students finally coming into the center—it was air-conditioned—something all subsequent groups would take for granted. But the students that moved from Ramat Rahel savored it as a luxury.

There were a few surprises that first day. For example, we quickly realized that we did not have any toilet paper. Who would have ever thought of that? All those years we were building a center, not stocking a hotel. We also forgot towels. We had to rush to stores in order to meet these basic needs. Since the kitchen was not done, we could not feed our students. However, there was a hotel just below the center called the Commodore Hotel. We contracted with them to feed our students for the first few months until the cafeteria was finished. The students walked to and from the hotel at mealtimes. These inconveniences were completely overweighed by our joy in finally being in our Jerusalem Center.

I wrote an e-mail to BYU president Jeffrey R. Holland the day we moved into the center. It captures my feelings of joy at the time: “All these many months we have labored on a building of cement and stone, and as impressive and grand as this building is, it now takes on added meaning as it assumes the measure of its creation. The students breathe life into it, the breath of life, and those cold, stone corridors and lifeless rooms now take on an air of happiness. In place of the
sounds of construction, there is shouting and whispering, laughing and crying, and the very walls absorb it all, and at last they are content.”

Our students in the building served as an incentive to the contractors to get the job done. They brought on more crews and expedited the whole process. The center was finished on time and on budget. Those students in the building were part of a long series of unforgettable miracles to me.

**Van Dyke:** On May 18, 1988, Elders Howard W. Hunter and James E. Faust and President Jeffrey R. Holland arrived in Jerusalem to sign the long-term lease securing the property on which the Jerusalem Center was built. Discuss the events of that day.

**Galbraith:** It had been determined with Israel’s attorney general that the lease would be signed on Wednesday, May 18, 1988. Elders Hunter and Faust and President Holland had arrived May 14th in anticipation of the event.

Just as the Jerusalem Center representatives and the Brethren were getting ready to drive to the signing at 1:30 p.m., a phone call came in that the signing was all off. The national head of the Land Authority had apparently decided that he and his attorneys would have to give one final review of the documents before the district director could be authorized to sign. That would reportedly take about one week.

What more could happen? It was reminiscent of a previous occasion when the Brethren had come over for the signing of the Development Document with the government of Israel, which was interrupted by a terrorist incident and compounded by Israeli bureaucracy. It was as though this was the adversary’s last chance in his war against the center to make sure it did not materialize. Some of the obstacles he threw in the path were trivial and funny; others were of major import. Elders Hunter and Faust and President Holland were scheduled to leave town two days later, on May 20th, and the demands of their positions in the Church and the university would have made a weeklong delay in the signing impossible. More important, the delay constituted a serious violation of protocol because the Brethren had made special arrangements in good faith, at the invitation of the Israeli government, to sign the documents May 18th.

Our attorney, Joseph Kokia, was called, and with all the forceful persuasive powers we could muster, we described the new hitch in the developments as a crisis that absolutely had to be resolved on the spot. While Kokia was seeking a solution, Elder Faust called everyone together and offered a powerful apostolic prayer calling for divine intervention so that the lease could be signed on schedule. In the
meantime, Kokia was successful in reaching the attorney general, who promised he would personally take care of the matter. Within twenty minutes, we were advised by phone that the government’s representatives were ready to sign.

Van Dyke: How did you commemorate this significant day?

Galbraith: On the way back from signing, after everything was official, we went to the Garden Tomb. That is where the whole process had started with President Lee in 1972. There, in those sacred surroundings, Elder Hunter asked Elder Faust to offer a prayer of gratitude. It was a solemn and an emotional time. We had gone through so much together, had overcome so many obstacles together, and the hand of the Lord was so evident so many times in our behalf. It was such a moving occasion to be there in the presence of those two Apostles and Jeffrey R. Holland and hear their expressions of gratitude and appreciation. We knew that our years of work and the resulting Jerusalem Center were a worthy offering to the Lord. And we knew it was acceptable to Him.

Van Dyke: You were the first president of the Jerusalem Branch in this dispensation, and you were the first director of the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. Your dreams have become a reality, and students have enjoyed that wonderful center. What are your reflections twenty years later?

Galbraith: Even in the face of the fiercest opposition, we were comforted to know that we were pursuing the will of the Lord, and that made all those difficult periods of opposition easier to cope with. Because of the Jerusalem Center, everyone in Jerusalem—and even Israel—has heard of the Mormons in a positive light. Even those opposed to us, who were determined to fight our presence to the bitter end, can now be found attending our weekly musical concert series at the center. We have become a part of the cultural calendar of Jerusalem. Where we had wished so many years ago for only a visitors’ center, we now have something far better. Most important, our enemies became our friends.

It’s timely that we remind our readers through this interview that twenty years have passed since students moved into the center. Let us not forget the wonderful and miraculous things that were accomplished in establishing the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. And let us consider, with faithful anticipation, the reality that many prophetic events await the Church in this part of the Lord’s vineyard.  

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2. A letter to the government of Israel from Brigham Young University and signed by Jeffrey R. Holland, president, dated May 18, 1988.
3. Issued by the Church and signed by Elder Howard W. Hunter, May 18, 1988.
Robert T. Barrett, *Portraits of Moses, Mormon, Joseph Smith Jr., and Gordon B. Hinckley*

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In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord commands us to “teach the principles of my gospel” (D&C 42:12). A principle is “a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine or assumption” or “a rule or code of conduct.” Thus, a gospel principle is a lesson on which we base righteous decisions, the way to apply doctrine to our lives. In 1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 8, we can glean eight powerful lessons on following the living prophets. Each principle reinforces the theme of the Primary song: “Follow the prophet; he knows the way.”

1. Give Your Best to the Lord First

A widow lived in Zarephath, a city north of Galilee on the coast of the Mediterranean in present-day Lebanon. Because of the terrible drought and famine, her food stores were spent. At the brink of starvation, she was gathering sticks to make a fire and cook the last meal she and her son would eat before they died. While doing this, the prophet Elijah, who had been sent to her by the Lord, approached her and asked her to bring him some water and some bread. She replied to him: “As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (1 Kings 17:12).

Upon announcing this, the prophet Elijah asked her to give her remaining food and water to him, instead of to herself and her starving
son, with this promise: “For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth” (1 Kings 17:14). Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Quorum of the Seventy explained the reason Elijah did this:

Now doesn’t that sound selfish, asking not just for the first piece, but possibly the only piece? Didn’t our parents teach us to let other people go first and especially for a gentleman to let a lady go first, let alone a starving widow? Her choice—does she eat, or does she sacrifice her last meal and hasten death? Perhaps she will sacrifice her own food, but could she sacrifice the food meant for her starving son?

Elijah understood the doctrine that blessings come after the trial of our faith (see Ether 12:6; D&C 132:5). He wasn’t being selfish. As the Lord’s servant, Elijah was there to give, not to take. . . .

One reason the Lord illustrates doctrines with the most extreme circumstances is to eliminate excuses. If the Lord expects even the poorest widow to pay her mite, where does that leave all others who find that it is not convenient or easy to sacrifice?

The Lord’s prophets frequently ask us to give the best we have, or all we have, to the Lord first, with the promised blessing that if we do, the Lord will bless us in return. I have reflected many times on how extremely difficult it would have been for a mother to give her last meal, meant for her child, to anyone—even the Lord’s prophet. However, this woman had the faith to do it. 1 Kings 17:15–16 reads: “And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.”

How can we more effectively teach our students the blessings that attend those who give their best to the Lord first? Tithing for a poor college student, a two-year mission at the prime of life, seminary or institute in an already full high school or college schedule, giving up two nights a week for family home evening on Monday night and a Mutual activity another weeknight when they have pressing work or school conflicts—the list could go on. It is critical that we teach them they cannot expect the full blessings of the Lord unless, like the widow of Zarephath, they are willing to follow the prophet and give their best to the Lord first.

Perhaps the most poignant part is what happens next. Even though the oil and flour never ran out, allowing this woman, her son, and the prophet Elijah to eat “many days,” her son still became ill and died.
But, because of this woman’s sacrifice and obedience, the prophet Elijah was still alive and was still at her house. Providentially, Elijah took the lifeless body of her son, called upon the Lord, and by the power of the priesthood raised him from the dead (see 1 Kings 17:15–24). Had this woman denied the prophet her last bit of food, would he have been there or even been alive to raise her son from the dead?

How many times have our students been asked to give up something valuable to the Lord only to find out later that the blessing they desired the very most—undoubtedly a blessing they could not have received any other way—was provided by the Lord because they chose to follow the prophet’s counsel and give their best to the Lord first? Like this woman, our students can expect the Lord’s blessings only if they are willing to sacrifice all they have, if necessary, to follow the words of the Lord’s prophets today.

2. Prophets Stand for the Truth

Elijah faced the challenge of convincing apostate Israel that Jehovah was the only true and living God and that the worship of Baal had not only led them deeply into sin but was the cause of their current suffering. To do this, he proposed his famous challenge as recorded in 1 Kings 18:21–24:

How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. . . .
I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.
Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under:
And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. (emphasis added)

What pain the prophet Elijah must have felt when no one responded positively to his challenge, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” Instead, they insisted that Heavenly Father prove Himself one more time.

They knew of the miraculous way the Lord had freed their ancestors from Egyptian bondage, helped them escape by the parting of the Red Sea, and fed and cared for them in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. They knew of Joshua’s conquest of the land of
their forefathers and the Lord’s sustaining hand in allowing them to retain the lands of their inheritance even up to that day. They had just experienced a terrible drought and famine caused by the sealing power of the priesthood that their false god Baal had been unable to prevent. Did the Lord need to further prove to them He had the power to save them before they would leave the worship of the false god Baal?

Like Elijah, our students may also have to stand alone against the wicked trends of our current culture and society. Like Elijah, many of them stand bravely against the storm of sin. However, many of them are seduced by seemingly “small” trends, fashions, or pressures because “everyone else seems to be doing it.” The threat of peer rejection for “being too good” can overcome even the strongest among them. Of this, President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, “What we desperately need today . . . are leaders, men and women who are willing to stand for something, . . . especially when it is unpopular to do so. . . . The problem with most of us is that we are afraid to stand up for what we believe, to be witnesses for what is true and right. We want to do the right thing, but we are troubled by fears.” In other words, we need more “Elijahs” today.

Elder Glenn L. Pace of the Seventy said this of the need to decide, once and for all—and before it is too late—who your God is:

Many of us take the blessings of the gospel for granted. It is as if we are passengers on the train of the Church, which has been moving forward gradually and methodically. Sometimes we have looked out the window and thought, “That looks kind of fun out there. This train is so restrictive.” So we have jumped off and gone and played in the woods for a while. Sooner or later we find it isn’t as much fun as Lucifer makes it appear or we get critically injured, so we work our way back to the tracks and see the train ahead. With a determined sprint we catch up to it, breathlessly wipe the perspiration from our forehead, and thank the Lord for repentance.

While on the train we can see the world and some of our own members outside laughing and having a great time. They taunt us and coax us to get off. . . .

I would propose that the luxury of getting on and off the train as we please is fading. The speed of the train is increasing. The woods are getting much too dangerous, and the fog and darkness are moving in.

With all the prophecies we have seen fulfilled, what great event are we awaiting prior to saying, “Count me in”? What more do we need to see or experience before we get on the train and stay on it until we reach our destination?
Perhaps Elijah’s story as recorded in 1 Kings 18 could help reinforce amongst our students the idea that the “train of the Lord’s kingdom here on earth” is moving quickly, and the time for deciding whose side we are on is now. Elijah’s challenge echoes down through the ages to us today: “How much longer will you debate back and forth among yourselves?” The time to decide to stand up for the truth—and for the Lord’s prophets—is now.

3. Prophets Tell Us What We Need to Hear

An example of how the wisdom of men pales in comparison to the infinite and eternal nature of prophetic revelation is found in 1 Kings 22. When the king of Israel, Ahab, asked the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, if he would help him wage war against Syria in an attempt to regain a portion of their land they had lost, he agreed to form an alliance and help him. Before they went to battle, however, they counseled together and decided to seek the advice of the prophets. Instead of consulting with the prophet of the Lord, King Ahab sought the advice of four hundred prophets of Baal. He did this because they always said what he wanted them to say. And, of course, this time was no different. They all proclaimed that he should do as he wished and that Baal would deliver their enemies into his hand (see 1 Kings 22:1–6).

Upon seeing this, the righteous king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, said, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might enquire of him?” (1 Kings 22:7). King Ahab responded, “There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” (1 Kings 22:8).

When Micaiah was summoned, he sarcastically said what King Ahab wanted to hear (see 1 Kings 22:15). Sensing this, King Jehoshaphat said: “How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?” (1 Kings 22:16).

Once Micaiah realized that Jehoshaphat wanted to know the truth, he told him that the four hundred prophets of Baal were possessed of a lying spirit and that if they went against their enemies they would be scattered like sheep without a shepherd (see 1 Kings 22:17, 22). At this, the wicked King Ahab replied: “Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?” (1 Kings 22:18).

Because Micaiah told them the truth, he was shut up in prison and was fed a meager diet of bread and water. Meanwhile, both kings went to war against the Syrians. In the battle, the wicked King Ahab
was killed, but the righteous King Jehoshaphat’s life was spared (see 1 Kings 22:26–37).

What would happen if our prophets only told our students what they wanted to hear? For Ahab’s wickedness, the Lord had promised him through the prophet Elijah that when he died dogs would lick up his blood—and they did at the battle against the Syrians (see 1 Kings 21:19; 1 Kings 22:37–38). Fortunately, our students will not have something that ghastly happen. However, spiritually speaking, something much worse could happen. It is not the role of our prophets to agree with us—especially when the path we are pursuing could lead to our moral or spiritual destruction. It is the prophet’s responsibility and privilege to warn us against evil paths we might be tempted to pursue. Avoiding their counsel could put us in dire straits. President Harold B. Lee said of the path to safety:

> Now the only safety we have as members of this church is to do exactly what the Lord said to the Church in that day when the Church was organized. We must learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through his prophet, “as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me . . . as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.” (D&C 21:4–5.) There will be some things that take patience and faith. You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord himself, with patience and faith, the promise is that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory.” (D&C 21:6.)

King Ahab did not have to die—he had a prophet, the true prophet, who warned him of danger despite his wickedness. Similarly, our students have living prophets who will tell them what they need to know, instead of what they might want to hear, in an effort to keep them safe from the dangers of the world.

4. The Mantle Fits—Wear It!

An example of an exceptionally faithful follower of the living prophet is Elisha himself. When the prophet Elijah passed by him one day, he threw his mantle or shawl on Elisha (see 1 Kings 19:19). Later, when Elijah was translated, it fell on him again (see 2 Kings 2:13–14). Elijah had used this shawl to perform miracles like parting the waters in
2 Kings 2:8. This passing of Elijah’s shawl or mantle to Elisha has become symbolic of prophetic succession in the Lord’s kingdom even today.8

Elisha didn’t stop to see if the mantle fit; he simply did his best to perform the work the Lord called him to do and was a wonderfully successful prophet who performed many mighty miracles and other good works for the Lord. Similarly, it is not our students’ place to decide if a call from the Lord fits or is right for them; it is their opportunity to accept and serve and go and do. President Boyd K. Packer said:

It is not in the proper spirit for us to decide where we will serve or where we will not. We serve where we are called. It does not matter what the calling may be.

I was present at a solemn assembly when David O. McKay was sustained as President of the Church. President J. Reuben Clark Jr., who had served as First Counselor to two Presidents, was then sustained as Second Counselor to President McKay. Sensitive to the possibility that some may think that he had been demoted, President Clark said: “In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines.9

Like Elisha and President Clark, each of us should seek to serve where we are called, regardless of position, prestige, or honor. I was taught this lesson powerfully by my grandmother. At her funeral, the bishop remarked, much to my surprise, that my grandmother had served in the same calling in that ward for thirty years. The calling? Nursery leader. “In fact,” he said, with much emotion, “she served as my nursery leader.”

Not once had I heard her complain that she had served in the same calling for thirty years. What an example of wearing the mantle given to her from her priesthood leaders!

5. “Bear” with the Difficult Teachings of Prophets

The wisdom of the prophets is not always easy to see. Some youth are tempted to believe the prophet’s counsel as outdated, old-fashioned, or out of sync with reality. We have all witnessed some of our students experience serious misfortune because they turned their ears, eyes, or hearts away from prophetic counsel. An unfortunate example of this is found in 2 Kings 2:23–24. After having performed the great miracle of healing the waters of Jericho, Elisha “went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth [youths] out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and
cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.”

What does the phrase “go up” mean? They were asking the prophet to leave, or at least leave them alone. Their reference to “bald head” was most likely referring to the prophet’s age. In our modern English, they were saying something to the effect of, “Get out of here, you old man, and leave us alone!” Now, our students would probably not say that directly to our beloved prophet. But, unfortunately, some say things with the same impact: “I wish he [the prophet] would mind his own business,” or “What does he know about being a teenager today?” Is it not prophetic guidance protecting them from the destructive “bears” waiting to prey upon them?

It is a tragedy that the youth in Elisha’s day were cursed and died the way they did because of their attitudes and actions toward the prophet. However, there are many more today that are losing their spiritual or physical lives due to similar attitudes. And there are many bears seeking to prey on those who willfully disregard the Lord’s prophets and their counsel. We have all seen those who have been bitten, or even destroyed, by the bears of pornography, unworthy music, immodest clothing, unclean language, inappropriate relationships, and substance abuse.

Although our society is full of these hungry, vicious bears, our students can be completely safe from their devastating effects if they will honor and obey these older, wiser, gray, even bald-headed men who are called of God to be our leaders. My friends and colleagues, perhaps these verses could be used to reinforce the idea in our students’ minds that there is safety from the she-bears of our day in honoring and sustaining the prophets, even if, and perhaps especially if, their teachings are difficult to bear or seem out of sync with current trends.

6. Make “Room” for the Prophet in Your Life

How much time and effort does it take to follow the prophet? How much time and effort are you putting into listening to and following his words? In 2 Kings 4 we read about “a great woman” from Shunem (2 Kings 4:8) who made time and space for the Lord’s prophet in her life. Her story can help students see that we need to make time for the prophet.

This woman watched the prophet Elisha pass by her home on his many travels day after day, and, sensing he was indeed a holy man of God, she stopped him one day and invited him in for food and refreshment.
Elisha appreciated her graciousness and eventually made it a practice to stop by her home each time he passed.

