

# *Becoming More Teachable*

MELISSA HEATH

Over the past month our ward has welcomed several newborn babies. Each baby comes to this earth curious and eager to learn. They want to taste everything, chew everything, and pull on everything. I imagine that from a baby's point of view, everything in this world is new and amazing.

As we anticipated our exodus from the spirit world, we placed great trust in the plan of salvation. We trusted Heavenly Father and our Savior. In Their wisdom, They knew that our spirits would initially flourish best in the physical form of a baby. When our spirits were united with our physical bodies, we became helpless and totally dependent on our caregivers. We forgot our previous knowledge and relationships. It must have been a huge shock to have our spirit and physical body unite. But we were confident in the plan of salvation—we were confident that this earthly life, including the merging of our spirit and physical body, was a necessary step in our eternal progression. Confident in our Savior's Atonement, we came to earth knowing that we could return to our heavenly home. Each of us started our life fresh and innocent, and we began to learn the many things we needed to know in order to function on this earth and continue our eternal progression.

We are children of our Heavenly Father; each individual who comes to this earth is given an extraordinary capacity for learning and growth. We have opportunities in this life to learn information that would have been difficult—if not impossible—to learn in the spirit world. For instance, learning to ride a bicycle would be difficult to accomplish if we only observed others riding their bicycles. Even more difficult would be learning to ride a bicycle if our sole preparation was merely reading books about bicycle riding. Learning by doing is an amazing process. Most of us scraped our knees and elbows as we repeatedly tried to master cycling—without the training wheels. Most of us were successful. We now ride a bicycle without much thought regarding our initial difficulties, fears, and injuries. Fortunately, as young children we were not faced with simultaneous challenges that overwhelmed our capacity to learn and progress. For example, on the same day—or week—that we learned to ride a bicycle, we were not faced with learning to drive a car, pilot an airplane, and fly a rocket to the moon.

---

*Melissa Heath was a BYU associate professor of counseling psychology and special education when this devotional was given on 29 May 2012.*

Typically, as Nephi described in 2 Nephi 28:30, our learning progresses “line upon line, precept upon precept.”

At Brigham Young University, before we “go forth to serve,” we “enter to learn.” We read books, listen to lectures, discuss topics, write papers, and take tests. Many of you will complete a practicum or internship in which you will apply your academic learning to real-life situations. “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36).

*Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.*

*And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. [D&C 130:18–19]*

Because attaining knowledge is such an important task—and a lifelong endeavor—it is important to understand the meaning and implications of being teachable. When we are teachable, the Holy Ghost bears witness of truth and we increase in knowledge and wisdom.

In 2 Nephi 28, the prophet Nephi saw our day and warned us about the challenges of living and learning in these latter days. Even though Nephi offered these words approximately 2,572 years ago, his vision was inspired and crystal clear regarding these perilous times. The chapter synopsis in the Book of Mormon reads:

*Many false churches shall be built up in the last days—They shall teach false and vain and foolish doctrines—Apostasy shall abound because of false teachers—The devil shall rage in the hearts of men—He [the devil] shall teach all manner of false doctrines.*

Likening the scriptures to my personal life, I took this synopsis and placed responsibility on myself, the learner: In 2012 men and

women shall join many false organizations—They shall learn false and foolish doctrines—Apostasy shall abound, and I will be pulled into personal apostasy if I listen to and learn from false teachers—Many will allow the devil to rage in their hearts—I will not allow the devil to rage in my heart. I will avoid learning all manner of false doctrines from the devil’s teachings.

Although the very existence of false teachings is troublesome, our eternal progression is blocked when we accommodate and assimilate these false teachings into our beliefs and way of life. The end product is misery. As Alma warned his son Corianton, “Wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). In direct opposition to Satan’s false teachings, the gospel of Jesus Christ and our obedience to God’s commandments help us move forward in our eternal progression (see Mosiah 2:41). In regard to moving forward, 2 Nephi 28:30 emphasizes the importance of being teachable:

*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.*

Today I am recommending four strategies to help us become more teachable and to help facilitate our eternal progression: (1) stick to the gospel’s fundamental principles; (2) have a grateful heart; (3) conquer pride by choosing to be humble; and (4) recalibrate and get back on track.

### **Stick to the Gospel’s Fundamental Principles**

Have you ever studied for an exam without knowing the exact information that you would be required to know? The exam may have covered several textbooks, and the exam’s grade may have factored heavily into your

course grade. This uncertainty of not knowing what to memorize or what to study can cause great anxiety because you do not know which pieces of information are the most important—or which pieces of information the professor thinks are the most important.

Sometimes we are overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information available through the Internet and library resources. There are literally thousands of books available on every imaginable topic. One important lifelong skill is the ability to prioritize information, focus on the most important pieces, and know how these pieces fit into the bigger picture. During His ministry the Savior boiled down critical information and summarized key points to help us focus on fundamental principles. His words and actions provide a perfect model for us to follow. He emphasized the importance of obedience, and, in response to a lawyer's question, He identified the first and greatest commandment:

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. [Matthew 22:37–40]*

His teachings identified the gospel's fundamental principles—the very most important things we need to know and do.

