

We must never lose this precious gift. We must pay whatever price of faith and obedience is required to retain this great blessing.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith—History 1:14–17.
2. In Conference Report, Oct. 1984, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 52.
3. 2 Nephi 33:1–2.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 35:13.
5. In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 51.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 51.
7. Helaman 4:12.
8. Helaman 4:23.

9. In Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 115; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 78.

President Hinckley

Elder L. Aldin Porter of the Presidency of the Seventy has just spoken to us.

The chorus and congregation will now join in singing “Now Let Us Rejoice.” We shall then hear from Sister Virginia H. Pearce, first counselor in the general Young Women presidency.

The chorus and congregation sang “Now Let Us Rejoice.”

Sister Virginia H. Pearce

Hoping we will be active and faithful

Several months ago my husband performed the baptism of a dear friend. As I sat in the service, my mind and heart raced over her years of preparation for that single event—the principles carefully taught, constantly observed, and quietly accepted, the acknowledgment of God’s hand in life events, the sweet confirmation of the Spirit as difficult but right choices were made. My mind recalled the past and rejoiced in the present, and I couldn’t help but anticipate the future. I hoped with all my heart that this good woman would remain actively connected to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the rest of her life—that she would continue to learn and live the gospel and experience the fulness of its blessings.

This morning, as I remember those hopes, I think about the 375,469¹ others who were baptized last year. And then I think of the rest of us, the roughly nine million who have stepped into the waters

of baptism sometime in the past. Though our stories are individual, each of us came to that ordinance having been taught the true doctrines of the kingdom, having felt the Spirit, having understood how the doctrines fit into the context of our lives, and having demonstrated a willingness to try always to live those truths.

It seems too hard to think about the possibility, even the probability, that not all of us will continue to “cling to the Church and live its principles.”² Many of us will leave and never return to this happy fellowship. Some of us will leave for a time and find our way back with a heightened sense of gratitude for participation in the kingdom of God on earth. The reality of life is that each of us is daily at risk for drifting or even marching into inactivity.

Church classes foster growth

There are so many things in place to help us remain active. This morning I

would like to talk about just one of them. I would like to suggest that the ordinary Church classroom is a powerful setting for steady and continued growth in the gospel.

Sunday School, priesthood, Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, seminary, and institute classes may be held in dedicated buildings, under a tree, or in a home. But each class is part of a plan for lifelong gospel learning. We can have great expectations for the power of those learning hours! Church classes provide a place where we can repeatedly experience the very things that brought us into the waters of baptism, where we learn doctrine and receive the ratifying witness of its truth, where we come to understand how doctrine is applied in the reality of our daily lives and accept the challenge to change our behavior accordingly.

Teach, understand, and apply doctrine

The fundamental curriculum for all classes in the Church is the scriptures³—they contain the unchanging doctrines of the kingdom of God. These truths are what brought us into the Church. If we fail to continue learning them, we may not stay. “You shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom . . . that ye may be prepared in all things.”⁴

Elder Boyd K. Packer said, “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior.”⁵ How do we know which doctrine to teach each week? It is stated in the lesson objective. But how do we come to *understand* the doctrine in a way that it will change our attitudes and behavior?

In order to really understand, we have to see the way doctrine is applied. In the lesson manuals, the suggested stories, examples, activities, and games are intended to help the learners understand doctrine in real-life settings.

Because the daily life of people varies so much in the 160 different coun-

tries where we have organized classes, the stories and examples in the manuals may sometimes confuse the learners. Teachers can prayerfully make adaptations, always taking care that the learning activities chosen truly reflect the doctrine.

A teacher’s goal is greater than just delivering a lecture about truth. It is to invite the Spirit and use techniques which will enhance the possibility that the learner will discover the truth for herself and then be motivated to apply it.

Learn and enhance teaching skills

Although some seem to be born teachers, teaching skills can successfully be learned. Where can you go as a teacher to enhance your skills? Could you watch and learn from others? Perhaps approach an admired teacher, asking him to observe and offer suggestions? What about your Primary presidency, if you are a Primary teacher, or your Sunday School presidency, if you teach Sunday School? Asking your ward teacher development coordinator for regular and specific help would put you in touch with a multitude of resources.⁶ We don’t have to struggle alone in this Church. There is help everywhere. We can prayerfully and courageously seek to learn and practice new techniques.