Sometimes his journeys would bring him by her home late at night, and rather than just send him on his way after feeding him, she asked her husband to add a room onto their house so he would be able to spend the night if he needed to before continuing on his journey. This woman not only made time and space for the prophet, she actually made physical space for him by adding a room (see 2 Kings 4:8–11).

One of the great blessings of living at this time is that our students have more opportunities to listen to or read the inspired words of the prophets than any other group of young people that has ever lived. They are also busy with many good activities. While some of these activities are for mere pleasure, most are not. Schoolwork and extracurricular activities alone could monopolize their time. Many of them also work to save money for their missions, college, and personal needs. While almost all of these activities can be beneficial, it is possible to become so busy there is no time left to spend with the prophets. Like the Shunammite woman, they must decide to make “room” in their lives for the prophets and their messages.

Because of her faithfulness, great blessings followed. Although this woman and her husband had reached old age without the blessing of a child, Elisha promised them that because of the way they had treated him they would be blessed with a son. To their surprise, they had a son within a year’s time! After he was fully grown, however, he became sick and died. When Elisha heard of it he traveled to their home and brought their son back to life (see 2 Kings 4:16–37). Later, when Elisha prophesied a seven-year famine in Israel, he made a special trip to this woman’s home to warn her to leave the country with her family to save their lives. After the famine, they returned only to discover that another family had moved on to their property while they were away. When the king learned they had left because they had been warned to do so by the prophet, he restored their property to them (see 2 Kings 8:1–6).

How many challenges could be overcome, questions answered, or difficult problems resolved by finding a regular time and place to study and ponder the words of our living prophets? For some, the thought of adding one more thing to an overscheduled life might be discouraging or even overwhelming. Commenting on this, Elder Dallin H. Oaks said: “For most of us, most of the time, the choice between good and bad is easy. What usually causes us difficulty is determining which uses of our time and influence are merely good, or better, or best.”¹⁰ We can glean a lesson from the Shunammite woman. Her “house” did not
have adequate room in it either—it was already full. To make room for the prophet, she had to add a room to her house. This suggests that perhaps the answer is not dropping a class, being released from a calling, or quitting a job. It is often inappropriate to remove such activities from our lives. As Elder Oaks has suggested, the answer is more likely to make room at a time taken up by a less important activity. As we create space in our lives for the better over the good, we make room for the words of the prophets. We too can be blessed beyond our expectations.

7. Prophets Often Teach through Small and Simple Means

In 2 Kings 5, we read of the interaction between Naaman the leper and the prophet Elisha. This story could be used to teach various principles, some of which are outlined below.

*Trust the messengers of the Lord.* If we are humble and teachable, we can learn from the most unexpected sources of the truth.

The first messenger in 2 Kings 5 is an Israelite woman who, providentially, was taken as a prisoner of war and given to Naaman’s wife as a servant. We know very little of this young woman’s life experiences. However, from her heartfelt expression of faith we gather that she had an unwavering conviction of the divine calling and attendant priesthood power of the prophet Elisha. Her only words recorded in scripture are: “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy” (2 Kings 5:3). What a beautiful expression of absolute faith! And what an unlikely messenger of the prophetic power to heal the captain of the Syrian hosts!

Apparently her message was well received because it led to a personal letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel and an accompanying gift of enormous value. It is a remarkable thing indeed that the Syrian hierarchy took such notice of the words of this young Israelite prisoner of war. From this incident we can learn the importance of receiving the testimony of prophets from even the most humble of witnesses. We can also see the immense power and influence one person can have when speaking with spiritual conviction. Our students need to know that their humble, pure, powerful testimonies, when borne with spiritual conviction, can have a powerful influence on people of every nation or every station.

Of his own conversion, President Brigham Young said: “When I saw a man without eloquence, or talents for public speaking, who could only say, ‘I know, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the Book of Mormon is true, that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of the Lord,’ the Holy
Ghost proceeding from that individual illuminated my understanding, and light, glory, and immortality were before me. . . . The world, with all its wisdom and power, and with all the glory and gilded show of its kings or potentates, sinks into perfect insignificance, compared with the simple, unadorned testimony of the servant of God.

The second messenger was Elisha’s servant, Gehazi. Unlike the Israelite maiden, whose message was accepted, believed, and acted upon, Gehazi and his message were entirely rejected at first. Naaman had assumed that after the long journey to Samaria the prophet would come out to see him, call down the powers of heaven in some miraculous display, and heal him instantly (see 2 Kings 5:11). When Elisha did not even come out to meet him, but instead sent a young man with his message to “go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean” (2 Kings 5:10), Naaman was offended and exclaimed: “Are not . . . [the] rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?” And the scriptures record, “He turned and went away in a rage” (2 Kings 5:12).

The final messenger to Naaman was his own servant. Sensing the potential loss of the prophet’s promised healing, he carefully approached his master and said: “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” (2 Kings 5:13). To his credit, Naaman humbles himself and submits to the prophet Elisha’s counsel and is made whole.

It is critical that our students learn from this story that the authorized messengers of the prophets—Church teachers and leaders, parents, and home and visiting teachers—carry saving messages directly to their homes and hearts. The Lord said, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). Elisha taught this principle powerfully by not coming out to Naaman in person. It is also critical that our students come to understand that in their callings they become the messengers of the prophets to those to whom they are called to serve. Like the three messengers in this story, our students can become the means of bringing salvation to those of great influence, station, or wealth—or to the smallest child and simplest Saint.

*Obey the Lord’s plain and simple teachings.* Like Naaman, some of our students might be tempted to look for something new, sensational, or dramatic while overlooking the ordinary teachings they receive from the prophets through parents, teachers or leaders. Perhaps they might
rationalize, as Naaman did, that there must be greater solutions to what seem like greater problems. Perhaps the world might offer a more spectacular, sophisticated solution. In the words of Naaman, “Are not . . . rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” (2 Kings 5:12).

Naaman almost missed out on a miracle that completely changed his life because he did not believe it would heal him. How many more blessings could be given us if we would more consistently listen to and obey the normal, everyday counsel from God’s prophets? Can we help our students gain a greater appreciation for the doctrines and principles taught in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” and the standards found in For Strength of Youth (especially our college-age students)? What about reinforcing the small and simple acts of regular church attendance, meaningful participation in family home evenings, and daily scripture study and prayer? These are the things the Lord’s prophets have asked us to cause the great things to come to pass in our lives. Could we more powerfully teach our students to humble themselves, like Naaman, and follow these small and simple things to receive the greater blessings we all desire?

8. Prophets See What We Do Not

In 2 Kings chapters 6 and 7 is the story of a drought and famine so terrible that the Israelites resorted to cannibalism. The king discovered starving women eating their own children and sent a messenger to Elisha the prophet. Elisha prophesied that on the next day, food would be so plentiful that it would sell for an all-time low in the market place. This was difficult for the Israelites to believe. Their country was under siege by the Syrian army, which at that time had them completely surrounded. Food was so scarce that bird dung was selling in the market place for food—and that, at a very high price. When one of the king’s servants heard Elisha’s prophesy, he denounced him saying it was impossible. Elisha replied that not only would his prophecy be fulfilled, but this man would live to see the food with his eyes, but never get any of it to eat because of his unbelief and derision of the Lord’s prophet (see 2 Kings 6:24–7:2).

As you know, that night “the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life” (2 Kings 7:6–7).
When the Israelites discovered the camp of the Syrian army completely empty of soldiers the next day, they ran out and took all of the food the Syrians had left behind. And, as Elisha has prophesied, it did sell in the market place at all-time low prices. As for the man who had scoffed at Elisha’s prophecy—well, the king had assigned him to keep the gate of the city. When the starving people ran out of the city in a frenzied craze and returned in the same manner, they trampled him under their feet, and he died—thus fulfilling Elisha’s second prophecy that the man would see the food but never get to eat any of it.

What lessons are in this story for our students today? Like Elisha, our modern prophets are also “seers.” That means they can see things that we cannot see with our mortal eyes. Elder Dennis B. Neufenschwander of the Seventy taught: “What our modern seers are making known that otherwise could not be known and what they are seeing that is not visible to the natural eye. . . . Listen, ponder, and prayerfully consider what they are teaching and what they are doing. . . . To have living prophets, seers, and revelators among us and not listen to them is no better than not having them at all.”

An excellent example of this is “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Elder M. Russell Ballard noted: “The proclamation is a prophetic document, not only because it was issued by prophets but because it was ahead of its time. It warns against many of the very things that have threatened and undermined families during the last decade.” For example, in October 1995, when the proclamation was issued, same-sex marriage was not legally recognized anywhere in the world. From 1998 to 2000, however, the issues of same-sex marriage and so-called civil unions became the focus of large-scale public debate in Europe, Scandinavia, South America, and Canada. Since 2003 this debate escalated in the United States of America to the point that many states passed legislation against it and a federal constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman was proposed and voted on twice in Congress. The First Presidency also issued a statement in support of such a constitutional amendment. As of this writing, nearly all countries in the world have now become heavily engrossed in this debate, which was not even an issue in 1995. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” stands as a clear witness to the world that prophets, seers, and revelators are not only ahead of the times, but their counsel can also prepare us against the future elements of societal and moral decay that threaten to destroy us as individuals, families, and societies.
Conclusion

The books of 1 and 2 Kings offer inspiring lessons and principles about following the prophets. By testifying that prophets “know the way,” we can help our students successfully travel the difficult roads that lie ahead.

Notes

2. President Boyd K. Packer defined a principle as “an enduring truth, a law, a rule you can adopt to guide you in making decisions” (in Conference Report, April 1996, 22).
3. Duane E. Hiatt, “Follow the Prophet,” Children’s Songbook (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 110.
While visiting historic Williamsburg, Virginia, I happened upon the Powell House nestled in the eastern end of the city. It was a cheery home that exhibited family life in the eighteenth century. The guide pointed out that Benjamin Powell had acquired the property in 1763 and practiced his career as an “undertaker” there until 1782. Learning that Powell was a mortician, I immediately looked around the home thinking that I would never have guessed that the lively house was actually a funeral home. Apparently I was not alone in this assumption as another guest verbalized what I was thinking. The guide politely chuckled and then pointed out that in the eighteenth century an undertaker was actually what we now call a contractor. In truth, Benjamin Powell was a carpenter who undertook building projects in the community.

As I imagined the look on the face of a present-day contractor being referred to as an undertaker or a mortician being called a contractor, I was reminded of the confusion and misunderstanding that is caused by using modern definitions and perspectives to frame historical terms and concepts. This misaligned association is known as presentism, a term that describes using present-day terms and understanding when considering the historical past. Thus, whenever anyone makes an assumption based on modern or personal experience (or lack thereof) without gaining an accurate historical perspective, they have exercised presentism and jeopardize accurately understanding the past. Like my
experience with the eighteenth-century undertaker, such assumptions distort accurate understanding and lead to faulty conclusions, especially of familiar terms and common concepts.

When it comes to Old Testament leadership, none are more familiar than the prophets. Unlike other contemporary leaders, the Old Testament prophet held a dominant position unparalleled in Hebrew history. Often considered more than a match for kings, priests, and even the masses, Israel’s prophets influenced not only the people’s religiosity, but also their society’s concept of leadership. As such, many considered the Hebrew prophet to be the most important person in Israel’s ancient community. With such importance placed upon Israel’s prophets and the profound impact they had in unfolding Israel’s identity and direction, the Old Testament prophet could be considered Israel’s leader extraordinaire.

Understanding the role and position of this leader is especially problematic because of our familiarity with the term and our preconceptions concerning prophets or, in other words, because of presentism. “The word prophet’s contemporary usage in our vernaculars is very fluid,” Joseph Blenkinsopp points out, “covering such things as prediction, emotional preaching, social protest, and, within the sociological community, millenarian movements and their founders.” Accurately understanding the prophet as a leader in the Old Testament requires discipline to avoid the easy association of modern conceptions and terminology. This discipline behooves both a textual and contextual investigation.

Israel’s Textual Prophet

Defining the word prophet is a challenging task because so many individuals, roles, and functions have been subsumed under the precept of prophecy. However, many people define the term prophet as a person who tells what will happen. Assuming that the ancient Israelites defined and viewed a prophet exclusively as a predictor and prognosticator would be like assuming that Benjamin Powell was a mortician.

An etymological investigation of the terms prophet and leader can help frame an accurate concept of the prophet-leader in the Old Testament. The English term prophet is derived from the Greek prophetes, meaning “to speak on behalf of gods.” While this is a step in the right direction, the Old Testament’s textual origin is Hebrew rather than Greek, so a look at Hebrew word origins should help to establish a good starting point in understanding how the Hebrews defined their prophets. The Hebrew definition of prophet is actually derived from
four Hebrew terms used throughout the Old Testament: *nabi’*, *naba’*, *nataph*, and *hozeh*. With a careful tracing of word histories, these terms can be linked together etymologically and render the meaning of *spokesman*.

This definition differs from modern views that a prophet only predicts and prognosticates. When Rodney R. Hutton concluded, “In actual fact, there were no prophets in Israel,” he was actually saying there was nothing like what we define and envision as prophets today in ancient Israel. The spokesman conception is illustrated well in Jehovah’s description of His prophet: “I will raise them up a prophet [*nabi’*] from among their brethren, like unto thee [Moses], and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18; see also Exodus 4:12; Jeremiah 1:7).

Thus, as a spokesman, the Old Testament prophet would say whatever God required him to. If God told the prophet to prophesy of future events, teach, enlighten, chasten, or even criticize, then as God’s spokesman, the prophet would do as instructed. If the prophet failed to express God’s words, desires, and wishes appropriately, then he would no longer be a spokesman but a voice independent of God (Deuteronomy 13). Thus his role would be violated, and he would be a false spokesman.

Although an adequate historical definition is necessary to understand a prophet, if our examination stops with textual definitions, the concept of the Old Testament prophet might be lost. For example, the Mari letters and the Letters from Lachish also describe their prophets as messengers or spokesmen. In fact, the textual Lachish prophet was also termed *nabi’*. In some ways the Hebrew prophet was similar to the Mesopotamian oracular speakers as well as to the Canaanite and Syrian prophets. But despite the general textual definitions and similarities, Smith concluded that there was a “vast gulf between Israelite and non-Israelite prophecy.”

The gulf between the ancient prophets is evident as soon as one moves beyond the textual comparisons. For example, when Sidney B. Sperry compared the Hebrew prophet with the Greeks, Babylonians, and others, he wrote: “None had a ‘prophet’ in the Hebrew connotation of the word.”

One connotation of the Hebrew prophet [*nabi’*] is its textual connection with leadership. This unique relationship between biblical leadership and prophets is supported by a further look at how the Hebrews textually defined their leadership. A *leader*, in Old Testament Hebrew, is translated from either *nasi’*, *nagiyd*, *sar*, or *rosh*. Once again we find that the oldest available origins of these four related terms render the definition of a leader as a “spokesman” or he who “speaks for another.” By definition
The prophet and leader for the Hebrews were synonymous. Orelli once wrote, “No phenomenon analogous to Biblical prophecy, even in form, is anywhere to be found in the world of nations.”\textsuperscript{10} Thus, it was not merely having a prophet that separated the Hebrew’s from their contemporaries, but it was the way the Hebrews conceived of their prophets (spokesmen) that separated them from the rest of the world. This becomes more evident as we step beyond the textual definitions and examine more contextual concepts and prophetic practices in the Old Testament.

\textbf{Israel’s Contextual Prophet}

\textit{Prophetic selection.} While Moses instructed seventy elders at the tabernacle, Eldad and Medad remained in the camp and prophesied. Upon hearing of the events in the camp, Joshua turned to Moses and said, “My lord Moses, forbid them” (Numbers 11:28). Moses’s reply adds deep insight to the Hebrew connotation of a spokesman and its connection with leadership: “Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29). It seems possible that under the Hebrew connotation of a prophet, every individual who possessed the Lord’s spirit could (or should) speak Jehovah’s words. Not only was this in the realm of possibility, but Moses’s statement also puts it in the realm of desirability.

It must be clear, however, that Moses’s desire that “all the Lord’s people were prophets” was an invitation to speak the words of Jehovah but not an invitation to speak for Jehovah. Elder Bruce R. McConkie described this difference as “ranks and grades of prophetic responsibility and authority.” He further declared that “every member of the Church should be a prophet as pertaining to his own affairs” and “those who hold offices in the Church . . . should be prophets both as pertaining to their own affairs and the affairs of the organization over which they preside.”\textsuperscript{11} Thus, while men and women sometimes performed the prophetic function of speaking Jehovah’s words, their role is distinguished from those who were selected to speak for Jehovah and to be His prophets and leaders. This distinction was reiterated as Christ reminded the restored church of the similarities between the modern prophet, Joseph Smith, and the Hebrew prophet, Moses. He said: “But, behold, verily, verily, I say unto thee, no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses” (D&C 28:2; see also Exodus 4:16).

In this light, Hebrew prophets were not just common messengers, but also exclusive spokesmen for Jehovah. They did not merely exercise
a personal spiritual right but were selected by Jehovah as His mouthpiece for the Church (1 Kings 14:18). The prophets’ confidence in speaking for Jehovah began with an assurance that Jehovah had personally selected them for service. This selection process bound the ancient prophets’ allegiance to Jehovah rather than to the people.

Since the Hebrew prophet was selected by Jehovah Himself, he was not bound nor influenced by elections, popular opinions, political persuasion, or public polls. It is evident that the Old Testament nabi’ did not seek to become Jehovah’s spokesman. As a matter of fact, many of the Old Testament prophets attempted to elude the Lord’s bidding to prophetic service. Enoch, for example, tried to dissuade Jehovah from extending a prophetic calling, reminding the Lord that he was “but a lad” (Moses 6:31–32). In like manner, Moses tried in vain to convince Jehovah that he was not qualified as a spokesman for he was “slow of speech.” Other prophets who attempted similar patterns include Amos (Amos 3:8), Hosea (Hosea 1:2), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4), and Jonah (Jonah 1–2). Perhaps the prophets’ reluctance to accept this calling was due to personal feelings of inadequacy and an overwhelming awe of responsibility. While the Old Testament does not detail every prophet’s selection, it is reasonable to assume that the ancient prophets began their prophetic careers with Jehovah’s invitation.

