

## “A Teacher Come from God” (John 3:2)

### *Introduction*

Think of a **teacher in school** who excited you about learning and study. What was it about them and their teaching that lit a fire for learning within you?

Now what about **gospel teachers**? Who do you remember that inspired you, touched your heart?

### *Ten Suggestions for Making Your Teaching More Impactful*

**1. Live the gospel; we teach what we are.**

We cannot teach very effectively a law or principle we do not believe in or keep.

**President David O. McKay**, in speaking of teaching in the Church, said: “The first thing to do, my [brothers and sisters], is to look to yourselves, to see whether or not you are prepared to teach. No man [or woman] can teach what he [or she] does not know. It is your duty to teach that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world, that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that to him in this last dispensation there appeared God the Father and his Son in person. Do you believe it? Do you feel it? Does that testimony radiate from your being? . . . If so, that radiation will give life to the people you . . . teach.” (*Gospel Ideals*, 1953, 190.)

**2. Focus on doctrine and keep the doctrine pure.**

**Elder Neal A. Maxwell**: “Doctrines believed and practiced do change and improve us, while assuring our vital access to the Spirit. Both outcomes are crucial.” (*One More Strain of Praise*, Bookcraft, 1999, pp. x, 9-10.)

Teach substance. Let your teaching be that about which the Spirit can testify

**President Joseph F. Smith**: “The sanctity of a true testimony should inspire a thoughtful care as to its use. . . . The voicing of one’s testimony, however eloquently phrased or beautifully expressed, is no fit or acceptable substitute for the needed discourse of instruction and counsel expected in a general gathering of the people. The man who professes a testimony as herein described, and who assumes that his testimony embraces all the knowledge he needs, and who therefore lives in indolence and ignorance shall surely discover his error to his own cost and loss. . . . Of those who speak in his name, the Lord requires humility, not ignorance.” (*Gospel Doctrine*, 1971, 205-6.)

**Elder Jeffrey R. Holland**: “Now, at a time when our prophet is calling for more faith through hearing the word of God, we must revitalize and reenthroned superior teaching in the Church.

“. . . When crises come in our lives—and they will—the philosophies of men interlaced with a few scriptures and poems just won’t do. Are we really nurturing our youth and our new members in a way that will sustain them when the stresses of life appear? Or are we giving them a kind of theological Twinkie—spiritually empty calories? President John Taylor once called such teaching ‘fried froth,’ the kind of thing you could eat all day and finish feeling totally unsatisfied. . . .

“Satan is certainly not subtle in his teachings; why should we be? Whether we are instructing our children at home or standing before an audience at church, let us never make our faith difficult to detect. Remember, we are to be teachers ‘come from God.’ Never sow seeds of doubt. Avoid self-

serving performance and vanity. Prepare lessons well. Give scripturally based sermons. Teach the revealed doctrine. Bear heartfelt testimony.” (“A Teacher Come from God,” *Ensign*, May 1998.) While teaching methods are important, it is the substance of what is taught that will lead one to conversion.

**Joseph Fielding McConkie:** “Philosophy, ethics, and the wisdom of the world are not the only synthetics offered under a gospel label. Many in-service programs get lost in methodology and rarely concern themselves with what is being taught as long as it is being taught well. Teachers who are the products of such training often find themselves giving beautifully packaged gifts which when opened are of slight or passing worth. Might we ask of what value it is if a teacher has high involvement, good discipline, a neat and orderly classroom, but never really teaches anything? What is the value of a well-told story if it carries no message? If that which matters most is not to be at the mercy of that which matters least, the *how* of teaching cannot relegate the *what* of teaching to a place of secondary importance.” (*Teach and Reach*, 1975, 4)

On keeping the doctrine pure, **President Gordon B. Hinckley:** “I have spoken before about the importance of keeping the doctrine of the Church pure, and seeing that it is taught in all our meetings. I worry about this. Small aberrations in doctrinal teaching can lead to large and evil falsehoods.” (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 1997, 620.)

### 3. *Use time wisely.*

Don’t spend most of your time on matters that are less important Sunday School teacher responsible for teaching Acts 19 and Galatians who chooses instead to focus on his family’s vacation to Hawaii

A recent Sunday School class where the reading was Luke 22 on the Lord’s atoning sacrifice; we spent all our time on “I am among you as him that serveth” [verse 27]).

### 4. *Respond positively and affirmatively to student comments or answers.*

It is always a risk for a class member to speak up or provide an answer; we must find ways to respect their expressions, to affirm their answers, to build upon their words, and even to politely correct their answer if it is incorrect. Avoid trite responses to student comments or answers like “Exactly right” or “Good,” or “Okay” or “Anyone else?”

Develop a climate of love and trust, a safe environment (D&C 59:12 [“confessing thy sins”]).