Church classes affect Church activity

I had a conversation once with a young man I cannot forget. His story of activity, complete inactivity, and a return to activity included the description of two classrooms. He said: “When I was about 15, I started to have a lot of questions about the Church. I thought maybe there would be a chance to talk about my questions at church, but it didn’t happen. In priesthood it seemed like most of the time everybody talked about the game the night before. Sunday School was about the same—maybe a little lesson

thrown in during the last five minutes where the teacher asked questions, and it was kind of 'guess-the-right-answer-from-the-manual-time.'

Well, other things happened—late Saturday nights, a switch to an earlier meeting schedule—and soon the young man's attendance dropped to nothing. Several years passed by until he found himself in church again. This time his face lit up as he described his Sunday School class:

"The teacher was this unimpressive-looking guy, but he was so excited about what he was teaching. He didn't waste a minute. He asked important questions. Everyone had their scriptures. They looked up verses, shared ideas. They listened to each other. They talked about problems at school and how they fit in with the lesson. You could tell that the people in the class were all different, but they had one amazing thing in common—they were all interested in learning the gospel. After five minutes, I knew that this was a good place for me."

How to help class members learn

What a difference in those experiences! Can you imagine hundreds of thousands of classrooms every Sunday, each with a teacher who understands that "the learning has to be done by the pupil. Therefore it is the pupil who has to be put into action. When a teacher takes the spotlight, becomes the star of the show, does all the talking, and otherwise takes over all of the activity, it is almost certain that he is interfering with the learning of the class members."⁷

A skilled teacher doesn't think, "What shall I do in class today?" but asks, "What will my students do in class today?"; not, "What will I teach today?" but rather, "How will I help my students discover what they need to know?"⁸ The skilled teacher does not want students who leave the class talking about how

magnificent and unusual the teacher is. This teacher wants students who leave talking about how magnificent the gospel is!

Create trust and safety in class

Learning occurs best in an atmosphere of trust and safety. This means that each person's questions and contributions are respected. When we feel safe and included, we can ask questions that will help us to understand the gospel. We can share insights and faith that might help someone else.⁹ We can stumble without embarrassment as we try to apply the lessons taught. Conversely, when we feel that we must protect and defend ourselves or seem more righteous than we are, our energy is used counterproductively and our learning and the learning of others is severely limited. Maintaining a climate of trust and safety is a responsibility the teacher and the learners share.

The beginning, middle, and end of class

I have heard Sister Janette Beckham, Young Women general president, talk simply about teaching a class. She says:

"It is the teacher's responsibility to introduce the lesson and help lay the groundwork. The middle part belongs to the students where they participate and work toward understanding and application. Then the teacher must watch the time, because she owns the last few minutes of class. She has a responsibility to clarify and summarize the doctrine taught so that learners will not leave confused about the message. Then she can bear personal testimony of the principle under discussion."¹⁰

A successful Young Women class

In conclusion, will you come with me into a classroom of 12- and 13-year-old

young women. Listen as you hear the learners discover doctrine. Notice the experience the teacher provides for the learners so that they can connect the doctrine to the reality of their lives. Feel the accompanying witness of the Spirit:

Our teacher moves her chair closer into the semicircle of five girls. "We have a guest waiting outside," she begins. "It is Sister Jonas. She has agreed to show us her tiny baby and tell us how she feels about being a new mother. As you watch this new little baby, would you also notice his mother—how she treats the baby, what she does, what she says. We'll talk about her visit after she leaves."

Sister Jonas comes in, spends seven or eight minutes talking about her baby and answering questions. The girls thank her, and she leaves the classroom.

"The baby was darling, wasn't he?" our teacher responds to the delighted hum of the class. "But what did you notice about the mother?"