The importance of being selected to prophetic service was emphasized by the prophets themselves. For example, Amaziah, a priest of Beth-el, scornfully told Amos to prophesy in Judah, where he could make a living out of it. Amos replied that he was a prophet not because he wanted material gain, nor because of heredity, but because “as I followed the flock and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel” (Amos 7:15). Not motivated by personal gain or the spokespersonship, the Hebrew leader was in complete servitude to Jehovah because he was called into service by Jehovah.

Presentation of the Prophet’s Personal Character

There are over three hundred references about the Old Testament prophets (nabim). These refer to individuals ranging from Abraham (Genesis 20:7) to Zechariah (Zechariah 1:7). With such a large group, there is an incredible diversity when taking their personal backgrounds and characteristics into consideration. A quick survey reveals that Abraham roamed the deserts; Moses was raised in Pharaoh’s court; Samuel was an apprentice in Shiloah sanctuary; Nathan and Gad were royal chaplains; Amos tended sheep in the hills of Hebron; Elisha was often found behind his father’s plow in Jordan Valley; and Isaiah was a
confidant of kings. The noted Jewish historian, Cecil Roth, suggested that Israel’s prophets “might be drawn from all ranks of society, from the highest to the lowest.”

The Old Testament not only expresses the diversity among the prophets, but it also shows many of the prophets’ personal weaknesses. Rather than attempting to embellish competence and boost the people’s confidence in a leader by hiding personal imperfections, the Hebrews openly recognized their leaders as mortal. Johnson described this phenomenon in the following words: “Jewish writers and sages, fighting against the strong tendency in antiquity to deify founder-figures, often went out of their way to stress the human weaknesses and failings.” A good example of this phenomenon is the occasional portrayal of Moses as bewildered, confused, angry, and sometimes doubting.

This candid portrayal is baffling for those who think it weakens the prophet’s leadership position in the minds of the people. For the Hebrews, this actually strengthened the position of the prophet rather than weakened it. It demonstrated that it really didn’t matter who the prophet was as long as he or she was selected by Jehovah. It wasn’t the prophet’s personal charisma, style, or connections that defined the essence of Hebrew leadership; it was Jehovah. This emphasized the people’s allegiance to Jehovah. Thus, the prophet was accepted as a link between the people and Jehovah by definition, selection, and personal description.

The Prophetic Message

The prophets emphasized their role as spokesmen by emphasizing that they delivered Jehovah’s message, and not their own. In many instances, the prophet introduced messages with specific statements that declared Jehovah as the source of the message. Scholars refer to this as the “messenger formula.” The most common phrase used in the messenger formula is: “Thus saith the Lord.” Moses used this statement when declaring Jehovah’s will to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:22), emphasizing that the fight was not between Pharaoh and Moses, but a matter between Pharaoh and Jehovah. Moses was merely Jehovah’s proxy. Other prophets who used this phrase in their declarations include: Joshua (Joshua 7:13), Samuel (1 Samuel 2:27), Nathan (2 Samuel 7:5), Ahijah (1 Kings 11:31), Shemaiah (1 Kings 12:24), Elijah (1 Kings 17:14), Zedekiah (1 Kings 22:11), Elisha (2 Kings 3:16–17), Isaiah (2 Kings 19:6), Gad (1 Chronicles 21:10–11), Obadiah (Obadiah 1:1), and Micah (Micah 2:3). The phrase itself is actually used 413 times throughout the Old Testament text. Other
phrases included in the messenger formula are: “these are the words of the Lord” and “this is the word of the Lord.” Some of the prophets even opened their written works with a messenger formula-type statement. An example of this would be Hosea’s opening words: “The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea” (Hosea 1:1).  

Some may suppose that since a prophet is merely a man, the purpose of the messenger formula was to distinguish when the prophet was speaking as a man and when he was speaking as Jehovah’s official messenger. This argument results in endless rationalizations. “Sometimes there are those who haggle over words,” Ezra Taft Benson explained. “They might say the prophet gave us counsel but that we are not obligated to follow it unless he says it is a commandment.” In like manner, some feel that unless a prophet prefaces his message with one of the phrases of the messenger formula, it is not of God. President J. Reuben Clark taught: “There are those who insist that unless the Prophet of the Lord declares ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ the message may not be taken as revelation. This is a false testing standard.” The formula was not provided so the people could determine which of the utterances were truly prophetic, but it was provided as an emphasis and reminder of the prophet’s function as spokesman for the Lord.

**Prophetic Titles**

There are numerous titles in the Old Testament text that aid in reconstructing an accurate picture of the ancient Hebrew prophet-leader. While they cannot be considered as definitive terms, they do add to the portrait of the ancient prophet. The titles are important as they often describe various functions of the Old Testament prophet. The most common titles associated with the Old Testament prophet are: Man of God, Seer, and Jehovah’s Servant (or my or His [Jehovah’s] servants).

**Man of God** (*ha’elohim*). The most obvious meaning drawn from this title is a man who resembles God—a godly man. This title describes more than a righteous man and was considered a title of honor. Many thought this title to be synonymous with the word *prophet*. It is important to consider that rather than the prophet just being described as a godly man (even though we would assume that he was), *is ha’elohim* affirms the calling of the prophet as God’s (Jehovah’s) man—meaning, chosen by Him. This separates the *Man of God* from all other Israelites, including those who were otherwise godly. The title was first bestowed (at least textually) upon Moses (Deuteronomy 33:1).  

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17 Some may suppose that since a prophet is merely a man, the purpose of the messenger formula was to distinguish when the prophet was speaking as a man and when he was speaking as Jehovah’s official messenger. This argument results in endless rationalizations. “Sometimes there are those who haggle over words,” Ezra Taft Benson explained. “They might say the prophet gave us counsel but that we are not obligated to follow it unless he says it is a commandment.”

18 In like manner, some feel that unless a prophet prefaces his message with one of the phrases of the messenger formula, it is not of God. President J. Reuben Clark taught: “There are those who insist that unless the Prophet of the Lord declares ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ the message may not be taken as revelation. This is a false testing standard.”

19 The formula was not provided so the people could determine which of the utterances were truly prophetic, but it was provided as an emphasis and reminder of the prophet’s function as spokesman for the Lord.

20 It is important to consider that rather than the prophet just being described as a godly man (even though we would assume that he was), *is ha’elohim* affirms the calling of the prophet as God’s (Jehovah’s) man—meaning, chosen by Him. This separates the *Man of God* from all other Israelites, including those who were otherwise godly. The title was first bestowed (at least textually) upon Moses (Deuteronomy 33:1).
Seer (ro’eh). Literally translated, ro’eh means “one who sees.” Traditionally, it is interpreted as seer, “one gifted with second sight or extrasensory perception.” Jehovah allowed certain individuals to see, understand, receive divine communication, or insight as “one who sees with spiritual eyes . . . that which seems obscure to others.” The first mention of a seer is Samuel (1 Samuel 9:19; 1 Chronicles 9:22; 26:28; 29:29). Others connected with this title were Hanai (2 Chronicles 16:7, 10) and Zadok. To assume that these three men of the Old Testament were the only seers would be not only incorrect but also unfortunate. Scholars debate attempts to make the terms, functions, and titles of the Old Testament prophets mutually exclusive. From a contextual perspective, the titles and terms of prophet and seer appear “parallel in function” rather than exclusive traits. Moses clearly saw things to come and understood that which was obscure to others. This applies to almost every Old Testament prophet as well. Elder John A. Widtsoe taught: “In the sense that a prophet is a man who receives revelations from the Lord, the titles ‘seer and revelator’ merely amplify the larger and inclusive meaning of the title prophet.”

Servant of Jehovah (ebed). Some felt that this title was one of the most important general titles applied to the Hebrew prophet. This title directly links the prophet as a slave, property, or an indentured servant of Jehovah and was attributed to many of the Old Testament prophets. It would be odd for a servant to accept adulation, praise, or glory that rightfully belonged to his or her master. Likewise, the prophets directed the glory and praise to their master, Jehovah. If an indentured servant performed a service contrary to the will of the master, then the servant would be discharged. Likewise, the Old Testament prophets served Jehovah in thought, word, and deed. If there was a deviation, the servant would be dismissed. Moses painfully learned this concept at the rock of Horeb where he failed to follow the instructions of Jehovah (Moses struck the rock rather than speaking to it) and then seemed to present himself as the deliverer when he said: “Must we [Moses and Aaron] fetch you water out of this rock?” Jehovah chastised Moses for deviating from the title ebed (servant) and the role of spokesman by saying, “Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel” (Numbers 20:12).
Roles of the Old Testament Prophets

It is important to note that the titles attributed to the Old Testament prophet are wholly consistent with the definition of the nabi’ (spokesman). This is also the case when considering the roles of the Old Testament prophet-leader. Significant roles attributed to the nabi’ throughout the Old Testament include intercessor, watchman, and political protector.

Intercessor. Lindbloom wrote: “In ancient Israelite society, intercession with Yahweh (Jehovah) was regarded as a function belonging to men who occupied a special position in relation to God.” While patriarchs and kings were considered intercessors, the prophets were considered “intercessors par excellence.” The intercessor served a dual role by representing Jehovah to the people by speaking Jehovah’s words and commands, while at the same time serving as the people’s representative to Jehovah.

Numerous examples of intercession are in the Old Testament. Abraham sought to intercede in behalf of the doomed inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah as Jehovah declared His intention to destroy the two wicked cities. Moses spent a lifetime in the role of intercessor or mediator. For example, Moses was sent to Mount Sinai by the children of Israel to hear the word of the Lord (Deuteronomy 5:24). After the Lord spoke to him, Moses said: “I stood between the Lord and you at the time to convey the Lord’s word to you, for you were afraid of the fire and did not go up to the mountain” (Deuteronomy 5:5; Exodus 19:9). Not only did Moses carry Jehovah’s word to the people, but he also brought the pleas of an iniquitous people to Jehovah. To this, Jehovah responded by saying, “I have pardoned according to thy [Moses’s] word” (Numbers 14:20). Samuel, the only other Old Testament nabi’, who was also called an intercessor, pleaded for the people as he mediated their political desires (1 Samuel 12:19, 23). The intercessory prophets (especially Moses and Samuel), were praised in song (Psalm 99:6), nostalgically remembered by other prophets (Jeremiah 15:1), and considered to be the “exemplars of great intercessors”.

Watchman. In truth, the watchman could be considered a prophetic title just as easily as a role. It was Isaiah who was specifically referred to as a “watchman” (Isaiah 21:6, 11). Similar terms, such as “scout” and “lookout” also appear in the Old Testament. The role of the watchman was to watch over the people and protect them from immediate harm and loss of identity and theology. In this way, the Old Testament prophet was not only the defender of the people, but the
defender of the faith as well. It is important to note that the prophet not only would see and warn of impending danger from outside the wall, but because of his unique positioning, he would also see and warn of dangers within the walls. Chamberlain described a prophet as one who “fought with tongue and pen, and even life itself, to save the nation from the attacks of its outward foes, and from the social and religious dissension which disturbed it within.”

Although the watchman is textually linked to Isaiah, this role was established long before Isaiah’s birth. While the name itself does not appear in the earlier texts, this prophetic role appears throughout Israel’s history. For example, Noah warned of the impending flood; Joseph forecast the famine; Moses prepared his people for the impending plagues; and Samuel warned the Israelites of the dangers of adopting the ways of their contemporaries when the Israelites desired a king to make them “like all the nations” (1 Samuel 8:20).

**Political protector.** Similar to the watchman, part of the role of the prophets was directly related to the political venue of their time. The prophets were not political revolutionaries, as their aim was to purge the institutions of the kingdom of vice and not to overthrow them. Since the prophet was Jehovah’s spokesman, he represented the Heavenly King before an earthly king. Even though David was anointed by the previous prophet, Samuel, Nathan felt responsible to rebuke David for his conduct with Bathsheba and Uriah. Likewise, Ahijah announced Jeroboam’s selection and his rejection as Israel’s king. Other prophets involved with political intercession and protection can include Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:1), Hanani (2 Chronicles 16:7), Jehu (2 Chronicles 19:2–3), and Elisha (2 Kings 3:16; 9; 13:14).

**Conclusion**

With a comprehensive understanding of Old Testament prophets, it becomes evident that they were much more than modern concepts of prophets. Prophets were Jehovah’s spokesmen and as such were obligated to speak His words regardless of what that might include. If a prophet ever deviated from God’s direction and words, then he was considered a false prophet. In addition to their defined role as spokesmen, they were selected by Jehovah Himself without regard to training, profession, or rank of society, to be His mouthpiece on earth. As such, the Hebrew prophet became the people’s spiritual guide and life-leader. The Old Testament leader was a watchman, intercessor, and visionary. In reality, his comprehensive role was a role of complete servitude that positioned the Old Testament prophet as Jehovah’s proxy
on earth. Most importantly, the prophet-leader of the Old Testament was a literal reminder by definition, title, and role that it was Jehovah who was their only king, ultimate leader, and only God. If the prophet did not reflect Jehovah, he was a false prophet.

The importance of accurately understanding the Old Testament prophet is essential for those of the restored gospel today. In 1842, Joseph Smith wrote that the Latter-day Saints believed “in the same organization that existed in the primitive church” and then specifically named prophets as part of that organization. When Joseph Smith was establishing the Church in 1830, the Savior commanded the Saints to “give heed unto all his [Joseph’s] words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:4–5). In 1835, when establishing the organization of the hierarchy of the Church, Joseph was instructed that the leader of the Church “is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses—behold, here is wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church” (D&C 107:91–92). It appears that when it comes to understanding the prophet-leader, there are still meaningful connections between the prophet of the Old Testament and the prophet of the Saints in the latter days. With an increased understanding of the prophet-leader, it is easy to understand why Elder M. Russell Ballard would exclaim, “It is no small thing, my brothers and sisters, to have a prophet of God in our midst.”

Notes

4. While there are many texts that cover some etymological studies of prophetic terms, a lengthy section of etymological roots and comparisons of nabi’, naba’, nataph, and bozeh is compiled in Matthew O. Richardson, “The World Perspective and its Impact on Leadership Conceptions: An Examination of Leadership in a Theocentric World Perspective” (EdD diss., Brigham Young University, 1996). This dissertation also contains a bibliography listing related texts.

6. The Ostracon III (Lachish Letters) points out that the *nabi*’ was not only a messenger but also a spokesman sent in behalf of the sender. The prophets in these letters dealt mostly with cultic and political matters. For further discussion on this comparison, see D. W. Thomas, *Documents from the Old Testament Times* (London: Thomas Nelson and Son, 1958), 215; B. D. Napier, s.v. “Prophet,” G. A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962).


12. Seilhamer emphasized this point as he wrote: “If there is one characteristic that was common to all biblical prophets, it was their absolute assurance that God had called them personally into his service” (F. H. Seilhamer, *Prophets and Prophecy: Seven Key Messengers* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977], 2).


17. The books of Amos and Micah also begin with the messenger formula.


21. Other *Men of God* in the Old Testament included Samuel (1 Samuel 9:6), Elijah (1 Kings 13:4–24), Elisha (2 Kings 4:7), Shemaiah (1 Kings 12:22), the unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 13, the anonymous prophet who warned Amaziah (2 Chronicles 25:7–9), and David (2 Chronicles 8:14). Crenshaw felt that the unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 13 was actually Amos (James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic*
Conflict and Its Effects upon the Israelite Religion [Walter de Gruyter, 1971].

22. Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet, 124.


24. While Zadok is mentioned here for consideration, it should also be pointed out that Zadok’s position as ro’eh is often considered dubious and is often disputed (see 1 Samuel 15:26).


28. Ahijah (1 Kings 14:18), Abraham (Genesis 26:24), Moses (Numbers 12:7–8), Jonah (2 Kings 14:25), Elijah (1 Kings 18:36), and Isaiah (Isaiah 20:3) were all known as both a nabi’ (spokesman) and an ebed (servant of Jehovah). Others attributed as ebed included Jacob (Isaiah 44:1, 2, 21), Caleb (Numbers 14:24), Job (Job 1:8), David (2 Samuel 7:5, 8), and Eliakim (Isaiah 22:20).


30. Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel, 204.


Robert T. Barrett, Moses Parting the Red Sea

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Cecil B. DeMille’s epic film *The Ten Commandments* was a smashing success due in part to the leading actors. Certainly, Charlton Heston’s portrayal of Moses was unforgettable. And who can forget Yul Brenner’s swagger as the egotistical Ramses II? The real ingredient to the film’s popularity, however, was not the charismatic Heston or Brenner but rather the sensational storyline itself, taken primarily from the book of Exodus. One would be hard-pressed to find a scriptural narrative more exciting, dramatic, or—shall we say—made for Hollywood.

The Exodus story is a scriptwriter’s dream: a one-time national-hero-turned-fugitive is called by God to return to his homeland and demand the release of masses of people held in bondage. Add to that a ruling despot who refuses to grant the slaves their freedom and is humbled (together with his people) by numerous plagues sent from God. Rivers and standing pools of water turn to blood, frogs infest the land, dust miraculously changes to lice, flies swarm, cattle die, men and beasts suffer from boils, hail and fire rain from heaven, locusts devour vegetation, and after three days of thick darkness all Egyptian firstborn men and beasts are slain. Add to that list the miraculous parting of the Red Sea to provide safe passage for the newly released captives and ultimate deliverance from the despot’s pursuing army. Certainly, this dramatization of God’s miraculous power and awesome might leaves few readers wondering if anything is too hard for the Lord.
The story is high adventure. More important, it is a true narrative. We need look no further than the Book of Mormon for corroborating evidence as to its factuality (see 1 Nephi 17). The ancients used the events of the Exodus, together with the miracles that occurred during the forty years of wilderness wanderings and the conquest of Canaan, to instill in their people a sense of trust and confidence in God’s invincible power. For example, when Nephi began to build a ship in the land Bountiful, he countered Laman and Lemuel’s jeering skepticism with a brief but pointed history lesson—but not just any history lesson. Nephi’s powerful tutorial was the account of the Exodus and the Israelite conquest of the land of Canaan (see 1 Nephi 17). His intent? To teach his wayward brothers. He asked that if God had “wrought so many miracles among the children of men [during the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan], how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?” (1 Nephi 17:51). Nephi’s historical vignette confounded his brothers as well it should have. The Exodus storyline provides convincing evidence of God’s omniscience, which is beyond the scope of human comprehension.

