

## Mighty Teachers with Perfect Hearts

I recently read for the first time the Old Testament account of David's "mighty men." David has always been one of my favorite scripture heroes who as a youth could stand against impossible odds and fight for the right with God's help. But I wasn't aware that later he was the chief captain of King Saul's army as they fought to regain their lands from the powerful Philistines. David in his wisdom surrounded himself with only thirty-seven, hand-selected captains considered good enough to receive the coveted title of "mighty man" (2 Samuel 23:39).

This outstanding group of soldiers possessed incredible qualities. In Chronicles we read, "They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow" (1 Chronicles 12:2). They were men "fit for battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains" (1 Chronicles 12:8). These mighty men had developed the skills of a warrior to a very high degree. They were determined and, as with the faces of lions, completely without fear. They were prepared for battle.

In one account, David's army was in the middle of a plain preparing for battle against the Philistines. David's army became scared, and they all ran for safety except for David and three of his mighty men who did not break rank and stood alone against the Philistines, and one of these mighty men killed 800 Philistines in that battle. David and the mighty men were victorious.

These mighty men were not only powerful in war, but they were also loyal and compassionate to David. David and his army were living in caves outside the Philistine-ruled and guarded Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In a moment of despair, David longingly wished for a drink of water from a well in Bethlehem that at that time was a well of particularly refreshing water. David simply expressed a desire for a taste of the cool, refreshing liquid from the Bethlehem well. Without command or assignment or even duty, three of the mighty men broke through enemy lines at great personal risk to travel to Bethlehem. They drew water out of the well and returned, again at great risk through enemy lines, to bring the wonderful refreshment of Bethlehem water to David. David was so overcome by the demonstrated act of personal, unsolicited service that he refused to drink it and consecrated it unto the Lord (1 Chronicles 11:17-19).

These mighty men of David, we learn, were "men that had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). These men were informed and educated in matters relating to the conditions of their times and their duties. These men were diverse in their talents and in their services.

These were mighty men who "could keep rank" (1 Chronicles 12:33) in difficult times. These men understood the need for an organization that would stay in place during dangerous and challenging times. They were able to adhere to a broad vision of their country, their king, their leader, and their God.

But the quality that most intrigues me is that these mighty men of David had what the scriptures call “perfect hearts” (1 Chronicles 12:38). In these same passages, we find that a perfect heart is not a “double heart” (1 Chronicles 12:33) or a heart that is compelled to seek its own personal interest ahead of that of Israel or that of God. We also learn that a perfect heart is “one heart” (1 Chronicles 12:38) with their desire to serve David and each other. These thirty-seven mighty men continued to serve David when he was made king over all of Israel. They were mighty men with perfect hearts.

Over the last few years in my assignment as a dean of this college, I’ve also have become more and more aware and grateful that I, too, have the privilege of surrounding myself every day with each of you who are also mighty servants with perfect hearts. Even though I doubt a single one of us could use “both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow” or “handle shield and buckler” or be as “swift as the roes upon the mountains,” but I am confident each of you is a mighty servant with perfect heart who understands our times, who keeps rank, who is valiant, who is loyal, who is compassionate, who is faithful to covenants, and who willingly serves.

So our theme for today’s college meeting is “Mighty Teachers with Perfect Hearts.” And I hope we can focus more specifically on what it means to have a perfect heart in relationship to teaching. These last few months I’ve been thinking about the perfect teaching heart, and principles of rhetoric have influenced my understanding of this teaching heart. So bear with me as I introduce what may appear to be a digression but hopefully will eventually clarify and explain some fundamental principles of teaching.

One of the first concepts I teach my writing students is the rhetorical or communication triangle. There are slight variations of this triangle, but I teach that the center of the triangle is the message, and each point of the triangle represents elements that influence that message: the writer, the reader, and the subject. Classical rhetoric through Aristotle also addresses this triangle but with the terms *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, and we could spend considerable time discussing each of these in detail. However, let’s simplify the terms and call *ethos* the ethics or values of the writer, *pathos*, the emotions of the reader, and *logos* the reasoning of the subject. Now, let’s make a brief connection to the perfect teaching heart. In the classical ancient sense, according to Parker Palmer in *The Courage to Teach*, the heart is “the place where the intellect [*logos*] and emotion [*pathos*] and spirit and will [*ethos*] will converge in the human self” (11). The perfect teaching heart, then is when we as teachers develop, study, nurture, explore, and practice each of these elements in our own classrooms.

Each element of the perfect teaching heart is significant, each is integrated, each is essential. For instance, *logos* represents our own personal scholarship of our own disciplines. Each of us to have a perfect teaching heart must be a scholar in our field. Three years ago, President Bednar’s fall address to the faculty focused on scholarship. I’m quoting now:

Will we at BYU-Idaho be engaged in scholarship? Absolutely yes. We must! If we are not engaged in scholarship, then we have no business being a university. So absolutely we will engage in the work of scholarship.

President Bednar continues to explain that in addition to the scholarship of our disciplines, we have opportunities to advance the scholarship of learning and teaching, especially in a gospel context. We must be scholars; we must know what we teach, and in terms of the scriptures, we must expand our minds through the Spirit (Alma 32:34).