In a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith and recorded in section 42 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord said, “If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments” (D&C 42:29). Obedience is important, and—interestingly—love and obedience are paired together. This will not change: we are expected to keep the commandments—to show our love for God we must keep His commandments. This principle is important and is reiterated by every prophet.

Contrary to Satan's teachings, being obedient is not restrictive; in fact, obedience keeps us free from spiritual bondage. Obedience allows us to have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost and keeps our minds open to learning and feeling the love of our Savior and our Heavenly Father. We must stick to the fundamental principle of being obedient because obedience helps us become more teachable and facilitates our eternal progression.

The gospel's fundamental principles—such as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance and turning from sin, obedience to the Ten Commandments, and avoidance of pride—are repeated throughout the Book of Mormon by the prophet Abinadi, King Benjamin, Alma, and Moroni. In the scriptures several prophets and righteous men closed their earthly lives with a “parting message”—final words of wisdom that clarified the fundamental principles of the gospel. In the movies, dying individuals also give their parting messages as a nice way to emotionally emphasize critical information and manipulate the audience's emotions, often with dramatic music to draw some tears. However, the scriptural accounts of parting messages are accompanied by the witness of the Holy Ghost. These messages contain the gospel's fundamental teachings. These teachings are real, not imaginary, and in no way are these messages intended to manipulate or control the listener.

Unfortunately, those who were there to hear firsthand the passionate message of a dying prophet may or may not have benefited—everything depending on *if* the individual was teachable. Those leaving their final parting messages most often desired that the younger generation and future generations might avoid common pitfalls and carnal behavior that stunt the ability to learn and halt eternal progression. These righteous men passed the spiritual baton on to the next generation. It is important to note these repeated messages—the fundamentals—all of which are intended to help us

prepare for our eternal exam, often referred to in the scriptures as the final judgment. When reading the scriptures, we must listen carefully and learn fundamental lessons as if we were sitting at the prophet’s knee, witnessing his final urgent message. These parting messages place an emphasis on fundamentals that are repeated by our modern-day prophets.

Listen to, learn, and stick to the gospel’s fundamental principles.

### **Have a Grateful Heart**

The Lord loves a grateful heart. In November 2000 President Gordon B. Hinckley urged the youth to “be grateful”—the first of six Bs he counseled the youth to follow. He urged them to walk with gratitude in their hearts and to express gratitude to their parents, friends, and teachers. He also counseled the youth to “thank the Lord for His goodness to you” (“First Presidency Message: A Prophet’s Counsel and Prayer for Youth,” *Ensign*, January 2001, 4). This inspired advice applies to individuals of all ages, including university students, staff, and faculty.

A grateful heart is an important ingredient in becoming more teachable. When I came to BYU in 1999, I was awestruck by the incredible beauty of the mountains, particularly Mount Timpanogos and the way morning’s light struck the edges and angles of the rocky cliffs. Each day as I drove to campus I breathed in a deep, satisfied breath and said a prayer of gratitude for the beauty of these mountains. One day I said to myself, “I will say a prayer of gratitude each day as I soak in the earth’s beauty.” Several months later I became preoccupied with my to-do list and my responsibilities. As I hurriedly pulled into BYU’s parking lot one day and gathered my things, I had a moment of clarity: It had been several days since I had even noticed the mountains, let alone said my prayer of gratitude for the beauty of those mountains. I had developed a spiritual callus. The mountains were still there,

but, sadly, and to my detriment, other things clouded my attention. I resolved to daily take time to enjoy the beauty around me and to express my gratitude to Heavenly Father. Feelings of gratitude soften our hearts and open our minds to learning.

The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke frequently of the importance of expressing gratitude to the Lord. Though facing challenging situations, persecution, and the task of carrying the responsibility of opening this dispensation, Joseph Smith was inspired to share these words:

*And ye must give thanks unto God in the Spirit for whatsoever blessing ye are blessed with. [D&C 46:32]*

*And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more. [D&C 78:19]*

*Verily I say unto you my friends, fear not, let your hearts be comforted; yea, rejoice evermore, and in everything give thanks. [D&C 98:1]*

In his recent April general conference address titled “Thanks Be to God,” Elder Russell M. Nelson commented, “How much better it would be if all could be more aware of God’s providence and love and express that gratitude to Him. . . . Our degree of gratitude is a measure of our love for Him.” He also quoted Ammon’s teaching from Alma 26:8: “Let us give thanks to [God], for he doth work righteousness forever” (*Ensign*, May 2012, 77).

Choosing to have a grateful heart is an important strategy in becoming more teachable because it prepares our hearts to be humble and open to the promptings of the Spirit.

### **Conquer Pride by Choosing to Be Humble**

In his November 2000 address President Hinckley also urged the youth to “be humble”

—the fifth of the six Bs. He identified the meek and the humble as “those who are teachable” (“Prophet’s Counsel,” 10). In Doctrine and Covenants 112:10, the Lord counseled Thomas B. Marsh to “be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers.”