Besides Nephi’s account of the Exodus, the Psalmist and Habakkuk also pay homage to the Exodus motif, the idea that God will lead His people from bondage into a promised land. Much of Psalm 105 and all of Psalm 106 praise God for His miracles and demonstrations of His power during the Israelite’s exodus from Egypt, their forty-year wilderness wanderings, and the conquest of Canaan. Consider: “He [God] sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. They showed his signs among them, and wonders in the land. . . . He sent darkness. . . . He turned their waters into blood. . . . Their land brought forth frogs. . . . He spake, and there came divers sorts of flies. . . . He smote also all the firstborn. . . . He spread a cloud for a covering. . . . He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out. . . . And he brought forth his people with joy” (Psalm 105:26–43).

Habakkuk praised God’s majesty through allusions to the miracles found in the Exodus and conquest narratives. He declared, “The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high” (Habakkuk 3:10). This poetic imagery likely refers to the parting of the Red Sea (see Exodus 14). Habakkuk’s statement “the sun and moon stood still in their habitation” (Habakkuk 3:11) certainly refers to the miracle during Joshua’s battle against the five Canaanite kings (see Joshua 10:8–14). Lastly, Habakkuk’s words “Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in
anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people” recalls the Lord’s power over the Canaanites as he led Joshua and the Israelites in the conquest of the promised land (Habakkuk 2:12–13).

Nephi, the Psalmist, and Habakkuk all attributed the Exodus miracles not to Moses or Joshua but to God. They emphasized God’s central role in these monumental events with the intent to strengthen faith in God’s ability to act in the affairs of mankind and, more important, God’s power in their own affairs.

The Paradigm Shift

The use of the Exodus motif served as an impressive and profound way to illustrate God’s power throughout Old Testament times. But according to Jeremiah, that motif would eventually be replaced by another paradigm. Note Jeremiah’s words: “Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers” (Jeremiah 16:14–15).

According to Jeremiah, the day will come when the Exodus story will be eclipsed by another event, or series of events: the latter-day gathering of Israel. Stories from the modern gathering will replace the Exodus story as the benchmark demonstration of God’s power and His control over the destiny of nations and individuals. Modern apostles and prophets will rehearse stories in general conference regarding their own missionary experiences, the experiences of other missionaries and converts, and the dedication of distant foreign lands for the preaching of the gospel.

Some may wonder how the modern gathering of Israel could replace the Exodus story as the optimum example of God’s majestic power. Certainly, the latter-day gathering will include miracles as in ancient times. And it will transcend the Exodus story in other ways—extremely important ways.

The New Paradigm

The latter-day gathering will surpass the events of the Exodus in terms of its sheer magnitude, the outpouring of spiritual and temporal blessings, and the use of the Book of Mormon as the instrument of gathering.
A worldwide gathering. Moses gathered ancient Israel from a relatively small geographical area. In contrast, Old Testament prophecies regarding the latter days speak of a worldwide gathering—a gathering that reaches the uttermost parts of the earth. Jeremiah referred to this when he said the Lord would send fishers and hunters to search for modern Israel from every mountain, hill, and hole of the rocks (see Jeremiah 16:16).

Other Old Testament prophets echoed similar thoughts. Isaiah declared, “And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:12). Here, the four quarters is a Hebrew literary device meant to symbolize north, east, west, and south, or, in other words, universality.

Ezekiel echoed a similar thought when he announced, “I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered. . . . I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side” (Ezekiel 11:17; 37:21). Lastly, Micah wrote, “I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will gather the remnant of Israel; . . . they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men” (Micah 2:12).

Moses gathered ancient Israel from the land of Egypt—not an easy task, to say the least. The modern-day gathering of Israel, however, will reach far beyond the confines of a single country to include all nations of the earth, from major cities to tiny villages so small and remote they cannot be found on a map. The enormity of this work will require miracle after miracle, which may never be reported or talked about except in the journal pages of faithful missionaries and converts across the world.

An outpouring of spiritual and temporal blessings. No doubt about it, Moses understood his people. Unfortunately, most of what he understood was their propensity for negative, narcissistic, and self-destructive behaviors. He understood their spiritual waffling, their propensity to adopt worldly behavior, and their unwillingness to remain firm and steadfast in God’s love. He also knew their spiritual shortsightedness and disobedience would ultimately lead to their forced expulsion from the promised land and their scattering among the nations of the world.

Unlike the impermanence of the ancient gathering of Israel to the promised land, the latter-day gathering will be characterized by greater stability, faith, and commitment to God’s work. Certainly, this modern gathering to the Church will not be without its challenges, but the
Lord has made clear this gathering will endure. Daniel’s interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is evidence of that. In that dream, the king saw a great image made from gold, silver, brass, iron, and clay. The image was free-standing and firmly in place until a stone, miraculously fashioned without human hands, smashed the image into pieces. Ultimately, the stone became a “great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). By way of interpretation, Daniel proclaimed, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44).

The kingdom, of course, is God’s kingdom. Better stated, it is the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is a kingdom to which seekers of truth will gather and unite in fellowship through gospel ordinances such as baptism. It is a stable and enduring kingdom, not short-lived as it was in Old Testament times. No wonder Jeremiah was in awe of this modern-day gathering.

Amos referred to the permanence and success of the latter-day gathering in this way:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall not more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God. (Amos 9:13–15)

Ancient Israel inhabited the promised land, planted gardens and vineyards, and, in time, provoked God’s judgments through their disobedience. Israel lost the protective blessings of God and was ravaged by predator nations, such as Assyria and Babylon. In stark contrast, God has promised those who faithfully gather to the Church in the last days that they will not “be pulled up out of their land” (Amos 9:15).

Other Old Testament prophets made similar prophecies, such as Obadiah, who wrote of a latter-day Jacob who would “possess their possessions” (Obadiah 1:17), and Ezekiel, who proclaimed: “And I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: and I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring
fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates and will do better unto you than at your beginnings; and ye shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 36:10–11).

God’s blessings will flow freely to gathered Israel, blessings to surpass those that ancient Israel received. This is another reason for Jeremiah to applaud the latter-day gathering in contrast to the gathering in Moses’s day.

There is another key difference: building faith among latter-day Israel will not depend upon constant visual signs as it did in ancient times. God consistently reminded Moses’s people of His divine presence and redeeming love through miracles and visual signs. The cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night are evidence of this (see Exodus 13). Manna, the rock at Horeb, the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, and the brass serpent (to mention only a few) further show a people in need of visual objects to bolster their faith. In contrast, Jeremiah made clear that in the last days “they shall say no more, the ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more” (Jeremiah 3:16). The ark of the covenant was a representation of God’s presence and power. Modern Israel, however, will not need the physical presence of the ark to remind them of God. Instead, faithful latter-day Israelites will find evidence for God written upon their hearts (see Ezekiel 11:19). God will also be to them as a “little sanctuary in the countries where they [Israel] should come” (Ezekiel 11:16). In other words, modern Israel will remember God through their ordinances, their covenants, and the voice of God’s Spirit.

The instrument of the gathering: the Book of Mormon. What does whistling have to do with the modern gathering of Israel? Quite a bit, actually. At least, Isaiah thought so. He foresaw the time when the Lord would “hiss,” or whistle, as a device to gather Israel to the Church (see Isaiah 5:26b). More specifically, the Lord proclaimed it would be the writings of the Nephites, the Book of Mormon, that would do the whistling: “And also, that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed; and that the words of your seed should proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed; and my words shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard [ensign] unto my people, which are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:2).

Isaiah called the Book of Mormon part of the “marvellous work” that would surround the Restoration of the gospel and latter-day missionary work (see Isaiah 29:11–14). Ezekiel also saw the Book
of Mormon as the instrument of the modern gathering of Israel. He declared that when the record of Joseph or Ephraim (the Book of Mormon) would finally be joined with the record of Judah (the Bible), the gathering process would begin: “I will take the stick of Joseph . . . and . . . the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side . . . and I will make them one nation in the land . . . and one king shall be king to them all . . . and [I] will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 37:19–23).

In short, the Bible is not the instrument to gather modern Israel. That daunting task is left to the words of those who slumber: the Book of Mormon. President Ezra Taft Benson stated: “Now, what is the instrument that God has designed for this gathering? It is the same instrument that is designed to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith is His prophet, and that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true. It is that scripture which is the keystone of our religion. . . . It is the Book of Mormon.”

The Book of Mormon is one of the great miracles of this dispensation—and of all time, for that matter. Not only is it the keystone of our religion, but it is the tool used by countless missionaries throughout this dispensation to gather modern Israel to the Church. The power of the book is enduring. Its messages are indelibly burned into the souls of those who faithfully read and pray about its contents. And, unlike the ancient Israelites, who murmured against Moses within days of witnessing the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, modern Israel has the Book of Mormon to continually foster testimony and faith. Jeremiah was surely aware of that when he made his statements contrasting the ancient and modern gatherings of Israel.

**Conclusion**

The Exodus narrative served a useful purpose for Old Testament writers. They reveled in the stories and praised God for His miracles. But, as Jeremiah pointed out, a new event and a new set of miracles would overshadow the Exodus story: the modern gathering of Israel. This new storyline is deserving of the praise Jeremiah lavished upon it. It is also worthy of our attention and our praise, for in it we see God’s hand working among the inhabitants of the earth as majestically as He ever did among the Israelites in Moses’s and Joshua’s day. Indeed,
according to Joseph Smith, “[The] subject of the gathering . . . is a principle I esteem to be of the greatest importance to those who are looking for salvation in this generation, or in these, that may be called, ‘the latter times.’ All that the prophets that have written, from the days of righteous Abel, down to the last man that has left any testimony on record for our consideration, in speaking of the salvation of Israel in the last days, goes directly to show that it consists in the work of the gathering.”

Notes

“He Healed Them All”: Understanding Mental Illness in the Classroom

Barbara Morgan and Alvin W. Morgan Jr.

Barbara Morgan (MorganBE@ldschurch.org) is a CES researcher and evaluator and a part-time instructor of Church history and doctrine at BYU. Alvin W. Morgan Jr. (AlMorgan@mstar2.net) is a retired social worker for LDS Family Services.

“For years my family has struggled with a father who is unable to keep a job,” Ashley explained with an insecure yet determined voice. “He stays in bed all morning, sometimes all day. He is often short-tempered, likes to be alone, and doesn’t seem to enjoy life. I know he loves me, but I don’t seem to feel it from him very much. He seems to be struggling with so many of his own problems that he doesn’t have time for mine or me. We really don’t talk much anymore. It’s been really hard on my family, especially my mom. I’ve wondered for years what he must have done to cause him to be this way. I’ve always thought that it must have been something pretty serious. Are you guys saying that he could be this way because of genetics or a chemical imbalance and not because of something he’s done?”

As Ashley continued with her questioning, other students joined in. Some had more questions to ask, others more experiences to share. I was surprised how many of them shared experiences of family, friends, and even themselves that were similar to those of Ashley and her father. At one point, when asked how many of them either suffered from or had a close friend or family member that suffered from depression, not one hand stayed down. Feelings in the classroom became strong, and tears began to flow freely. As is often the case with these wonderful and inquisitive youth, we turned to the scriptures to find the answers.

The class struggled to answer Ashley’s plea and other questions through the use of basic principles and doctrines found in the Book
of Mormon. For example, to his son Coriantumr, Alma states, “Wick-
edness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). In his closing testimony, Moroni states, “Despair cometh because of iniquity” (Moroni 10:22). Nephi, in regard to obedience to God’s laws in 2 Nephi 5:27, states, “And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness.” King Benjamin, after discussing the guilt, pain, anguish, and unquenchable fire that come as a result of sin, states, “I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the com-
mandments of God” (Mosiah 2:41).

Not finding the immediate answers and solace hoped for, the class asked deeper questions: It is true that wickedness never was happiness, but does that mean that unhappiness is always caused by wickedness? Is despair always caused by iniquity, or is it possible that despair comes from other sources as well? Is it possible that even those who are obedi-
cent do not always “live after the manner of happiness”? Is it possible that there are some who keep the commandments of God who do not live in this life in a blessed and happy state, but rather live with constant feelings of guilt, pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire?

As the class discussion continued, our eyes were opened. Ashley stated near the end of class, this time with perhaps more humility and love, but still a hint of insecurity, “Maybe my dad needs me more than I need him. Maybe I should share this stuff with him.” The students left that day with greater unity and understanding of the gospel and of each other.

Months later, while I was putting the hymnbooks back after class and getting things back in order, a gentleman came into my classroom and introduced himself to me as Ashley’s father. Without any further introduction or small talk and with tears streaming down his face, he said, “Thank you.” He explained that for years he had suffered from this dark depression and loneliness. He didn’t know what was causing it, but it was destroying his life, his marriage, and his family. He had been blaming himself, trying himself to figure out what had caused this darkness, blaming himself for unworthiness and being trapped in despair. He didn’t go into much detail as to the steps he was now taking but said, “I’ve received help. Ashley and I now have a good relationship. For the first time in years we have been able to talk. She has really helped me. Thanks for helping us both to understand.” Of course the real understanding came through the Spirit to Ashley, to her father, to me, and to all others in the class who were taught that day.

That was not the first time, nor was it the last time that we have had discussions of that sort with individuals and various groups on
the topic of mental illness. As mental illnesses continue to grow and become more pervasive throughout the world, the need to understand the truth is vital. My father has served as a stake president and patriarch, a social worker for LDS Family Services for over twenty-five years, and the father of thirteen children, many of whom suffer in varying degrees from depression. I have served as a Relief Society president, a Church Educational System instructor for seven years, and a BYU Religious Education adjunct faculty member for two years. In both our Church service and professional life, we are keenly aware of the great need for increased understanding in the education, especially religious education, of people affected by mental illness.

In our service as religious educators, a greater knowledge and understanding of mental illness will help us better love, accept, empathize with, and bring into the fold those who suffer and are in pain due to this highly misunderstood disease. We hope that by exploring the doctrines in the scriptures and the writings of prophets and apostles as well as knowledgeable mental health professionals, we can help give care and encouragement to those personally afflicted with mental illness and those who suffer because of the suffering of one they love.

**The Need to Understand**

Elder Alexander B. Morrison, an emeritus member of the Seventy, offered this heartfelt plea: “With knowledge and understanding come love, acceptance, empathy, and enfoldment. May God bless us to love all His children, to abandon none, and to lift up and strengthen those suffering and in pain.” Much pain has been caused by the misunderstandings we and others have had in regard to depression. I remember clearly one of my sisters sharing with me a paper she had received from one of her teachers describing the feelings of one who has the Spirit and one who does not. She expressed how she had been reading her scriptures, saying her prayers, trying to be obedient, exercising, going to Church, and serving others, yet she was alone, sad, had no hope, and felt complete despair. According to the paper she had received and the discussion in class, she had unrepentant sin; otherwise she would not be feeling that way.

Not understanding depression and recognizing this teacher to be well educated and knowledgeable on gospel subjects, I too was confused and tried to help her understand. We studied the scriptures together and concluded that the teacher was right: she must have done something wrong. It wasn’t until years later when I was able to recognize symptoms of depression, and became familiar with many
other righteous people with similar feelings to what she had described, that I was able to help her and become more sensitive to the needs of others suffering with a similar disease.

**Normal Disappointments or Depression?**

“It was meant to be that life would be a challenge,” wrote President Boyd K. Packer. “To suffer some anxiety, some depression, some disappointment, even some failure is normal. Teach our members that if they have a good, miserable day once in a while, or several in a row, to stand steady and face them. Things will straighten out. There is great purpose in our struggle in life.”

It is normal to suffer some anxiety, some depression, some disappointment. What if, however, a person suffers a miserable day more than once in a while, or has more than several miserable days in a row? What if a person feels this way for weeks, months, years, or perhaps even a lifetime?

Elder Morrison defines mental illness this way:

> By mental illness I do not mean the temporary, transient social and emotional concerns experienced as part of the normal wear and tear of living. Included in that category would be the temporary depression associated with the death of a friend of the anxiety felt when starting a new job. Nor do I include in the category of mental illness secondary effects of serious physical disorders, such as brain cancer or meningitis. By mental illness I mean a brain disorder that causes mild to severe disturbances in thinking, feeling, perception, and behavior. If such disturbances are sufficiently severe, and of sufficient duration, they may significantly impair a person’s ability to cope with life’s ordinary demands and routines. They may even threaten life itself—as in severe depression—or be so debilitating that the sufferer is unable to function effectively as an individual or productive member of society.

My father and I asked three individuals who have experienced both cancer and chemical depression which disease they would rather find a cure for. Without hesitation, they replied “depression.” One individual even looked somewhat bewildered in response to the question and stated simply, “It’s obvious that you have never suffered from chemical depression. If you had you would never have need to ask the question. At times I wish the cancer would end my life so I would no longer have to suffer the depression.”

Although there are many who may believe that too much emphasis is placed on the biological-medical model of mental illness, it is our belief that understanding this biological-medical model of mental ill-
ness is vital to assist those who struggle in this area. Recognizing some of the symptoms of depression may increase understanding and thus help individuals. Common symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Sleeping too much or too little; waking in the middle of the night or very early in the morning
- Reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of pleasure and interest in activities once enjoyed
- Restlessness or irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness, or worthlessness
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Lack of concentration

Common Misunderstandings

A difficult reality is that people simply do not understand mental illness, its causes, or its treatments. Following are some common myths associated with mental illness.

Misunderstanding 1: Mental illness is caused by sin. One of the most harmful and destructive myths about mental illness is that it is caused by sin. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “Many of the righteous shall fall a prey to disease, to pestilence, etc., by reason of the weakness of the flesh, and yet be saved in the Kingdom of God. So that it is an unhallowed principle to say that such and such have transgressed because they have been preyed upon by disease of death, for all flesh is subject to death; and the Savior has said, ‘Judge not, lest ye be judged’ (Matthew 7:1).”

Elder Morrison helps those with mental illness apply even more personally this doctrine taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith. He writes: “Recognizing that all mortals sin, in the sense that all fall short of perfection, the vast majority of the mentally ill are not sick because they are gross sinners. Furthermore, they are not sick because God is punishing them but because they have a disorder of body function, resulting from the natural causes and treatable using the knowledge God has given to skilled health care providers. If we do not believe that people get osteoarthritis or tuberculosis because they are sinners, why would we accept that they get obsessive-compulsive disorder or
schizophrenia (and we would add depression) because they are sinners? Such thinking just doesn’t make sense.”

