

# Teaching with the Power and Authority of God

By David M. McConkie

*First Counselor in the Sunday School General Presidency*



The Lord has provided the way for every worthy Latter-day Saint to teach in the Savior's way.

We are grateful beyond any measure of expression for teachers throughout the Church. We love you and have great confidence in you. You are one of the great miracles of the restored gospel.

There is indeed a secret to becoming a successful gospel teacher, to teaching with the power and authority of God. I use the word *secret* because the principles upon which a teacher's success rests can be understood only by those who have a testimony of what took place on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of 1820.

In response to a 14-year-old boy's humble prayer, the heavens were opened. God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared and spoke to the Prophet Joseph Smith. The long-awaited restitution of all things had begun, and the principle of revelation was everlastingly established in our dispensation. Joseph's message, and our message to the world, can be summarized in two words: "God speaks." He spoke anciently, He spoke to Joseph, and He will speak to you. This is what sets you apart from all other teachers in the world. This is why you cannot fail.

You have been called by the spirit of prophecy and revelation and have been set apart by priesthood authority. What does this mean?

First, it means that you are on the Lord's errand. You are His agent, and you are authorized and commissioned to represent Him and to act on His behalf. As His agent, you are entitled to His help. You must ask yourself, "What would the Savior say if He were teaching my class today, and how would He say it?" You must then do likewise.

This responsibility may cause some to feel inadequate or even somewhat fearful. The pathway is not difficult. The Lord has provided the way for every worthy Latter-day Saint to teach in the Savior's way.

Second, you are called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. You must not teach your own ideas or philosophy, even mingled with scriptures. The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation,"<sup>1</sup> and it is only through the gospel that we are saved.

Third, you are commanded to teach the principles of the gospel as they are found in the standard works of the

Church, to teach the words of modern-day apostles and prophets, and to teach that which is taught you by the Holy Ghost.

So where do we begin?

Our first and foremost responsibility is to live so that we can have the Holy Ghost as our guide and companion. When Hyrum Smith sought to become engaged in this latter-day work, the Lord said, “Behold, this is your work, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength.”<sup>2</sup> This is the starting point. The counsel, provided by the Lord to Hyrum, is the same counsel He has provided to the Saints in every age.

Speaking to teachers today, the First Presidency stated: “The most important part of your service will be your own daily spiritual preparation, including prayer, scripture study, and obedience to the commandments. We encourage you to dedicate yourself to living the gospel with greater purpose than ever before.”<sup>3</sup>

It is significant that the First Presidency did not say that the most important part of your service is to prepare your lesson well or to master various teaching techniques. Of course, you must diligently prepare for each lesson and strive to learn how you can teach so as to help your students exercise their agency and allow the gospel to enter into their hearts, but the first and most important part of your service is your personal, spiritual preparation. As you follow this counsel, the First Presidency has promised: “The Holy Ghost will help you to know what to do. Your own testimony will grow, your conversion will be deepened, and you will be strengthened to meet the challenges of life.”<sup>4</sup>

What greater blessings could a teacher desire?

Next, the Lord has commanded that before we seek to declare His word, we must seek to obtain it.<sup>5</sup> You must become men and women of sound understanding by diligently searching the scriptures and by treasuring them up in your hearts. Then as you ask for the Lord’s help, He will bless you with His Spirit and His word. You will have the power of God unto the convincing of men.

Paul tells us that the gospel comes to men in two ways, in word and in power.<sup>6</sup> The word of the gospel is written in the scriptures, and we can obtain the word by diligently searching. The power of the gospel comes into the lives of those who so live that the Holy Ghost is their companion and who follow the promptings they receive. Some focus their attention only on obtaining the word, and they become experts in delivering information. Others neglect their preparation and hope that the Lord in His goodness will somehow help them get through the class period. You cannot expect the Spirit to help you remember the scriptures and principles you have not studied or considered. In order to successfully teach the gospel, you must have both the word and the power of the gospel in your life.

Alma understood these principles when he rejoiced in the sons of Mosiah and how they taught with the power and authority of God. We read:

“They were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

“But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had ... the spirit of revelation.”<sup>7</sup>

Next, you must learn to listen. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught this principle to missionaries. I will quote from Elder Holland's remarks but have taken the liberty of replacing the terms *missionaries* and *investigators* with the terms *teachers* and *students* respectively: "Second only to the responsibility [teachers] have to listen to the Spirit, is the responsibility they have to listen to the [student]. ... If we'll listen with spiritual ears, ... [our students] will tell us what lessons they need to hear!"

Elder Holland continued: "The fact of the matter is [teachers] are still too focused on delivering comfortable, repetitious lesson content rather than focusing on their [students] as individuals."<sup>8</sup>

After you have prepared yourself and your lesson to the very best of your ability, you must be willing to let go. When the quiet promptings of the Holy Ghost come, you must have the courage to set aside your outlines and your notes and go where those promptings take you. When you do this, the lesson you deliver is no longer your lesson, but it becomes the Savior's lesson.

As you dedicate yourself to living the gospel with greater purpose than ever before and search the scriptures, treasuring them up in your heart, the same Holy Ghost, who revealed these words to apostles and prophets anciently, will testify to you of their truthfulness. In essence, the Holy Ghost will reveal them anew to you. When this happens, the words that you read are no longer only the words of Nephi or Paul or Alma, but they become your words. Then, as you teach, the Holy Ghost will be able to bring all things to your remembrance. Indeed, "it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say."<sup>9</sup> When this happens, you will find yourself saying something that you did not plan to say. Then, if you will pay attention, you will learn something from the things that you say when you teach. President Marion G. Romney said, "I always know when I am speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost because I always learn something from what I've said."<sup>10</sup> Remember, a teacher is also a student.

Finally, you must stand as an independent witness of the things you teach and not just be an echo of the words in a manual or the thoughts of others. As you feast upon the words of Christ and strive to live the gospel with greater purpose than ever before, the Holy Ghost will manifest unto you that the things you are teaching are true. This is the spirit of revelation, and this same spirit will carry your message into the hearts of those who desire and are willing to receive it.

Let us now end where we started—in the Sacred Grove. Because of what took place on that beautiful spring morning not so long ago, you are entitled to teach with the power and authority of God. Of this I bear my solemn and independent witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. Romans 1:16.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 11:20.

3. First Presidency, in *Teaching the Gospel in the Savior's Way: A Guide to Come, Follow Me: Learning Resources for Youth* (2012), 2.

4. First Presidency, in *Teaching the Gospel in the Savior's Way*, 2.

5. See Doctrine and Covenants 11:21.

6. See 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

7. Alma 17:2–3.

8. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Divine Companionship” (address given at the seminar for new mission presidents, June 26, 2009), 7, 8, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; emphasis in original.

9. Doctrine and Covenants 100:6.

10. Marion G. Romney, in Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (1975), 304.