When we are humble, we are ready to listen to and follow the Lord’s direction. In the April 1989 general conference, President Ezra Taft Benson spoke on a topic that remains especially relevant to me: pride. He described pride as “the great stumbling block to Zion” (“Beware of Pride,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 7). Pride makes us deaf to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. Pride takes a heavy toll on our earthly life and on our eternal life. When we allow pride to enter into our lives, we will not and cannot learn the most important things in this life nor in the eternities. We become hard-hearted, stiffnecked, and spiritually blinded. President Benson observed that for those who are infected with pride, “the world shouts louder than the whisperings of the Holy Ghost” (“Beware of Pride,” 5).

President Benson identified the core ingredient of pride as enmity, which starts with competitive feelings and a desire to be better than others. Then come feelings of being offended, then contentiousness, and ultimately an intense hatred toward God and mankind. The opposite of humility, enmity is the alluring and controlling power Satan uses. Rather than the Savior’s “thy will be done, and the glory be thine,” Satan’s statement is “my will be done and the glory be mine.” It is a battle of the wills (see “Beware of Pride,” 4–5).

What characteristics of pride impede learning? For the prideful, the purpose of life narrows down to an obsession with being better than others. One’s focus becomes warped, dark, and evil. Pride destroys unity and oneness. It destroys us and those around us. Pride keeps us from confessing our sins; it keeps us from forsaking our sins. Pride literally diverts

and squelches the physical and spiritual ability to learn. Pride leads to rebellion, hate, contentiousness, unrighteous dominion, and abusive control of others. Sadly, the prideful are easily offended, they are unforgiving, and they will not take correction and feedback. In other words, their learning and all interpersonal relationships in this life are stunted. Even more tragic is the poor eternal prognosis for those who succumb to pride.

Although pride is potentially a terminal condition, there is an antidote: humility. Choose to be humble. When we are humble we are teachable, opening our minds and hearts to spiritual learning. In Mosiah 3:19 King Benjamin stated:

*For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.*

On a personal note, to help me avoid flattery and deception and the end result of sliding down the slippery slope of pride, I have created a realistic and disturbing image: Although flattery feeds our ego, it is nothing more than a lure snatched by a starving rat now writhing on a cheese-less trap. So avoid the cheese! Once the trap snaps shut, it is very hard to escape. In becoming teachable, we must conquer pride by choosing to be humble.

### **Recalibrate and Get Back on Track**

As we recognize we are off the path and are headed in the wrong direction, we must recalibrate and head back in the right direction. On a recent trip to the Dallas-Fort Worth area, before I left the airport in a rental car, I plugged in my GPS and proceeded to type

in my destination. I left the rental-car lot and listened carefully for directions.

“Turn left and proceed 500 feet.” I carefully followed those directions. About four turns into the trip, the GPS told me to turn left. But on my left was a barrier blockading a closed road. Luckily it was around 11:00 p.m. and no other traffic was on the road. As I started to panic, the GPS clearly stated, “Merge onto I-15 and head north, traveling toward Salt Lake City.” Now I was totally flustered. For some reason my GPS thought I was in Utah! I pulled off the road, turned off the GPS, waited a few seconds, restarted the GPS, and retyped the Texas address. Within a few seconds the correct set of directions was displayed, and I was guided to the intended destination—my targeted goal.

From a spiritual sense, when we realize we are going in the wrong direction, we must stop and get back on the right track—and the sooner the better. From personal experience, I know that the best way to get back on track and keep on track is to stick to those things that I know are right and true. For me this includes daily scripture reading, personal prayer, and attending sacrament meeting. Is this basic and simple? Yes, it is. However, when I fall short in doing those three things, my learning is stunted, because I lose calibration and start to head off in the wrong direction.

A few years ago I attended groups sponsored by the LDS twelve-step addiction recovery program. I attended with a dear friend, and we supported each other. These groups are held every day of the week at various locations throughout the Wasatch Front. Recovering from addiction is a lifelong challenge.

My friend and I learned practical lessons from group members. I learned that successful days of sobriety are never lost. When you slip and fall back into old patterns of addiction, it is critical that you immediately get back on track, repent by following the necessary steps, and move forward to add another day of sobriety to your “new history.” You do not lose any of your days of sobriety. Instead, you keep those previous days of sobriety and simply add your new days to the tally. I appreciated the fact that you keep making “new history”—what a positive way to think about getting back on track and staying on track.

Contrary to Satan’s voice, which tells us that things are hopeless, that we are worthless, and that we are forever lost, our Savior wants all of us to repent as quickly as possible, get back on track, and come unto Him.

### **Closing**

It is my prayer that we strive to become more teachable by knowing and living the gospel’s fundamental principles, having a grateful heart, conquering pride by choosing to be humble, and recalibrating and getting back on track. Living these strategies takes courage and honesty, a willingness to submit to the Lord’s eternal truths, and a trust in God—that He knows each of us personally and wants us to become more teachable. He wants us to be teachable so that we can learn of Him, make changes to be like Him, and return to Him.

The Holy Ghost bears witness of truth. Listen for that witness. If we are teachable, we will feel and hear that spiritual witness. I bear testimony that God lives and that Jesus is the Christ, our Perfect Example, in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, amen.