While I was visiting a loved one in the University of Utah Mental Hospital, one of the psychiatrists there, careful not to mention any names but sensitive to modern misconceptions and perhaps desiring to relieve the social stigma of depression, said, “You would be surprised how many General Authorities and their families I have treated here.”

One General Authority, Harold B. Lee, who later became a prophet, suffered miserably from depression, apparently triggered by the death of his daughter Maurine and later by the passing of his wife. The grief that takes place after the death of a loved one is normal, but the grieving experienced by President Lee was not.

On one occasion, Elder Walter Stover, a traveling companion of Elder Lee’s in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland for four weeks, expressed the following, “We held many conferences. At that time he was in deep sorrow for the loss of his beloved eternal companion, and I have seen him weep on many occasions, and it was very difficult for me to cheer him up. We held many meetings with our missionaries and members in the armed forces in different cities in Germany. On many occasions, I was his translator. In Berlin, he was so depressed he had to go to his hotel room and turn the conference over to me.” A few days later President Lee wrote, “Our heartbreaking experience in losing our darling Maurine seems to bear promise of binding our families together as we all seek to share in the heavy burdens of sorrow in our loss. Somehow I seem unable to shake off this latest shattering blow. Only God can help me!”

Misunderstanding 2: Faith, righteous living, and priesthood blessings will always heal mental illness. Although President Lee was a righteous man, it was not in the Lord’s design at the time to alleviate his suffering. It is a common misconception as well that if we have enough faith, read the scriptures, say our prayers, attend church, and receive priesthood blessings we will be healed. There is no question the Lord does want His people to be healed, but it does not always happen immediately or even in this life.

In response to a question by a Church member as to why she was suffering from serious emotional problems even though she was active, an Ensign author wrote: “Spiritual growth and knowledge does not come to us automatically by virtue of membership in the Lord’s church. Furthermore, depression and other emotional problems can be caused by physical and psychological disorders unrelated to our membership in the Church and which can often be improved or resolved by medical
treatment of professional counseling. . . . It is not enough to join the Church and be ‘active’ in it. Baptism alone does not change lives or cure physical problems.”

All the prophets and apostles, with the exception of those who were translated, were subject to mortal infirmities and death. Are we to believe that their death was a result of lack of faith? Was Elder Maxwell’s death from cancer due to lack of faith, scripture study, Church attendance, prayer, or any other lack of righteous act on his part? Of course not. Both depression and cancer are physical ailments. Do miracles happen? Do people with cancer get healed? Yes! Do people with depression get healed? Yes! We must understand, however, that miracles are dependent on our willingness to ask in conjunction with God’s desire to grant. Elder Dallin H. Oaks declared:

Although the Savior could heal all whom He would heal, this is not true of those who hold His priesthood authority. Mortal exercises of that authority are limited by the will of Him whose priesthood it is. Consequently, we are told that some whom the elders bless are not healed because they are “appointed unto death” (D&C 42:48). Similarly, when the Apostle Paul sought to be healed from the “thorn in the flesh” that buffeted him (2 Corinthians 12:7), the Lord declined to heal him. Paul later wrote that the Lord explained, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9). Paul obediently responded that he would “rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me, . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong” (vv. 9–10).

Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best.

Misunderstanding 3: Mental illness is untreatable. Just as a person with cancer seeks medical advice while fasting and praying for divine assistance, so should a person suffering with mental illness seek medical attention while exercising faith in the Lord. Mental illnesses, just like other illnesses, vary in type and seriousness, some easily resolved through medical advice and medication and others not. Rather than diagnosing oneself or a loved one, medical assistance should be sought after. A June 1984 Ensign article titled “When Life Is Getting You Down” counseled: “This kind of depression does not respond to will-power, positive thinking, or stress management techniques [alone]. The causes of biological depression involve altercations in the brain neurotransmitter [messenger] chemicals. Changes in these brain chemicals can actually alter one’s mood, thinking, and behavior.” It is true that these techniques alone do not solve the problems of depression,
but they may help, especially when combined with medications. Elder Joe J. Christensen stated:

One sensitive area I wish to deal with is the use of medication for resolving emotional problems. I am not a medical doctor, and, for the most part, neither is your bishop or other church leader. Prescribed medication can only be given by a trained and licensed professional. Whether or not you use medication is a decision that you and a trained physician make. Use a similar procedure in taking medication for a mental illness as you would in deciding about taking medications to deal with any other medical problem. The Lord has blessed us with science and technology that can make our lives so much easier. A variety of medication are now available that assist in dealing with serious and life threatening problems, including emotional ones. To those suffering from a mental illness or disorder, medication can be a tremendous help. We would no more expect a diabetic to live without insulin than we would expect a person suffering from a serious mental illness such as manic depression or schizophrenia to live without appropriate medication. We understand the treatment of many mental illnesses require the use of medication. If you, your surrounding loved ones, and a mental health professional decide medication is necessary, then take the medication.¹⁰

**Misunderstanding 4: People with mental illnesses need to “buck up and snap out of it.”** Many people believe that those with mental illness need to merely snap out of it, get over it, buck up, and move on. Those with this belief show a detrimental lack of knowledge, understanding, and compassion. Elder Morrison states:

Anyone who has ever witnessed the well-nigh unbearable pain of a severe panic attack knows full well that nobody would suffer that way if all that was needed was to show a little willpower. No one who has witnessed the almost indescribable sadness of a severely depressed person who perhaps can’t even get out of bed, who cries all day or retreats into hopeless apathy, or who tries to kill himself would ever think for a moment that mental illness is just a problem of willpower. We don’t say to persons with heart disease or cancer, “Just grow up and get over it.” Neither should we treat the mentally ill in such an uncompasionate and unhelpful way.¹¹

Alleviating these common misconceptions and teachings in our classrooms may reduce the number of “daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds” (Jacob 2:9).
Our Role

As religious educators, we can strive to follow the example of Jesus Christ in offering love, acceptance, and empathy to all our Heavenly Father’s children. Much as Christ took upon Himself our infirmities, “that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12), we should be “willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9). And there are some basic things we can do to help our students who suffer from mental illness.

1. Study and seek to understand mental illness. Increasing our knowledge and understanding of mental illness will increase our ability to “mourn with those that mourn” and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort.” The social stigma associated with mental illnesses has been a great detriment to those suffering from mental illness and its effects. Just as any false doctrine taught to students can have devastating effects, the misconceptions about mental illnesses can be so devastating that learning the truth from a wise teacher can open a path of hope and understanding for a student in need. In seeking spiritual knowledge, Elder Richard G. Scott invites us to “search for principles. Carefully separate them from the detail used to explain them. Principles are concentrated truth, packaged for application to a wide variety of circumstances. A true principle makes decisions clear even under the most confusing and compelling circumstances. It is worth great effort to organize the truth we gather to simple statements of principle.”

In our search for principles, we must be careful in separating them from the detail used to explain them. Misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or ignorance on our part of the words of the prophets or of the scriptures, if not carefully studied, can be of great confusion and heartache to our students. As we gain a better understanding of the truths of depression, we will be able to sympathize and perhaps even empathize with those suffering from its devastating effects. Our very attitudes can change as the truths of all things are known by us.

2. Understand the rule first, and then see to the exception. President Packer shared the following experience:

I once learned a valuable lesson from a mission Relief Society president. In a conference, she announced some tightening up of procedures. A sister stood up and defiantly said, “Those rules can’t apply to us! You don’t understand us! We are an exception.”
That wonderful Relief Society president replied, “Dear sister, we’d
like not to take care of the exception first. We will establish the rule
first, and then we’ll see to the exception.” Many times I have borrowed
from her wisdom, grateful for what she taught me.

When teaching about joy and happiness as found in the scriptures
and the joy that comes from obedience, chemical depression is the
exception to this rule. Most students do feel happy as a direct result
of obedience; most students do feel peace, love, and joy as examples
of “the fruit of the Spirit” as stated in Galatians 5:22, but a few do
not, and they are the exception. It is significant that the Relief Society
president not only established the rule but also saw to the exception.
There are exceptions to the rule!

Imagine the heartache of a young student in one of our classes
intently studying a handout prepared by a loved and respected teacher
on “the fruit of the Spirit.” Students studying Galatians 5:12 may write
on one side of the paper how they feel when the Spirit is present and on
the other how they feel when He is not present. The student who feels
depressed, sad, alone, dark, and hopeless now may also feel sinful, guilty,
and confused. With a quick aside, the teacher may state simply that this
does not apply to someone suffering from chemical depression. Thus the
pain is eased, the guilt soothed, and the doctrine understood.

By stating this brief exception, we have seen on many occasions
a look of understanding, relief, gratitude, and even joy on the faces
of students who face their own struggles or the suffering of a family
member inflicted with mental illness. Often a short discussion ensues
with questions asked and answers discovered. On more than one occa-
sion family members suffering from depression have later entered the
classroom to thank us for helping their child or sibling understand.
With so many people suffering from serious mental illnesses in these
latter days, it would be rare to have students who are not affected by
the effects of mental illness.

As teachers we must see to the rule first, but we must also at times
help our students understand the exception.

3. Treat students on an individual level. Coach John Wooden, the
former coach of the ten-time national-title-winning UCLA basketball
team, in regards to making a winning team, stated, “It was very impor-
tant that I learn about each player and then study that player so I would
know if he needed a little more time on this or that particular drill. I
needed to know which drill had greater application to this player or that
player, because individuals vary. So I devised drills for both individuals
and the group and studied and analyzed them. Some drills would be
good for all and some drills would be good for just certain players.”

How much more important is it for a teacher of the souls of man to
know the individuals in his classroom. The need to know the individu-
als in the classroom is not merely a good idea, but according to modern
prophets, it is crucial. President Howard W. Hunter, in his address to
religious educators, admonished:

In your search for individually teaching each student, you will
most certainly discover that some are not doing as well as others and
that some are not making it to class at all. Take personal interest in
such students; give extra-mile effort to invite and help the lost sheep
back into the fold. “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight
of God” (D&C 18:10). An incalculable price has been paid by our
Savior for every one of us, and it is incumbent on us to do all we can
to assist him in his work. It is incumbent on us to make sure that the
gift of the Atonement is extended to every young man or woman we
have responsibility for. . . . Give special attention to those who may be
struggling, and go out as necessary to find the lost sheep. A written
postcard, a telephone call, or, if possible, a personal visit to a home in
many cases will have a wonderful result.

The importance of understanding the individuals in our classrooms
cannot be underestimated. Understanding those who are not in our
classrooms may also reap great rewards. As many understand, often-
times those who are not in attendance are those who need the hope of
the Atonement most. Are there students suffering greatly from mental
illnesses of some sort who clumsily but painfully cover themselves with
excuses of various kinds such as “sleeping in,” “doing other things,” or
“just not wanting to talk about it”? Are there some students who have
been “sick” for lengthy periods of time? Do we as teachers, unknow-
ingly, take students off the roll too quickly without knowing the real
needs of the individual?

As teachers we would be wise to follow the perfect example of Jesus
Christ who “took their little children, one by one, and blessed them,
and prayed unto the Father for them” (3 Nephi 17:21). President
Hunter continues: “It will be hard for you to give all of the personal
attention some of your students both want and need, but try the best
you can to think of them individually, to let them feel something per-
sonal and special in the concern of you, their teacher. Pray to know
which student needs what kind of help, and remain sensitive to those
promptings when they then come.”
4. Help students understand the healing power of the Atonement.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, speaking to those battling with various difficulties, even specifically to those suffering from “disease or depression or death” pleads:

Whatever other steps you may need to take to resolve these concerns, come first to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Trust in heaven’s promises. In that regard Alma’s testimony is my testimony: “I do know,” he says, “that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions.”

This reliance upon the merciful nature of God is at the very center of the gospel Christ taught. I testify that the Savior’s Atonement lifts from us not only the burden of our sins but also the burden of our disappointments and sorrows, our heartaches and our despair. From the beginning, trust in such help was to give us both a reason and a way to improve, an incentive to lay down our burdens and take up our salvation. There can and will be plenty of difficulties in life. Nevertheless, the soul that comes unto Christ, who knows His voice and strives to do as He did, finds a strength, as the hymn says, “beyond [his] own.” The Savior reminds us that He has “graven us upon the palms of His hands.” Considering the incomprehensible cost of the Crucifixion and Atonement, I promise you He is not going to turn His back on us now. When He says to the poor in spirit, “Come unto me,” He means He knows the way out and He knows the way up. He knows it because He has walked it. He knows the way because He is the way.\[16\]

To the people of Gideon, Alma stated that Christ bore our sicknesses and our infirmities “that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:12). Elder Maxwell added, “No one can teach Christ anything about depression because he bore it to a depth and to a degree that we cannot even fathom.”\[17\]

Indeed, Jesus Christ is the great empathizer. There is no suffering He does not understand. There is no ailment He cannot heal.

“He Healed Them All”

“Jesus healed many from physical diseases, but He did not withhold healing from those who sought to be ‘made whole’ from other ailments,” taught Elder Oaks in the April 2006 general conference. “Matthew writes that He healed every sickness and every disease among the people (see Matthew 4:23; 9:35). Great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all (Matthew 12:15). Surely these healings included those whose sicknesses were emotional, mental, or spiritual. He healed them all.”\[18\]
He then added: “Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a ‘healing’ cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are ‘healed’ by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us. . . . The Atonement . . . gives us the strength to endure ‘pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind,’ because our Savior also took upon Him ‘the pains and the sicknesses of his people’ (Alma 7:11). . . . If your faith and prayers and power of the priesthood do not heal you from an affliction, the power of the Atonement will surely give you the strength to bear the burden.”

With greater understanding and knowledge come increased love, empathy, and acceptance. We echo Elder Morrison’s plea at the beginning of this article: “May God bless us to love all His children, to abandon none, and to lift up and strengthen those suffering and in pain.” May we understand for ourselves and help our students understand the truths of mental illnesses and turn their attention to the eternal hope found in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. For He did indeed “heal them all.”

Notes

1. Alexander B. Morrison, Valley of Sorrow (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 35.
10. Joe J. Christensen, Education Week Presentation, “Mental Illness: A Soul under Siege.”


Cultivating the Proper Classroom Climate

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If you live in a neighborhood that has a few gardeners, you have probably noticed this scenario. You will see one outstanding garden, a few average gardens, and a few weed patches. The differences between the outstanding garden and many others are a few simple things such as cultivating, fertilizing, mulching, and controlling weeds. Some observers say that the outstanding gardener has a green thumb. When you walk into her garden, you notice the absence of weeds and the lush, thriving condition of the plants. Things look beautiful, and the produce is large and abundant. Her garden appears so lush that you can almost see the garden grow. It is inviting, and it has a climate that causes things to grow, thrive, and produce. If you are a person who loves to garden, when you walk into the outstanding garden, you fall into a state of shock, admiration, and depression. You realize that your garden, although very good, is not nearly as good as the outstanding garden. You have become satisfied with some success, but the possibilities and potential are breathtaking. With just a little more care, understanding, and skill, your garden could also be outstanding.

The gospel classroom is much like a garden. When the teacher realizes what kind of classroom environment is healthy, desirable, and possible, he or she is ready to become an outstanding teacher. The teacher becomes desirous and determined to do the right things at the right time, so the classroom climate becomes an outstanding environment, ready for gospel learning to take place. Elder Gene R. Cook
has taught, “The single greatest thing a teacher does is provide the
environment in which people can have a spiritual experience.”1 Because
providing the proper climate is of such importance in growing things—
both plants and people—a teacher or gardener should do all he or she
can to provide the best possible climate for optimum growth.

Any teacher soon discovers that the students’ willingness to learn
has a tremendous impact on the success of the class and the learning
that occurs. Some teachers give the classroom climate no thought at
all, whereas others put all the responsibility upon the students. Still
others attempt to manage or control the class with discipline and
rules, and some resort to gimmicks or entertainment. A teacher can
do many things to help students become willing and even desirous to
learn. When the motivation comes from inside the students’ hearts and
minds, the classroom experience changes into one that is exquisitely
enjoyable, and all “are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:22).
This article will explore some things a teacher can do to cultivate the
best possible climate for gospel learning.

Believing in Students

The place to begin so this kind of climate can be cultivated is with
the teacher. Into the heart and mind of the teacher must come a love
for students and a deep faith that they are seekers of truth. President
J. Reuben Clark Jr., in his now-famous presentation, “The Charted
Course of the Church in Education,” states:

The youth of the Church, your students, are in great majority
sound in thought and in spirit. . . . The youth of the Church are hun-
gry for things of the Spirit; they are eager to learn the gospel, and they
want it straight, undiluted. They want to know about the fundamentals
I have just set out—about our beliefs; they want to gain testimonies
of their truth. They are not now doubters but inquirers, seekers after
truth. . . . These students crave the faith their fathers and mothers
have; they want it in its simplicity and purity. . . . They are prepared to
understand the truth. . . . These students are prepared to believe and
understand that all these things are matters of faith. . . . These students
hunger and thirst . . . for a testimony of the things of the Spirit and
of the hereafter. . . . These students as they come to you are spiritu-
ally working on toward a maturity which they will early reach if you
but feed them the right food. They come to you possessing spiritual
knowledge and experience the world does not know.2

These are powerful words. Many of us let a few unbelieving or
undisciplined students affect our faith in the 90 percent who are just
as spiritual as President Clark describes. Some of us have not paid the price to cultivate the classroom climate; therefore, we have not yet come to see the students in the light in which the Lord sees them.

In the garden, each gardener plants the same corn seed. However, one gardener has an abundant harvest, and another has weeds. The difference is in the cultivation, not the seed. Acorns grow into mighty oak trees; likewise, infants are children of a divine Father. When given the proper growing climate, these infants grow into people with Christlike characteristics. Faith in the students’ divinity, in their potential, and in their being of the house of Israel are essential elements if teachers are to cultivate successfully the proper classroom climate.

