
Teaching — No Greater Call

Elder M. Russell Ballard Of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy



M. Russell Ballard, "Teaching—No Greater Call," *Ensign*, May 1983, 68

For the past several years, I have served as Executive Director of the Church Curriculum Department. When I became fully aware of the immense effort required to prepare a single course of study, I was overwhelmed. I now have much greater appreciation for the approved teaching materials of the Church.

Let me give you an example. The present Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Supplement, which was prepared to help teachers teach the New Testament, was written by a committee of faithful and knowledgeable Church-service writers, who were called and set apart for that service by one of the General Authorities. Their work commenced in the spring of 1980, following General Authority approval of the outline. Writing committee members spent thousands of hours researching, writing, and attending biweekly committee meetings, where the entire committee critiqued each lesson carefully and suggested improvements. The work of the writing committee then was reviewed by General Authority Managing Directors of the Priesthood and Curriculum departments, the General Presidency and the General Board of the Sunday School, Church Editing, and Church Correlation Review. This manual received careful scrutiny at many levels before it was approved for use in Sunday School this year. All teaching materials for the Church follow this same basic procedure in their preparation.

Teachers would be well advised to study carefully the scriptures and their manuals before reaching out for supplemental materials. Far too many teachers seem to stray from the approved curriculum materials without fully reviewing them. If teachers feel a need to use some good supplemental resources beyond the scriptures and manuals in presenting a lesson, they should first consider the use of the Church magazines.

Teachers can stay on safe ground when they use the standard works, the approved manuals, and the writings of the General Authorities. Elder Hyrum M. Smith of the Council of the Twelve said, "There is more to be learned in five minutes reading in the Holy Scriptures, more that is worthy of retention in the memory, more that will be helpful

if we remember and obey them, than we can find in reading all of the six best sellers in every month in the year.” (In Conference Report, Oct. 1917, p. 38.)

I believe there is no greater call in the Church than to be an effective teacher. Effective teaching by the Spirit can stir the souls of men with a desire to live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ more completely.

In each teaching setting, whether it is a family home evening, a class, a sacrament meeting, or a general or stake conference, the teacher should strive to create a heartfelt desire in his students to live worthy of eternal life with our Heavenly Father.

Regarding the need of effective teaching in the Church, President Kimball gave this counsel: “Please take a particular interest in strengthening and improving the quality of teaching in the Church. . . . I fear at times that all too often many of our members come to church, sit through a class or meeting, and then return home having been largely uninformed. . . . We all need to be touched and nurtured by the Spirit, and effective teaching is one of the most important ways this can happen.” (Ensign, May 1981, p. 45.)

The Apostle Paul placed the priority of teachers in the Church next only to the Apostles and the prophets when he said, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers.” (1 Cor. 12:28.)

President Brigham Young used the following story to illustrate the potential influence of teachers: “A traveller in the Eastern country overtook an old gentleman walking towards a town, and asked him, ‘Who is the great man of that little town? Who is your leading man? Who is the governor and controlling spirit of that little place?’ The old gentleman replied, ‘I am the king of that little town.’ ‘Really,’ says the traveller, ‘are you the leading man?’ ‘Yes, sir, I am king in that place, and reign as king.’ ‘How do you make this to appear? Are you in affluent circumstances?’ ‘No, I am poor; but in that little village there are so many children. All those children go to my school; I rule the children, and they rule their parents, and that makes me king.’ ” (Journal of Discourses, 9:39.)

President David O. McKay said, “No greater responsibility can rest upon any man, than to be a teacher of God’s children.” (In Conference Report, Oct. 1916, p. 57.)

May we ask you priesthood leaders who call your members to become teachers to be prayerful and concerned when selecting those who will teach in your stakes, wards, or quorums. Be sure to provide ongoing in-service teacher training. Visit the classrooms on occasion, and express genuine interest in the great cause of teaching. Please do not leave this most important work unattended.

The Lord set the example when he sent Paul to the home of Ananias. The Lord did not leave him to flounder in his newly found faith, but rather, as recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts, Paul received specific training to become a mighty gospel teacher and Apostle.

Should not every teaching setting within the Church be a forum of faith, where the teacher strengthens spirituality and fosters faith in the lives of those being taught?

President J. Reuben Clark's instructions to a group of professional teachers apply to all teachers in the Church. He said, "Your essential and all but sole duty, is to teach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. ... You are to teach this Gospel using as your sources and authorities the Standard Works of the Church, and the words of those whom God has called to lead His people in these last days. You are not ... to intrude into your work your own peculiar philosophy, no matter what its source or how pleasing or rational it seems to you to be." ("The Charted Course of the Church in Education" [an address delivered at the Brigham Young University Summer School in Aspen Grove, Utah, 8 Aug. 1938, p. 9].)

Jesus chided the Sadducees for their incorrect teachings. He said, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." (Matt. 22:29.) The Lord stressed the need for prayerful preparation by teachers, as recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants: "And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach." (D&C 42:14.)

One of the great teachers in my life, President N. Eldon Tanner, said: "In my opinion no greater call can come to anyone than to be a teacher in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We are all teachers in one way or another, whether we have been called and set apart as such or not." ("Teaching Children of God," Ensign, Oct. 1980, p. 2.)

Surely no teachers in the Church are more important than fathers and mothers. No classroom is more important than the home. Parents have been commanded to teach their children the gospel. (See D&C 68:25.)

My brothers and sisters, I believe that every human soul is teaching something to someone nearly every minute here in mortality. May we consider with great reverence the trust that the Lord has placed in us to "teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom." (D&C 88:77.)

May I urge each member of the Church, when you are serving as a teacher, to remember that every human soul is precious to our Father in Heaven, for we are all his children. God's children are entitled to be taught the truths of the gospel in clear and understandable terms so that the Spirit can confirm the truths of the gospel to them.

My plea to the teachers of the Church is to study, ponder, and pray for guidance in your preparation. Use the scriptures and the approved curriculum materials, teaching with the objective to bless and inspire the lives of those assigned to you. Let us also remember that some of the most effective activation work in the Church is accomplished by those teachers who reach out to the inactive, loving and teaching them until they are once again in full fellowship with the Saints.

To the master teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose resurrection we celebrate at this Easter time, I say: I thank thee, oh Lord, for teaching us that there is no greater call than to be an effective teacher. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Gospel topics: curriculum, scriptures, teaching