A minute of silence and then a response: "Well, she was happy." Another: "She kind of rocked back and forth the whole time she was holding him." A few more responses, and then Katie slowly begins, "She—ummm—she talked really quietly."

"Could you say more about that?" the teacher coaxes.

"Well, her voice reminds me of my mother's voice when she called from the hospital to tell us we had a new baby sister last year."

The teacher, turning to the other girls: "What do you think? Did anyone else notice her voice?"

The girls become more thoughtful and begin to reply with words like "reverence," "heaven," "love."

The teacher: "I think I understand. I believe those words come to our minds because we are recognizing a great gift from our Heavenly Father. He loves us and trusts us so much that He is willing

to share His creative powers with us. We feel such gratitude and reverence for this trust. Motherhood is a *divine* role."

After this clear statement of doctrine and testimony, our teacher moves on to an activity where the girls identify qualities their own mothers exhibit that show an understanding of the divinity of motherhood. "Could each of you prepare for motherhood right now by practicing one of these very virtues—maybe being more patient, kinder, or more positive this week?"

Each girl talks about her choice. Our teacher bears personal testimony. The closing prayer is offered.

A simple class. No sensational stories. No scholarly class members—just ones who come prepared to participate. No extraordinarily gifted teacher—just one who prayerfully prepares and uses techniques that allow her to help class members understand and apply true doctrine.

Strengthen each other through classes

I telephoned our newly baptized friend last week to ask how things were going for her. Her response was enthusiastic: "My husband and I have been called to teach the 15- and 16-year-olds, and I'm learning so much!" I felt reassured and excited. What better place than a classroom—for her and for each of us!

President Hinckley encourages us: "We are all in it together, all of us, and we have a great work to do. Every teacher can be a better teacher than he or she is today."¹¹ I would add: Every learner can be a better learner than he or she is today. And every classroom can be a better classroom.

I pray that we will continue to hold on to one another through effective classroom learning. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 28; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 21.
2. "Cling to the Church and live its principles and I do not hesitate to promise you that your lives will be happy, that your accomplishments will be significant, and that you will have reason to get on your knees and thank the Lord for all He has done for you in giving to you the marvelous and wonderful opportunities that you have" (Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in *Church News*, 3 Aug. 1996, 2).
3. See *Instructions for Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders on Curriculum* (1994), 1.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 88:77, 80.
5. "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, 20; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 17).
6. See *Teaching—No Greater Call* (1978); *Instructions for Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders on Teacher Development* (1993); *Teach One Another* (videocassette, 1990).
7. *Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders* (1994), 14.

8. *Teaching the Gospel*, 13.

9. See Romans 1:11–12.

10. Unpublished talk.

11. "We are all in it together, all of us, and we have a great work to do. Every teacher can be a better teacher than he or she is today. Every officer can be a better officer than he or she is today. Every father can be a better father, every mother can be a better mother, every husband can be a better husband, every wife a better wife, every child a better child. We are on the road that leads to immortality and eternal life and today is a part of it. Let us never forget it" (Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in *Church News*, 4 Nov. 1995, 2).

Additional references: 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Jacob 1:19; Alma 1:26; 29:8; Doctrine and Covenants 42:12; 43:8; 50:22; 88:122.

President Hinckley

The women who speak in these conferences add a certain luster. Thank you, Sister Pearce, for your message.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder David B. Haight

I'm honored to be here, to be part of this great conference. I'm glad that the First Presidency saw fit to have me back on the program. As we get older we have some limitations. I understand mine, and sometimes we can learn to sort of plow around them. If our vision starts getting a little weaker, I've found that we can compensate by doing other things and plowing around that little weakness and maybe strengthening some others. But out of all of that, I want you to know of my love for the gospel and for my knowledge of its truthfulness.

"Now let us rejoice"

We were singing a great song as the intermediate hymn, "Now Let Us Rejoice," written by W. W. Phelps (*Hymns*, no. 3). That was written following an incident in Independence, Missouri, where Brother Phelps was the editor of a little newspaper. He had a printing press, and the people who were unfriendly toward the Church decided to do away with it, and the mob broke in and burned the building and destroyed the printing press. They burned some 200 homes of