The Bond of Charity

Once a teacher believes in the students, then the teacher is ready to cultivate charity. Love for students is closely akin to believing in students. Love for students manifests itself in patience, in long-suffering, in not being easily provoked, in not thinking poorly of students, and in believing that students will rise to the level the teacher and the Lord expect. A teacher needs to have a pure heart, care deeply about the students, pray for the students, and help the students understand, know, and believe. This love insulates a teacher from being argumentative, contentious, controlling, and opinionated. It insulates a teacher from being negative and critical because of occasional immature behavior. The teacher’s tone becomes one of genuine interest, compassion, understanding, and meekness. Students feel this love and can see that the teacher really believes in them and has high expectations for them. The students respond accordingly, and their natural tendencies to be good, to participate, to learn, and to enjoy flower one after another.

The gardener who loves the garden prepares the soil, cares for and protects the plants, checks the water and nutrients, looks at the plant color, and watches for disease and bugs. Likewise, a teacher who loves the students provides a safe environment, personally watches over and knows each student, values each student, watches for signs of spiritual disease, and seeks to bring all to an understanding. Love of students is more than a feeling; it is doing things to help the students grow and progress because the teacher cares so deeply. When a teacher is filled with love and has cultivated the gift of charity, everything becomes easier and more effective. Then the efforts a teacher makes to help the students accept their role in gospel learning yield fruit. The students then desire to please their teacher, who loves them, and this translates
into the students’ success in pleasing God. The outcomes make for a very edifying experience in the classroom.

Expectations

It is healthy for the average gardener to visit an outstanding garden to see the possibilities; likewise, it is healthy for a teacher to obtain a view of an outstanding classroom. To obtain this view, each teacher needs to consider a few questions: What should I expect of my students in the gospel classroom? What does God expect? What will students accept and do? What is pleasing to the Holy Ghost?

Many Church leaders have explained that we can have great faith and confidence in our students. President Henry B. Eyring has said: “One of the dangers of the times we are passing into is that we might be tempted to lower our expectations for ourselves and those young people we serve. . . . We might be tempted to expect less. . . . The Lord has given another signal, clear and powerful. It is that we can expect more, not less, of youth. . . . In the days ahead, the Lord will raise the spiritual bar again and again. And our youth will rise higher and higher to more than clear that rising expectation.”3 The students will rise to the level of expectation. If a teacher has low expectations, the students succumb to the norm that exists in most school classrooms—the behavior of the natural man. The scriptures give the Lord’s expectations of gospel classrooms. Doctrine and Covenants 50:10–35 and 88:118–37 are two of the best sources to help a teacher come to understand what the Lord expects. Some of the things the Lord expects are the following:

- To be organized
- To have one person speak at a time
- To have all speak or participate
- To not be idle, lazy, or asleep
- To be prepared
- To welcome each other
- To teach as the Spirit gives utterance
- To reason together
- To teach by the Spirit
- To be edified and rejoice together
- To cease from light speech
- To have all listen
- To love another
- To have the class pray always
- To have the teacher pray
- To pray with thanksgiving
- To have a bond of charity
- To have no contention
- To receive by the Spirit
- To bring all to understand

Each of these ideas needs careful study and consideration by the teacher. Many teachers have found it extremely profitable to study the scriptures and words of the Brethren4 concerning the Lord’s expectations. The teacher must come to understand what the Lord desires and then believe it is possible. When a teacher believes the right way to teach is
the Lord’s way and acts accordingly, the students will rise to the Lord’s expectations because He will provide the way.

The outstanding gospel classroom is a sacred place where students can explore and share life-changing personal thoughts and feelings, where thoughtful discussions stimulate hearts and minds. It is a place where students are motivated to come unto Christ. It is a place where testimonies are born and nourished. It is a place where the Holy Ghost is the teacher. Distractions from the teacher, the students, or a teaching method must not be allowed to limit the students’ ability to hear and feel the still, small voice of the Spirit. In large measure, the responsibility to cultivate this outstanding classroom climate lies with the teacher.

Teaching Expectations

One of the best ways to help the students accept their role in gospel learning and rise to the Lord’s expectations is to teach three to four lessons at the beginning of the year that are model perfect. See that all students have scriptures; then teach several days of engaging lessons, teach doctrines and principles, and help the students discover for themselves. These first lessons set the tone and create the proper attitude in the hearts and minds of the students for the rest of the year. After these first few days, a well-planned and well-taught “expectation lesson” can unite the class and create the proper climate.

When an expectation lesson is taught carefully and thoroughly so the students accept their responsibility, the class is on course to have a wonderful experience together. Reminders are occasionally needed. These reminders are best given as incidents arise instead of allowing the class to drift slowly from doing things the Lord’s way. At the end of the quarter or semester, a short follow-up lesson is sometimes needed and helpful.

Teaching expectation lessons without believing in students or loving students is just another list of rules. It is managing and controlling. But when it is done with a pure heart, deep faith in the students, and the bond of charity, it empowers students because they come to believe. The motivation comes from within. After the students understand what is expected and have accepted their responsibility, the single greatest way to maintain the proper classroom climate is to teach enjoyable, engaging, edifying lessons. Get in the scriptures, discover doctrines and principles, ask great questions, have edifying discussions, and make application. Guide the students toward discovery as they participate, and have them share, teach, and testify to each other and to the class.
Training the Class

The next three weeks in the gospel classroom are very important. The teacher needs to realize that people are creatures of habit and that the class becomes trained in its attitudes and behaviors. When the teacher is aware that in the first weeks the class will become trained for good or ill, he or she will be especially careful to maintain the Lord’s expectations until the class is trained. Similarly, all plants need extra care until they are established, and some plants require training—pole beans, cucumbers, and grapes, for example. A little help is usually sufficient to get these plants growing where the gardener wants them to grow. Students are much the same; carefully training the students in a few simple things the first few weeks will make the class better the entire year.6

Once the climate has been cultivated and the class has been trained, compliments and praise from the teacher are two of the best ways for the teacher to maintain the proper climate. Whenever students do well, thank them. Write individual letters home to parents, thanking them for allowing you to teach their child. Every day, in some way, praise and compliment their best efforts. Even when a student is struggling, find a way to be complimentary. These inspiring, motivating words must come from a profound belief in students and a deep love for the children of men. When the teacher’s heart is pure and the bond of charity permeates the classroom, the classroom environment is ready so powerful teaching and learning can take place.

We all have had life-changing moments. One of those moments came into my life when I was taught that through our teaching, we train our class and that I, as the teacher, had trained my class to behave the way they did, either by what I was doing or by what I was not doing. I realized that the teacher held the key to making a great class, an average class, or even a poor one. After teachers have had considerable experience and success in cultivating the proper classroom climate, many find they do not need to teach a lesson on expectations. The rapport and the reputation of the class, along with the careful training the teacher orchestrates are sufficient. The real keys are believing in students and teaching great lessons. When the teacher understands the Lord’s expectations, believes in the students, and expects the students to rise to their potential, they usually do. In fact, the students thrive in such a class. The result is just like a lush, beautiful garden. The observer can see the healthy attitudes, willingness to learn, and even excitement and enthusiasm.
Conclusion

Elder and Sister John Hess, potato farmers from Ashton, Idaho, were called to serve in Belarus, where government plots of ground were yielding only a meager fifty sacks of potatoes per hectare. With Idaho potato experience and lots of faith and prayer, Brother Hess rolled up his sleeves and went to work with the same seed, tools, and fertilizer that were available to everyone. When harvest came, the Hesses’ plot produced a whopping 550 sacks per hectare—over a 1,000 percent increase. The difference was knowledge and experience and then doing a few simple things very carefully. They used the same seed, land, tools, and fertilizer, yet the yield was one of great abundance. The same is true in the gospel classroom. A few things done with skill and carefulness cause the yield to multiply by hundreds, even thousands.

Cultivating the climate of the classroom until an environment results that invites the Holy Ghost multiplies the yield. This environment comes when students desire to learn spiritual truths. It must come from inside the students—from what they have come to understand and believe. The teacher has the responsibility to teach, generate, and cultivate the climate that causes the students to rise to the level the Lord expects. The teacher must desire this environment and must pray, seek, and work until this blessing is obtained for the class, for each student, and for the teacher.

Over the years, I have learned much from other teachers. Believing in the students, loving them, having high expectations, and training the class are bedrock principles of great gospel teaching. I have witnessed these principles in action and have been truly amazed at the results. Every effort to improve gospel classrooms and get the gospel into more heads and hearts will hinge upon the classroom climate. Obviously, some improvement will come as we strive to improve in various teaching methods and skills, but until the climate has been cultivated that allows the Holy Ghost to teach, all our efforts will yield only a meager harvest. The abundant harvest will come when the students are with us—when they feel safe to share, teach, and testify to each other. This abundance will come when the gospel is taught by the Spirit, when it is received by the Spirit, and when all are edified and rejoice together (see D&C 50:14–22).
Notes


5. An excellent expectation lesson is found in *Teaching the Gospel: A CES Resource for Teaching Improvement* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 44–45. The following expectation lesson also seems to be very effective. Start by asking students, “Whose class is this?” They usually respond “yours” or “the teacher’s.” When you question their response, some will say “ours” or “the Lord’s.” Write at the top of the board: *The Lord’s Class,* and then divide the board in half. On one side, write *Teacher’s Responsibilities;* on the other side, write *Student’s Responsibilities.* Now have the students list all the things they feel the teacher should do to make a great class. Even if students suggest things a teacher should not do, write all their responses. Add any items the students missed by having them look at various verses. Erase items that you cannot do as a teacher because you represent the Lord and the board of education and explain why. Now promise the students you will do the best you can to fulfill the responsibilities they have listed under *Teacher’s Responsibilities.* Promise them you will work very hard to make the class enjoyable and instructive—not boring but engaging. Promise the students you will do your best to give them a great experience and please the Lord. Next, have the students list all the things they feel are student responsibilities. Add any items they do not include by having the students look at individual scripture verses. If you feel strongly about something, add it to the list, and tell the students why. Again, erase any item that is unreasonable or inappropriate.
Cultivating the Proper Classroom Climate

**The Lord’s Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s Responsibilities</th>
<th>Student’s Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be prepared</td>
<td>Be on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make interesting, fun lessons</td>
<td>Have scriptures at desk and use them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t be boring</td>
<td>Participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have videos</td>
<td>Don’t talk out of turn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan games</td>
<td>Do not sleep or do homework in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have the Spirit</td>
<td>Have journals and manuals, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have students participate</td>
<td>use them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t let a few ruin the class</td>
<td>Sing with energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach important, applicable truths</td>
<td>Attend daily (no sluffing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have good order and control</td>
<td>Pray and read personally, daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receive revelation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Have a prayer in heart</td>
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Now ask, “Can you as a class promise each other and the Lord that you will do your best to make this class pleasing to the Lord?” Most will respond accordingly. Before you finish, show a video clip from *The Three Witnesses* where the four men are unable to receive an answer until Martin leaves. Explain that Martin did humble himself and receive the manifestation.

Now ask, “What can we learn from this story that applies to the discussion today?” Discuss how one or two can affect the Spirit, and point out that by enrolling in the class, they are obligated to accept the items under “Student’s Responsibilities” so the whole class can have the best experience possible. The best results are achieved when this conclusion is drawn out from the students. The following questions seem to work to accomplish this outcome: “What if there is a student who really does not want to be in seminary or what if parents are making a student come—why should this student still come with a great attitude?” Or ask another way: “What would you say to a student who feels this way?”

During this discussion, if the teacher is able to get the students to express their feelings and desires to have a great class, the result is a powerful impact on every student in the class. They realize that their peers want to learn by the Spirit. They also come to understand that effective gospel learning requires a different kind of class. It is sometimes helpful to read a scripture or two on the blessings of unity (see D&C 6:32; Moses 7:18). Again, ask: “Will you promise each other and the Lord that you will do the best you can to make this class one that is wonderful, spiritual, and pleasing to the Lord—one that is enjoyable, engaging, and edifying?”

**6. Two examples of training the class are included in this note.**

**Devotionals.** Model the way you would like the devotional for a couple of days. Greet each student. Take care of business, announcements, and chitchat before the devotional starts. Select the hymn before the students arrive. Write the hymn number and the scripture chapter on the board. Ask students to have both books open before the devotional begins. Expect the students to sing with energy. If necessary, stop the singing and have the students start over singing with more energy. After the prayer, invite all to turn to the scripture, read the scripture, and express what they like about the scripture or how the scripture inspires them, and close in the name of Jesus Christ. After a couple of days, ask some students privately to look for a scripture they could share. On the third day, share a scripture and ask if any...
students would like to share theirs. Allow two or three to share. Tell the class this is how you would like the devotional to be conducted. Ask students to read their scriptures, ask them to look for a scripture that inspires them and that they could share. Allow two or three each day. As students share, make sure they write the reference, let all turn to the scripture, read the scripture, share how the scripture helps them, and close in the name of Jesus Christ.

This carefulness in the devotional starts the class out on a very high spiritual level. One of the reasons this process yields such a high return is that students who watch and listen to their peers share scriptures find the outcome to be extremely motivating. As more and more students individually read the scriptures, the Spirit is invited into more of the students’ lives. The students themselves are feasting upon the word of God and being filled with the fruits of the Spirit.

Participation. Teach your students that all are expected to participate in everything the class does: singing, scripture searching, and discussing. Expect all students to have open scriptures at their desk every day. Have the students all move forward, filling in the empty chairs so that groups and pairs can be utilized. This procedure also helps all be included and makes it difficult for students to hide or hold back. Have the students write in their scriptures. Start by telling them something to write, and, on another occasion, ask them what might be written next to a verse to help them remember. Sometimes share something you have written. At other times, have students write on their own and then share. Do not read many verses aloud, but ask a question and have students look individually for answers. Have students make a comment or give an answer to their partner and then share their thoughts with the entire class. You should train the class by how things are done so they are expected to participate every time, every day. Have the students write in their journals, and then share their thoughts or insights with their group. This high level of participation starts on day one. The students come to understand that in this class, everyone participates. This level of participation is unusual in school classrooms; therefore, participation becomes its own motivator. Time flies in such a class. The students feel it and thoroughly enjoy it. They look forward to coming to class every day; it gives them a shot in the arm; and it makes their day better. The students’ participation brings the Holy Ghost into their lives with all the abundant blessings the Spirit offers.

Speaking with Purpose and Peace: An Interview with Elain Witt

Celeste Elain Witt and Elizabeth Pinborough

Celeste Elain Witt (elain@att.net) is a professor in the Theatre and Media Arts Department at Brigham Young University. Sister Witt earned a BA in American studies from Chapman University and an MA in mass communication from BYU. In 2005 she published a book titled Amen: Speaking in Church with Purpose and Peace, an in-depth look at how to write an effective, inspiring sacrament meeting talk. Included after the interview is a talk by the author titled “Miracle of the Shredded Wheat.”

Elizabeth Pinborough is a graduate in English literature from BYU.

Pinborough: How did you come up with the idea for Amen? Is it based on your own experiences of speaking in public?

Witt: The most interesting thing about when I began as a public speaker was that the first time I ever spoke at the pulpit, it was a complete and total disaster. Many people would take that disaster as an indication that they should never speak again. Every time they reflect on it they can actually call up all the feelings associated with it. One of the things I teach my students is how to rid themselves of what I call the ghost of speeches past—much like the Ghost of Christmas Past, except worse. The ghost of speeches past is every bad, negative, unfortunate experience you have ever had standing before an audience that for some reason we bring with us up to the front of the room whenever we speak. We remember the time our notes were in the wrong order or the times we could not find the right scripture, we got confused, we got tongue-tied, or someone laughed at a part that we did not think was funny. We bring those instances with us and in so doing prepare ourselves to basically be paralyzed, both emotionally and physically. If that happens, then we are not going to do a good job, and then we say, “This proves I am not a speaker. That is not something I do.”

You can take any group of Latter-day Saints and ask them, “What
are some of the things you do well in the Church?” and very few people say, “You know, I am particularly gifted at speaking. I can stand before any group and share with them my testimony and riveting stories from the scriptures and from my own life that seem to have an influence on their lives.” We don’t usually hear people say this, and I asked myself why this is so since I had my own bad experience to reflect on. What makes a great speaker in sacrament meeting? Every once in a while, you and I will be sitting in sacrament meeting and someone will stand and speak and we’ll say, “That was wonderful! That was compelling. I want to go out and change my life. I want to add that to my testimony. I want to build on that. I am so grateful for the depth of insight that person shared.” But how often does that happen? That’s really where the book Amen came from.

While I have been teaching at BYU and discussing public speaking with my students, a number of them have said, “There isn’t a book out there about speaking in church.” Every time someone stands before the pulpit I want it to be fabulous, not because I want it to be fabulous for the speaker but because I want it to be fabulous for the people sitting in the pews. And the only way for it to be fabulous for them is for speakers to know how to prepare and to know how to make it a great experience.

**Pinborough:** What are some characteristics of a good talk?

**Witt:** A good talk in sacrament meeting—I use a number of models in my book—needs to be delicious. It needs to nourish the soul. I think that we’ve gotten away from that. I love general conference because the General Authorities, the Apostles, and the First Presidency have such a deep conviction that what they are sharing is important, and they frame that conviction in a way we can latch onto it. We listen to general conference, and we are transformed. Then we attend our meetings for the next six months, and they somehow don’t seem to measure up. But there isn’t any reason we couldn’t be giving the same kind of sermons. We have the same Holy Spirit, and the question is, what price are we willing to pay to create something really wonderful and memorable?

What if you knew that the next time the bishop called on you to speak, it would be the last time you would ever be asked to speak? What if the Church suddenly grew so large that this talk was your one time to share a message of significance, value, and spiritual depth with your brothers and sisters in your ward, whom you love deeply? What we need to do as a Church family is give sacrament meeting talks more credit, more importance, so that when you are called upon, you are not whining for the next two weeks, “I can’t believe I have to speak
in sacrament meeting.” But we should have the attitude that we have been selected by the Lord to share this message with our brothers and sisters and that speaking in sacrament meeting is a privilege. As soon as you sense it to be a privilege, even if you’re nervous about it, think of the kind of energy and personal conviction you would add, the depth of research and personal searching you would do.

Now the questions you ask are basically the framework of what you share. Many times we are tempted to start by saying, “What is the first thing I can think of that fits this assignment? What can I find that will make it so that I can fill the twelve, fifteen, or twenty minutes I have been assigned?” If the model we’re looking for is to fill the time, then we have really not fulfilled the assignment because the Lord sees it more as a stewardship. You have been entrusted with a certain group of people, for a certain period of time, with a specific message given to you by a member of the bishopric. If you can also see this as a stewardship, then the focus is no longer on yourself. But doubt is a real temptation: “I am afraid. I am nervous. I am unprepared. I am lacking.” The Lord knows all that, and when we turn to Him, He turns every one of our weaknesses into strengths. Now if we try to do it ourselves and rely on the arm of flesh, then it can become a disaster.