**5. *Draw upon the power of modern revelation and teachings of current Church authorities*** no matter what you are teaching (example of a woman teaching about Abraham without turning to the Book of Abraham; D&C 31:3-4; 49:1-4; 84:55-57, 61).

### 6. *Help class members grasp the eternal relevance of scripture.*

We are charged repeatedly by the leaders of the Church to read the scriptures regularly. Sometimes, if we are striving to do our best, *the scriptures can begin to read us.*

From **the Apostle Paul:** “[A]ll scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man [or woman] of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (JST, 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

**President Howard W. Hunter:** “I strongly encourage you to use the scriptures in your teaching and to do all within your power to help the students use them and become comfortable with them. I would like our young people to have confidence in the scriptures, and I would like you to interpret that phrase two ways.

“First, we want the students to have confidence in the strength and truths of the scriptures, confidence that their Heavenly Father is really speaking to them through the scriptures, and confidence that they can turn to the scriptures and find answers to their problems and their prayers. . .

“Obviously another meaning implied in the phrase ‘confidence in the scriptures’ is to teach students the standard works so thoroughly that they can move through them with confidence, learning the essential scriptures and sermons and texts contained in them. We would hope none of your students would leave your classroom fearful or embarrassed or ashamed that they cannot find the help they need because they do not know the scriptures well enough to locate the proper passages. Give the [members of the Church] sufficient experience in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price that they have both of the kinds of confidence I have just mentioned.” (“Eternal Investments,” address to CES religious educators, 10 February 1989.)

*7. Discussion is a valuable way for students or class members to learn, but discussion for discussion’s sake is seldom effective (i.e. dividing the class into groups for discussion).*

The most effective discussions grow out of thoughtful questions being asked after a scriptural passage has been read, or the teacher has just explained a principle or doctrine.

**8. Teach with simplicity and remember that the Lord has a system of gospel prerequisites** (read Alma 12:9-11; Doctrine and Covenants 71:1)

The Apostle Peter to Clement of Rome: “The teaching of all doctrine has a certain order: there are some things which must be delivered first, others in the second place, and others in the third, and so on, everything in its order. If these things be delivered in their order, they become plain; but if they be brought forward out of order, they will seem to be spoken against reason.” (Clementine Recognitions, III, 34; cited in Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 1976, 110).

**9. Read the scriptures aloud.**

Teach the students by example to read them slowly and distinctly. Reading this way will help students know that we take these sacred words seriously and believe them to be true and from God. Read D&C 18:34-36.

**Elder Bruce R. McConkie:** “In speaking of these wondrous things I shall use my own words, though you may think they are the words of scripture, words spoken by other Apostles and prophets. “True it is they were first proclaimed by others, but *they are now mine*, for the Holy Spirit of God has borne witness to me that they are true, and it is now as though the Lord had revealed them to me in the first instance. *I have thereby heard his voice and know his word.*” (“The Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” *Ensign*, May 1985.)

**10. Study, ponder, and pray that your teaching will not only be informative or insightful, but also healing** (Matthew 4:23).

## Conclusion

What kind of a teacher are you? What kind of a teacher do you want to be? These are very important questions. Pray earnestly for the gift of teaching, imparting wisdom and knowledge, one of the precious spiritual gifts (Moroni 10:9-10).

**Spencer W. Kimball:** “The Savior has told us to feed his sheep (see John 21:15-17). I fear that all too often many of our members come to Church, sit through a class or meeting, and they then return home having been largely uninformed. It is especially unfortunate when this happens at a time when they may be entering a period of stress, temptation, or crisis. We all need to be touched and nurtured by the Spirit, and effective teaching is one of the most important ways this can happen.” (Conference Report, October 1980, 67.)

**Jeffrey R. Holland:** “I do believe that Christ wants our teaching to lead to healing of the spiritual kind. . . . As with the Master, wouldn’t it be wonderful to measure the success of your teaching by the healing that takes place in the lives of your students?”

“Let me be a little more specific. Rather than just giving a lesson, please try a little harder to help that blind basketball star really see, or the deaf homecoming queen really hear, or the privately lame student body president really walk. Try a little harder to fortify someone so powerfully that whatever temptation the devils of hell throw at her or him, these students will be able to withstand and thus truly in that moment be free from evil. Can you try a little harder to teach so powerfully and so spiritually that you can take that student—that boy or girl who walks alone to school and from school, who sits alone in the lunchroom, who has never had a date, who is the brunt of every joke, who weeps in the darkest night—can you unleash the power in the scriptures and the power in the gospel and ‘cleanse’ that leper, a leper not of his or her making, a leper made by those on our right and on our left and sometimes by us?” (“Teaching, Preaching, Healing,” in *Trusting Jesus*, 2003, 31-32.)