Next, *pathos* focuses on our students and their diversity and needs. Students are the primary focus of our stewardship as teachers. Our students individually and collectively are often our reasons for doing what we do, when we do. We're in the classroom because of our students. However, some of the most sobering times in my career happen when I do not look deeper into a student's work in my class, when I've not recognized that a student isn't understanding what we're discussing, or when a student is too preoccupied with the challenges of life, that she isn't learning.

No matter how well I understand my discipline, it matters little if my students don't understand basic principles, how the principles work, what the principles mean, and why the principles are important. No matter how well I understand my discipline, it matters little if my students are not able to demonstrate their abilities to use the principles, adapt the principles or customize the principles for different purposes, audiences, and expectations. And no matter how well I understand my discipline, it matters little if my students do not understand the principles based on their and another's feelings and worldview, to experience the world for themselves and as another person experiences it. As teachers, we must reach students and through the Spirit "enhance [their] understanding" (Alma 32).

And finally, *ethos* focuses on us as teachers, on our own values and on our own personalities and individual teaching styles. With so much going on in our lives, we sometimes forget why we have become teachers. Often our initial desires to teach are associated with a teacher who has touched our lives. For just a few moments, jot down the names of some teachers who have made a difference in your lives and list a quality or two that you associate with that teacher. [After a few minutes of thinking, have faculty pair/share their responses.] Let's popcorn some of the qualities. These teachers and their qualities remind us good teaching and teachers come in many forms, and that the imprint of good teaching remains long after the facts they gave us have faded. Therefore, it is important to thank these teachers, not matter how belatedly, with our gratitude.

However, we're not finished with this exercise. I'm going to ask a second related question that will require a little more thought. Please jot down an idea response. Ready? "What was it about *you* that allowed this great learning experience to happen?" Parker Palmer reveals,

[Teaching and learning] are a mutuality that requires more than meeting the right teacher: the teacher must also meet the right student. In this encounter, not only

are the qualities of the mentor revealed, but the qualities of the student are drawn out in a way that is equally revealing” (21).

Now let’s popcorn some of the qualities we experienced as students that helped make our teachers more successful.

The next reasonable exercise we should follow up with is what are the qualities we possess as teachers that connect with our students? What are their qualities that connect with us to help us be successful? To strengthen ourselves as teachers, we must regularly reflect on and assess our teaching qualities. We need to consciously grow as educators and to comprehend why we teach how and what we do, and to “enlarge [our] souls” through the Spirit (Alma 32).

So what does all of this have to do with being mighty teachers with perfect hearts? Just as anciently the complete or whole heart consisted of *logos, ethos, pathos*, the same applies to us today. To be mighty teachers with perfect hearts we need to find a balance and an integrated weaving of the needs of our students, a knowledge of our disciplines, and an understanding of ourselves as teachers. I’ve only introduced these concepts, but later this morning, others will help clarify. Julie Engstrom will discuss the heart of the student, Larry Thompson the heart of the scholar, and Chris Geddes the heart of the teacher.

Now on a more personal note, this past year has been perhaps the most difficult academic year of my career. However challenging and at times heart-breaking it’s been, I’m grateful for the significant lessons I’ve learned. Without providing specific examples, please let me share some insights that have made this difficult year rewarding:

- I’ve learned to not play politics but just to work hard. By working hard, opportunities will come that often become blessings.
- I’ve learned the need to push myself professionally by teaching new courses or changing the course I regularly teach. For me, that has been teaching the English teaching methods course and a grammar class—I’ve learned for the first time how to diagram a sentence.
- I’ve learned the necessity and the value of working with others to share and lighten the load—I don’t have to do it all alone.
- I’ve learned that there is no one way to accomplish a task or to overcome a challenge. If one way doesn’t work, another way often will.
- I’ve learned that success takes time.
- I’ve learned to be intensely loyal to students, to faculty, to the university, and to the Church.
- I’ve learned that people are doing the best they can most of the time.
- I’ve learned that it’s easier to accomplish more by having a clearer vision and broader perspective while paying attention to daily details and needs.
- I’ve learned it’s best to communicate with my mouth closed.
- I’ve learned the value of listening to those who often aren’t heard but who continue quietly to attend to their challenges.

- I've learned to appreciate the possibility of the impossible.
- I've learned that family and loved ones are my refuge.
- I've learned the difference between praying and praying continually.
- I've learned the difference between a hardened heart and a softened heart.
- I've learned the need to be anchored to prevent drifting.
- I've learned that when we give unconditionally of ourselves we are blessed without measure.
- I've learned that the scriptures provide answers to nearly all of our professional challenges.
- I've learned that by accepting and loving individuals for who they are, we see Christ-like characteristics in them that will strengthen our own weaknesses.
- I've learned that through the Holy Ghost we can enlarge our souls, enhance our understanding, and expand our minds.
- I've learned that if we're thankful for all things, even the unpleasant, we will be glorious.
- And I've learned that we do not yet comprehend the blessings our Heavenly Father has prepared for us and that things are now difficult to bear; nevertheless to be of good cheer, He will guide us because He wants us to succeed gloriously.

May we all, with our Heavenly Father's help and help from each other, become mighty teachers with perfect hearts, and may we knit our hearts as one (Mosiah 18:21).

Bless you all. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.