What I try to teach my students and to live myself is to imagine receiving that message. So, as you are working with the topic—perhaps you have been given a simple topic like honoring the Sabbath—imagine being in the pew and hearing your message. What is it that the people who are in that room need to receive that only you can give them? That changes how you address the topic. Rather than just going to www.lds.org, typing in “honor the Sabbath,” and seeing what the last three conference talks on that issue were, you should read them, cut out the best quotes, use the best scriptures—use the jigsaw method of putting together a talk. It takes longer this way, but you start sensing, “What if there were people there that really needed to be nudged to a higher level of honoring the Sabbath? What if someone’s testimony of honoring the Sabbath is sort of dangling, and they don’t really see any value in it?” How deep would you search knowing that your job might very well be to rescue a soul that you were not even aware of? And that’s where the power comes from, from giving a well-organized, well-researched, spiritually grounded, and inspired message.

As we break free of ourselves being the focus, we learn to become listener-focused rather than speaker-focused. A lot of the things that people grouse about really have to be set aside because a talk is not about the speaker. It’s about the opportunity to be an intermediary
between the audience’s needs and a message that exists. You have the privilege of taking the pieces and putting them together in a way that will be acceptable and understandable to your audience.

**Pinborough:** How do we go about nourishing people through our talks? What can we do to prepare and enhance the nourishment we give them since it is nourishment only we can give?

**Witt:** First of all, we need to move away from the idea that we are information delivery systems. There are times where there is critical information that needs to be delivered that is just packaged for the talk. But when we feel like it’s just a list of dos and don’ts, we don’t respond very well. We don’t even respond that well to long, unending passages of scriptures. And at some point we’re sitting there thinking, “This is just a pile of random sound bytes.” If someone gave a talk on tithing, I would want to hear how their life was transformed and how their commitment to the Savior was enhanced by writing that first check from their high school job, realizing they were surrendering 10 percent of money they earned, and they were invested in the kingdom of God. And I want to feel from a speaker how they were transformed and how that process can become a model for me, to strengthen me, to fortify me. And when it’s imbued with spiritual depth, there simply is no question that the Lord is present in the communication. I love those moments when I feel that when that speaker sits down I know them better, I love them more, and my commitment to being faithful in the kingdom is enhanced.

What precious time sacrament meeting really is, when you have just partaken of the sacrament. If we use that time in the way we have been counseled to use it—to reflect on maybe where we failed this week—and do the introspection that we need to do and partake of sacred emblems to renew our relationship with the Savior, those can be powerful moments. We then look up to the pulpit, and we want to receive the pleasing word of God. We want to be lifted, we want to hear inspired texts, and we want to hear a message that really will meet our needs. It is absolutely critical to think about that whole room and say, “This is a room full of people who are hungry.” I am thinking of a talk by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland that reflects on the fact that we all come to sacrament meeting hurt. We have all been wounded this last week by things that we have done and that other people have done to us. We come to sacrament meeting and are not there to be entertained. We are not even there necessarily to come to understand some deeper metaphorical analogy in the depths of Isaiah. We are there to recommit to follow the Savior.
Are speakers sometimes called upon to say things that call us to repentance? Of course, and that is why King Benjamin will always be my favorite. He knew it was his last talk, and he gathered everyone into the biggest general conference that had ever been assembled up to that point (I suspect we’ve probably passed it up by now). He gathered all these people together, and he didn’t say to them, “You know, you’re really pretty good. And I just want to let you know I love you. Keep doing the things you’re doing.” He was really bold. What happened at the end of his remarks is unparalleled anywhere in the scriptures. Everyone just basically said, “Wow. You’re right. We have gotten off track, and we are totally convinced, based on the spiritual experience we’ve just had, to live according to the principles of the gospel. Give us more. Tell us more of what it is we need to do.” And I appreciate the fact that he had written down his words because he was going to deliver them to those who weren’t able to come or weren’t able to hear because of the distance. It let me know that his words weren’t just the ramblings of an old, inspired man. These were carefully thought-out messages that he knew would nourish that congregation.

**Pinborough:** How can personal experiences enhance the messages we give?

**Witt:** I love personal stories. Go to yourself as your first reference and just jot down every experience you have ever had in reference to your topic. It’s amazing what some personal, spiritually enhanced brainstorming can do for you. You will be able to bring up things you didn’t bother to record in your journal. All of a sudden things will pop up that you will be excited to write down, and you will be able to go back and recapture that moment. I have been teaching public speaking for eight years, and I still have stories I have never told any of my students. The power of the Spirit helps you recall things that are great, valuable, and applicable to your topic. And there may never be another opportunity to go back and recapture those stories. When you start doing that kind of brainstorming, make sure you write things down in detail because it may be the only record you have. It’s amazing that we have any record of the First Vision at all. Joseph Smith made his first diary account twelve years after the experience. I think personal stories are powerful. Not all personal stories are appropriate from the pulpit, however. The Brethren have been clear that we need to be selective on what kind of personal stories we share or to what degree we share. Sometimes you can be somewhat vague in describing certain details that are unnecessary but still capture the essence of the story. For most people, the stories are what captivate them—scriptural, historical, or
personal. Never just get up and wing a story. I see returned missionaries do this. It can go on way too long, and it can tread into areas you have not thought through carefully. Maybe there was a deeper, personal spiritual experience that is not appropriate for the pulpit, but you may suddenly find yourself sharing it and you do not know how to rewind. When using a personal story, decide really clearly what your point is, how much detail you want to include, and how long the story should be. Know what the last sentence of the story is so you can move on to the next part of your talk. There is nothing more awkward than a story that feels not quite wrapped up. When using personal stories, craft them carefully with the audience in mind for the purpose that you want that story to serve. Interesting enough, a story can actually serve multiple purposes. The same process can be seen from different angles.

Pinborough: Is it best for people to write out every word they are going to say? Or should they write out portions of their talks, or write an outline of their talks?

Witt: Manuscript delivery has its place just like outline delivery does. Let’s look at why we would choose one over the other. I would say that for sacrament meeting probably 80 percent of those who speak use full manuscript delivery. Every word they are going to say has been written out and carefully selected. And what happens most of the time is that they then feel tied to that piece of paper and read their entire talk. First of all, manuscript delivery is essential when timing is critical—the shorter the talk, the more important manuscript delivery can be. So if you only have three minutes and you go up there with just two main points and a scripture on a piece of paper, chances are you will not go three minutes, you will go eight minutes because you get up there and you try to feel like it’s full and wrapped up and you go over time. We should honor the amount of time that is given to us, and manuscript delivery can be critical in doing that. Second, if your ideas are complex—and sometimes they can be and still work in sacrament meeting—you will need manuscript delivery. Third, when word choice is important, manuscript delivery can be important. For sacrament meeting, most of us depend on manuscripts too much, however.

Let’s look at the other option of just fashioning an outline. There are a lot of people who can speak from just an outline—speak from the sparsest of notes and still give a compelling and spiritually energizing message. These are mostly people who speak often. Where does it work for those of us who do not speak often yet do not want to be tied to a manuscript? Now we’re moving more into the model of delivery. So
it is not so much what is on the piece of paper but what is going on inside your brain. For delivery I recommend a hybrid between manuscript and outline. I recommend that your introduction be extremely carefully crafted. The audience decides in a matter of seconds if you are someone to be listened to. Now that is going to happen during the introduction. It is not going to happen later on. You are going to have to capture them in those first few precious seconds. And the way you are going to do that is by looking at them. So I want you to write out a wonderful introduction and have it with you because you are not going to feel confident if you do not have those words in front of you. But you are going to know it so well and have devoted enough time to it that you will never need to look at it. You will deliver it as if it is the thirteenth article of faith, and it is just flowing out of you. When people have that as the first few seconds of a sacrament meeting talk immediately the congregation will sit up, take notice, and think, “Hey, something important is going to happen here. The speaker is looking at me. They are delivering words that I can see were carefully chosen to get me interested in this topic. I am going to pay attention.” Having it written out in your notes is what I call insurance because a talk that starts out well will be fine. Once you get rolling, the spiritual energy moves into you. And if we get off to a bumpy start, it may take another couple of minutes to get your stride, so you want to start out strong.

Inasmuch as it is humanly possible, it would be great if the body of the talk can either be in an outline or just key phrases that you want to express. I believe your conclusion, however, should be written down. I admit, as Latter-day Saints we are not really good at conclusions. And I think it is a cultural habit because we already know what the last few words of our talks are going to be. So we already know how to stop; we have a way to end our talk. But we don’t know how to do that part right before the end very well. It’s really clear that the Brethren in general conference give us fabulous examples by bearing clear and fervent testimony of the principle they have just taught. They don’t bring in extraneous issues. They just remain laser-focused right up to the end. Does that come spontaneously? Is that just something they make up on the spot? No, it’s something they’ve thought about and crafted in a way they know will communicate to us what it is we need to hear so the Holy Ghost can testify of its truth. I think it is powerful to bear testimony at the conclusion of the talk, and I do not think it needs to be spontaneous for it to be sincere. Sometimes we will see someone reading through a manuscript talk, and suddenly they will look up to us and say, “Now I would like to bear my testimony to you.” And
then they bear what I call the “kitchen sink” testimony, the testimony of everything that is more speaker-centered than audience-centered. What we need is that final moment to help us anchor that message into our soul, and that is good to have written out. But once again, like the introduction, you will know it so well that you will be looking at the audience and sharing it as if it were spontaneous. It’s not acting; it’s preparation.

**Miracle of the Shredded Wheat**

*Celeste Elain Witt*

What does a miracle look like? Is it possible that you had one this week, but you missed it? Quite simply, a miracle is the evidence of the hand of God in your life. “Miracles should not be regarded as deviations from the ordinary course of nature so much as manifestations of divine or spiritual power.” More than solving specific problems, they are designed to increase our faith in God.

In a hectic world of bits and bytes, maybe recognizing miracles is simply a matter of slowing down and becoming more keenly aware of the loving and ever-present hand of God. Many divine interventions go unnoticed. Yet every time we acknowledge and appreciate them, our faith increases.

A simple four-step process helps us appreciate each miracle in our lives:

1. See it.
2. Express gratitude for it.
3. Allow it to increase your faith.
4. Record it.

A fifth step comes into play when you share the miracle with your posterity. The Holy Ghost will confirm the truth of it to the generations that follow you. An unbroken chain of faithfulness comes from family members who see and testify of the hand of God. Nephi did. Laman and Lemuel did not. It is a consistent pattern throughout the scriptures.

Moroni warned this generation to be careful not to ignore the hand of God. “Deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever” (Moroni 10:7).
What might have been viewed as a mere clerical error by some has always been considered a miracle in our family.

It was the summer of 1990 in Redmond, Washington. As a young mother of four (with a fifth on the way), I innocently bought one of those giant boxes of Shredded Wheat. Those were tough times financially, and we stretched every penny. Even cold cereal was a luxury.

While unloading the groceries, I noticed that one of the interior packages of the cereal box was not completely sealed. In today’s troubling times, you think twice about a package that is even slightly out of the ordinary. So I loaded up the kids and returned the Shredded Wheat to Costco for a new box. End of story? One would think so.

Six months later the same thing happened. With a new baby in my arms, I was not as willing to jump back in the van to return it. So I gave the marketing office of Costco a telephone call. They agreed it was rather peculiar that I would have purchased two defective boxes. It was time to investigate. They would have an executive from Nabisco give me a call.

Several days passed and someone in the breakfast cereal division of Nabisco phoned to tell me that a representative would be by to collect the faulty box, complete with its computer encoding so they could discover how quality control let it slip through. Sure enough, two well-dressed gentlemen arrived on my porch with treasures in hand—some jam, salsa, trash bags, room freshener, and . . . some Shredded Wheat. Only one problem—it was a standard-sized box. When I handed them my huge Costco box, they winced. There had obviously been some horrible miscommunication. They assured me they would arrange for a Costco-sized box to be shipped to me immediately. Isn’t this every mother’s dream—home delivery of cold cereal?

A week later, just after I had stepped out of the shower, the doorbell rang. I threw on some clothes, and with hair dripping wet, I answered the door. A scruffy but pleasant man in a delivery uniform looked at me rather strangely and announced, “I have your Shredded Wheat.”

“Great,” I said, “Nabisco told me they were sending me a box.”

With a grin the delivery man replied, “No ma’am, I mean, I have some Shredded Wheat for you.”

“One of those big boxes, right?” There was an awkward silence.

“You don’t seem to understand—I have an entire pallet.”

“A what?”

“It’s 120 of those huge boxes.”

Dumbfounded, I fumbled for words. “There’s got to be some
mistake. Shouldn’t I send them back?”

“Are you kidding? It would cost Nabisco more to ship them back than the cereal is worth.”

As I continued to drip-dry in the middle of my front yard, I watched a delivery man unload 450 pounds of Shredded Wheat into my garage. Now, I’m a devoted fan of Shredded Wheat—but that’s definitely more than a year’s supply. Tears came to my eyes as I sensed the blessing this could be. I never sold one box. I never traded one box. And I never wasted one little biscuit. They were a miraculous gift from the Lord.

The challenge, as I saw it, was to take this unexpected windfall and make it bless as many lives as possible. I delivered boxes to ward members who were sad. I delivered some to neighbors whom I wanted to fellowship. I delivered some to the local food bank. As I spread joy through delivering boxes of cold cereal, I saw a real fulfillment of the counsel to “cast thy bread upon the waters” (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Who would have guessed it applied to Shredded Wheat?

As a result of the Miracle of the Shredded Wheat, gratitude ensued and good works abounded. Many were fed and blessed, and faith increased in our household.

Miracles rarely come in the way we expect. The house of Israel had manna. We had Shredded Wheat.

Notes
The last few years of President Spencer W. Kimball’s life were fraught with poor health and diminished strength. When Ezra Taft Benson received the phone call announcing the death of the venerable old prophet, he was stricken with grief and reverence for the heavy task that now fell on him. On the Sunday following President Kimball’s death, November 10, 1985, the Quorum of the Twelve met in the Salt Lake Temple at three in the afternoon. During this most solemn of assemblies, President Benson asked Gordon B. Hinckley and Thomas S. Monson to serve as his counselors. President Howard W. Hunter, next in seniority, set apart Ezra Taft Benson as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That evening the Bensons attended the previously scheduled Young Women fireside, broadcast by satellite from the Tabernacle on Temple Square. The next morning, the

![Elder and Sister Benson pause for a photograph when he was a new Apostle. Courtesy of L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU](image)
traditional news conference announcing a new Church President was held in the foyer of the Church Administration Building.

President Benson was the great-grandson of Ezra T. Benson, who was ordained an Apostle at Council Bluffs in 1846 during the exodus of the Latter-day Saints from Nauvoo. Ezra T. moved to Nauvoo in 1841 and filled responsible Church positions there. When the Saints began their westward trek, Ezra received a letter from President Brigham Young, who was out ahead on the trail, asking that he fill the position in the Quorum of the Twelve vacated by John E. Page. He traveled westward and was ordained an Apostle on July 16, 1846, at Council Bluffs, Iowa.

He and his growing family were also assigned by President Brigham Young to preside over the Church in Cache Valley in northern Utah. The Benson family resided here for several generations. Ezra’s oldest son, George Taft Benson (who had been born in Garden Grove, Iowa, during the flight from Nauvoo), grew up in Logan and later married Louisa Ballif on December 20, 1867, in Salt Lake City. Together, they had thirteen children. Louisa served for several years as the president of the far-flung Oneida Stake Relief Society. George was bishop of the Whitney Ward for twenty years.
Running the Farm

The second son (and fourth child) of George and Louisa Benson was born June 24, 1875, and named after his father. George T. Benson Jr. loved the gospel and was always active in the Church. He married Sarah Dunkley on October 19, 1898, in the Logan Temple. The oldest of their eleven children was named after George’s grandfather Ezra Taft Benson. George was an excellent farmer and passed the love of the land on to his oldest son, Ezra Taft, who became known to friends and family simply as “T.”

Due to his father’s call as a missionary when Ezra was only twelve years old, he became intimately acquainted with farm operations. While much of the farm was rented out during George T. Benson’s 1912–14 northern states mission, Ezra took care of the dairy herd and managed the pasture and hay fields that were not rented out.

His father was pleased with the way his son attended to farm duties, and affairs were managed so well that upon his return from missionary labors, George was able to expand his farming operations. Several years later, Ezra and his brother Orval purchased their father’s farm in Whitney for seventeen thousand dollars. On this land they tried some of
the methods they learned while studying agriculture at Utah State and Brigham Young University.

Ezra attended Oneida Academy, a Church school, in Preston, Idaho, before entering Utah Agricultural College (now Utah State University) in Logan, Utah. He saw his future wife, Flora Smith Amussen, drive by in a red Ford convertible during a campus visit before his mission. She was a popular coed, serving in student leadership, playing tennis, and performing in college dramas. He told a cousin standing by him on the corner that he would date her when he came back to attend school.

Flora lived in Logan with her widowed mother, Barbara Smith Amussen. Her father, Carl Christian Amussen, had died when she was a baby. Carl was a wealthy jeweler and a dentist who had been born and raised in Denmark and had traveled and worked in Russia, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. His family name was Asmussen, but he dropped the first “s” after arriving in Utah. He had found a copy of Parley P. Pratt’s *Voice of Warning* pamphlet on a street in New Zealand and was so moved that he traveled and sought out the Church in Liverpool, England, at the address given on the back of the pamphlet.

Because he had accumulated significant assets as a jeweler, Carl was able to gather with the Saints in the Salt Lake Valley, establishing a business with hired hands and goods he had brought with him. He sought the business counsel of President Brigham Young upon his arrival in Utah and was surprised to be invited to consider plural
marriage as one who could well afford the expenses of more than one family. He married Barbara Smith as his third wife in 1885. She was over forty years his junior, and together they had eight children. Flora was their youngest.

Flora was living alone with her mother when “T” came to call on her in early 1921. He was touched by Flora’s close and kindly relationship with her mother.

Ezra served a mission to Great Britain beginning in July 1921 through 1923 and returned to discover that Flora wished to serve a mission also. She was called to Hawaii and loved it. She was delighted to serve her final six months as a companion to her mother, who came to Hawaii to serve a short-term mission. She and Ezra wrote through her mission, and both were anxious to meet again when she returned.

Flora and Ezra were married in the Salt Lake Temple on September 10, 1926, by Orson F. Whitney, Ezra’s first mission president. (David O. McKay was his second.) Following a wedding breakfast, they left immediately for Iowa State University, camping out along the way. While Flora was serving her mission, Ezra had completed his bachelor’s degree in agriculture. Together, they determined he should go on to graduate school, and he finished his master’s degree in agriculture with honors in just one year. He was a hardworking student, turning down an offer to stay at Iowa State and teach. Returning to Whitney, Idaho, he farmed with his brother Orval until Orval went on a mission. Then Ezra farmed until offered a job as the extension agricultural agent for Franklin County in March of 1929. His two sons, Reed and Mark, were born exactly sixteen months apart during this time. Most of the Benson children were given the middle name Amussen in honor of Flora’s father, Carl Christian Amussen. A year and a half later, Ezra was appointed agricultural economist with the University of Idaho Extension Division in Boise. It was during this time that their daughters Barbara and Beverly were born.

Called to Serve

Ezra was called as president of the Boise Idaho Stake in November of 1938. This proved to be a short assignment since almost immediately his name was put forward as candidate for the appointment of executive secretary to the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. This meant a move to Washington DC where, on March 30, 1940, daughter Bonnie was born.

Church leaders approved of the move from Boise to Washington DC and on June 30, 1940, Ezra was sustained as president of the
newly organized Washington DC Stake. His tireless efforts on behalf of American farmers, as well as his strong personal leadership of the Washington DC Stake, did not go unnoticed. In July 1943, Ezra Taft Benson was called as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The call came as a complete surprise to him. He was in Salt Lake City following a business trip through citrus farms in California. He had taken his oldest son, Reed, on this trip, and they stopped to visit with his second mission president, David O. McKay. Following the visit, they made a short trip to Whitney, where friends and relatives were delighted to see them. On returning to Salt Lake City on July 26, 1953, he discovered President McKay’s office staff had been trying to locate him. They indicated President Heber J. Grant wished to see him at his cabin at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. Worried about catching his train on time, Ezra quickly sped to the cabin to be invited directly into the Church President’s bedroom where he was resting. President Grant took his right hand and lovingly issued the call to serve as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. Ezra was flabbergasted and completely humbled at the invitation to join this group of men he had honored and revered his entire life.

Fig. 5. The Benson family often enjoyed going to J. Willard Marriott’s ranch for recreation.
Courtesy of Church Archives
The following October, Ezra came to general conference, where he was officially sustained as the sixty-third Apostle called since the Restoration of The Church of Jesus Christ. His resignation from the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives brought congratulations from men who had little understanding of the nature of his new appointment. But great friendships had been made that would ultimately influence the future course of his apostleship and his public service. A short time after their move to Utah, the Bensons’ youngest daughter, Flora Beth Benson, was born in Salt Lake City.

**Special Post–WWII Assignment**

The armistice signed at the end of World War II brought welcome peace to Europeans, who had endured over five years of danger and strife. Included among them were destitute and hungry Latter-day Saints from several missions. Church leaders felt that a coordinated effort to bring relief was necessary, and the First Presidency designated the youngest Apostle, Ezra Taft Benson, to spearhead the effort as president of the European Mission. This would allow him to work with several mission presidents, some of whom were indigenous acting mission presidents, quickly assigned when war broke out and their American Church leaders were called home. The assignment would,
however, mean that President Benson would go into Europe alone, without the presence of Flora and the children. Ezra stayed there for almost a year, traveling throughout Europe and the British Isles, organizing relief efforts and arranging for food, clothing, and other supplies to be shipped from Welfare Square at Church headquarters. His heart was deeply touched as he encountered many members who had lost everything but seemed revitalized by the presence of an Apostle. Time after time, travel arrangements that had seemed impossible due to inherent military restrictions were made possible at the last moment. At other times, trips were begun without guaranteed arrangements along the way.

President Benson and his traveling associates pushed on and brought comfort and assurance to thousands of Latter-day Saints affected by the war. The depth of the suffering of the Saints caught in the war deeply touched the young Apostle. In July 1946, the First Presidency called Elder Alma Sonne, an Assistant to the Twelve, to replace President Benson in this assignment.
Back Home Again

His arrival home following a transatlantic flight was sweet after an eleven-month absence. Flora and the children were very excited to have “Daddy” return home. They had bravely carried on as normally as possible while he was gone, but doctors had told Flora she needed an operation as a result of complications from childbirth. Shortly after arriving home, she went into the hospital and endured the successful medical procedure. Elder Benson was greatly relieved and felt that prayers had been answered.

What followed were several years of intense and busy apostolic and civic activities that included heading the Church’s Melchizedek Priesthood Committee, being the senior adviser to the YMMIA and YWMIA programs, serving on the Boy Scouts of America National Executive Board, and speaking at major Church, university, and farming events. Republican presidential candidate Thomas Dewey even approached him about a cabinet position should he be elected. Sons Reed and Mark served missions, and the girls grew into beautiful young women. Constant stake conference visits and mission tours were mingled with family vacations, but growing Church responsibilities kept Elder Benson away from home and family more than he wanted to be.

Secretary of Agriculture

On November 20, 1952, a phone call from Utah Senator Arthur V. Watkins came as a bombshell. Ezra was informed that president-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower was considering him for the cabinet post of secretary of agriculture. Consulting with President McKay, Ezra was told to accept the post if it came in the right spirit. The following Monday he flew to New York, where President Eisenhower asked him to accept the position. Ezra laid all his reservations on the table. He raised concerns about his political leanings as well as his Church leadership role. But Eisenhower was unmoved by any of them. Ezra accepted. Within minutes the appointment was announced to the press. He would become the fifteenth secretary of agriculture and the first member of the Church to hold such an executive office in the federal government.

His would be a principle-based administration. Alarmed at the level of subsidies farmers were receiving at the time, Ezra often spoke about the free market system and farmers’ desire to be independent. The Department of Agriculture had previously amassed vast storage of excess food supplies that threatened to play havoc with world markets
if dumped cheaply. He wrestled with how to deal with such a situation. Ezra frequently visited with leaders of farm organizations and traveled the nation to talk to farmers themselves about these issues. As he presented his views on the principles of good agricultural economics, farmers listened, but the media mocked and politicians howled. Over time, however, his views gained favor with a majority of farmers and respect for the secretary grew. People felt Ezra was honest and that he said what needed to be said as plainly as he knew how. Political strategists winced, but Elder Benson did not flinch.

The secretary would often stop and talk to farmers, whether on the street or in the field. Some previously opposed to his agriculture programs were convinced otherwise once they had met and visited with him. He was down-to-earth and honest with everyone.

Sister Benson and the children similarly put off ostentatious behavior. On one occasion, the wives of cabinet members were invited to the Benson home, where homemade dishes graced the menu and were served by the Benson daughters. This was in stark contrast to the elaborate, catered dinners that were the norm at such functions.

His popularity rose and fell with regularity. Sometimes praised and sometimes roasted, the secretary became used to having his policies praised and panned. He even offered to step down on one occasion, but President Eisenhower insisted he stay to “the bitter end.” They then joked about whether the end would be bitter or not. The two grew closer over time as bills passed by a Democratic congress would be vetoed by the president with the strong encouragement of the secretary of agriculture.

President Eisenhower suggested that Elder Benson travel abroad from time to time. These diplomatic efforts put him in contact with many world leaders. His international reputation later did much good for the Church and the country. In later years, dignitaries were often invited to Church meetings and special events when Elder Benson visited nations while on Church business.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev visited the United States in 1959. During his visit, Ezra hosted the Russian leader through a tour of several farms. The Soviets returned the favor and invited Elder Benson to Moscow. There, he became painfully aware of the inefficiencies of the Soviet system and the restrictions placed on the Russian people. At the end of his tour, the American entourage visited the Central Baptist Church in Moscow. Filled mostly with elderly people whose faith predated the communist takeover, the congregation warmly received the group. Elder Benson spoke to the group and tenderly testified
of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the power of love, peace, and prayer. The deeply felt response of the people caused virtually everyone in the American entourage to weep over the experience. Media members would later comment about the spirituality of the event and the powerful feeling they experienced in the old church that day. It was clear that Elder Benson had a deep testimony of the Savior and wore his religion comfortably and sincerely and that he was unafraid to open his heart when occasion permitted.

**Back to the Quorum**

At the end of Elder Benson’s two terms as secretary of agriculture, President McKay once again called Ezra to assume the presidency of the European Mission, which now included four stakes and twelve missions. His notoriety as former secretary of agriculture meant that the press followed his arrival and subsequent activities with significant interest. Elder Benson used this opportunity to create a public relations organization in the mission that would enhance the visibility of the Church in Europe for the twenty-one months of his presidency. He also continued to speak on themes related to freedom. Some listeners equated his talks on freedom as being overdone, prompting Elder Benson to counsel with President McKay. President McKay only encouraged him to continue to speak his mind.

Some Americans wished he would run for president of the United States. In the mid-1960s a committee was formed to encourage his candidacy. President McKay suggested that he neither encourage nor discourage such a movement and, over time, the interest dwindled.

When President McKay died on January 18, 1970, Ezra lost his beloved friend. They had remained close throughout their lives, and he was asked to offer the benediction at the funeral. On Friday, January 23, 1970, ninety-three-year-old Joseph Fielding Smith became the President of the Church. Two and a half years later, his death resulted in Ezra’s high-school friend, Harold B. Lee, becoming President. Church members were shocked when President Lee soon died. This resulted in Ezra’s thirty-year colleague in the Quorum of the Twelve, Spencer W. Kimball, becoming President of the Church. At that time Ezra became the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

**President of the Quorum**

President Benson had felt for some time that it would be best if the Twelve could be relieved of their many administrative duties in order
to focus on the spiritual affairs of the kingdom. He began by streamlining assignments within the Quorum. He also made sure meetings started and ended on time. Quorum members always felt they could speak freely about important items, but he was very effective in turning open discussions into united decisions—in the right way, at the right time, with the right feeling. His humility and openness impressed each Quorum member to speak his mind without regard to seniority.\(^6\)

His diplomatic status as a former secretary of agriculture, combined with his affable manner in greeting and meeting with government officials, opened many doors for the Church and its missionaries throughout the world. Given President Kimball’s prophetic and electrifying spread of missionary work throughout the world, it was an advantage to have someone with President Benson’s experience with diplomacy and government serving as President of the Quorum of the Twelve.

President Benson was intimately involved in several momentous events as Quorum President. In 1976 the First Quorum of the Seventy was organized as a body of General Authorities. A year later, the Assistants to the Quorum of the Twelve were all added to that Quorum. Later, in June of 1978, the revelation on priesthood extended the priesthood to all worthy males.

A personal challenge arose a month later when President Benson was knocked down by a horse that reared unexpectedly, and he broke his hip. The recuperation time was slow, but by September he was able to attend his Quorum meetings and take care of regular Church business.

**President of the Church**

After President Kimball’s death, President Benson vowed to continue the threefold mission emphasis (proclaim the gospel, perfect the Saints, and redeem the dead) of the Church as outlined by President Kimball. Several developments occurred under the new First Presidency. For instance, they announced that faithful members married to nonmembers could be endowed in the temple. Another action was to reach out in their Christmas message to alienated members and invite them to return to Church activity. A new set of missionary discussions was released in July of 1986. They were designed to allow missionaries to teach more in their own words than the previous discussions allowed.

Church growth featured the first stake organized in West Africa as well as the legal recognition of the Church in Hungary.\(^7\) In November
1988 an agreement with the DDR (German Democratic Republic) allowed missionaries to serve there. Young men were also allowed to serve missions throughout the world from that country. These negotiations foretold the impending collapse of the Soviet Union.

Missionary work everywhere continued to flourish. Twenty-nine new missions were created in 1990 alone, and the equalization of mission costs for U.S. and Canadian missionaries, which made all monthly payments by parents the same for all missions, blessed the expansion of missionary work across the globe. In fact, over three hundred stakes were organized during President Benson’s presidency. The Church grew from almost six million to almost nine million members under his leadership. Eight new temples were dedicated, and three were rededicated after being refurbished. The BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies was also completed and dedicated on May 16, 1989, by then Quorum of the Twelve President, Howard W. Hunter. A decision was made to close the old Hotel Utah in Salt Lake City. It was completely renovated to later reappear as the Joseph Smith Memorial Building.

New technological advances made possible FamilySearch (a suite of computer programs designed to enhance and simplify family history work) and TempleReady (a software program that streamlined the clearance of names for temple work).

Perhaps it was only fitting that the Berlin Wall came down during President Benson’s administration. No one better understood the importance of this symbolic fall of the Iron Curtain installed by the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Communist nations in Europe were transformed during his service as Church President. His strong admonitions on the evils of communism and the importance of freedom for Americans and all mankind seemed to be vindicated by these major world events.

Members grew to love President Benson. One thing the President did that endeared him to many, especially to children and their parents, was to sing the old children’s song “I Am a Mormon Boy” a cappella in some regional conferences. Sister Benson also delighted audiences from time to time by reciting from memory the lengthy Edgar A. Guest poem “Home.” As long as they could, President and Sister Benson attended the temple every Friday morning. Temple patrons were delighted to find themselves in an endowment session with the President of the Church and his wife. It elevated the importance of temple attendance in the eyes of many.
As President Benson aged, like President Kimball, he faced health concerns related to old age. At age eighty-nine he had a mild heart attack that somewhat slowed him. Over time, he needed help getting around, and he began to attend general conference in a wheelchair. Then, on August 14, 1992, his beloved wife, Flora, died. They had been married for sixty-six years, and Ezra was now alone. His health continued to decline until May 30, 1994—Memorial Day—when Ezra Taft Benson died of heart failure at age ninety-four.

Notes

1. John E. Page was disfellowshipped on January 9, 1846, at a council meeting held in Nauvoo, Illinois. Ezra T. Benson was ordained to take his place in the Quorum on July 16, 1846, at Council Bluffs, Iowa.
2. From a 1988 conversation with Flora Walker Spackman, granddaughter of President Ezra Taft Benson. Flora’s husband, Larry, wanted to buy her a red convertible so she could drive around town like her grandmother!
To purchase the following publications, visit www.byubookstore.com, click on book title or search ISBN; or call the BYU Bookstore toll-free at 1-800-253-2578.

**Living the Book of Mormon:**
*“Abiding by Its Precepts”*

*The 36th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*

“I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” Joseph Smith’s statement rings true 166 years later. The Book of Mormon clarifies precepts taught in the Bible and invites us to live more Christlike lives. Topics of the 2007 Sidney B. Sperry Symposium include redemption through Christ, the “three Rs” of the Book of Mormon, and the divine precept of charity. Presenters include Elder Joe J. Christensen, Terry B. Ball, Richard O. Cowan, and Robert L. Millet.

*ISBN: 978-1-59038-799-3, Retail; $25.95*
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History is replete with examples of the accomplishments of the first Latter-day Saint missionaries to England. Prophesying of the importance of the missionaries’ success, Joseph Smith said that their work would be the means of bringing salvation to the Lord’s latter-day Church. In 1837, Latter-day Saint missionaries from America set foot in Great Britain seeking converts to the Mormon faith. This book includes articles on Isaac Russell, a photo essay, and turning the media image of the Church in Great Britain. Contributors include Alexander L. Baugh, Richard E. Bennett, and Richard O. Cowan.


The Tabernacle: “An Old and Wonderful Friend”

As the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City’s Temple Square was renovated in 2007, historian Scott C. Esplin releases this in-depth review of the Tabernacle’s construction. Featuring beautiful and historic photos, much of the book consists of a newly edited version of Stewart Grow’s thesis on the building of the Tabernacle. Grow was the grandson of Henry Grow, the bridge builder who built the roof of the historic Tabernacle. The author has provided a new introduction, placing the thesis in historical context.

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A Witness for the Restoration: Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews

This collection of essays offers tribute to Robert J. Matthews for his eightieth birthday. The wide-ranging essays are a reflection of his varied interests and academic loves. Written by Matthews’s colleagues, topics range from biblical studies to the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

ISBN: 978-0-8425-2676-0, Retail: $24.95
Upcoming Conferences

The Fifth Annual BYU Religious Education Easter Conference

Easter is in March this year, so the Easter Conference will be held Saturday, March 22, 2008, in the Joseph Smith Building. Watch for the publication of last year’s proceedings in “Behold the Lamb of God”: An Easter Celebration.

The Tenth Annual BYU Religious Education Student Symposium

This year’s presentations will take place in the Wilkinson Student Center on Friday, February 22, 2008. The purpose of the student symposium is to provide a forum for students to research, write, and present papers about religious subjects from a faithful perspective.
Staff Spotlight

Editorial Board Member

Lynne Speierman is an instrument-rated private pilot and retired kindergarten teacher. She and her husband, Chad, have served two missions, both at Martin’s Cove, Wyoming. Her hobbies include traveling, hiking, boating, and trail riding on Champion, a national champion Paso Fino. She and her husband live in Kansas. They are parents of two children and grandparents of two granddaughters. Lynne is currently serving as a ward organist.

RSC Associate Director

Kent P. Jackson is a professor of ancient scripture and associate dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, where he has taught since 1980. He has a BA in ancient history and languages from BYU and MA and PhD degrees in Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern studies from the University of Michigan. Among other courses, he teaches the Pearl of Great Price, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Old and New Testaments, and an introduction to Islam. His research interests include Latter-day Saint scripture, doctrine, and history, as well as biblical and ancient Near Eastern topics. Professor Jackson is married with five children and nine grandchildren. He and his wife, Nancy, live in Orem, Utah.

Student Editorial Intern

Elisabeth R. Sutton graduated from BYU in December 2007 with an English major and an Arab-Islamic studies minor. Originally from San José, California, she studied for two years at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, before coming to Provo. She loves the RSC, for at no other student job could she learn about hieroglyphic transcription, nineteenth-century medicine, ancient metallic epigraphy, Salt Lake City landmarks, Samaritan sacrificial lambs, and early Scandinavian missionaries. Her interests include fiction, languages, and indie music with historical themes. In 2008 she embarks on a mission for the Church in the United States.
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