

Teaching Souls Scholarship and Discipleship

I'd personally like to express my gratitude for being here with you today. Seeing you helps me look forward to another year of school. It really does seem just a few short years ago that I sat in my first fall meeting as a new faculty member here. Five years before that I had graduated from Ricks College, and I couldn't believe it when Dean Sorensen introduced me as a new faculty member. Even though I was terrified and excited, I remember Ron Messer putting his arm around me and welcoming me to the Ricks family—I did not realize then the significance of his welcome. In a very real sense, when we join the faculty at BYU-Idaho, we become members of a family, especially members of a department family. This is now my twenty-fourth fall faculty meeting, and during all those years, so many of you have become my family—you've become my brothers and sisters; in fact, for most of us, we see much more of each other than we do our own siblings.

As members of a faculty family, we also have a legacy of ancestors who have prepared a way for us to be here. Nearly every one of us is here because of a vacancy created when a dedicated teacher stepped aside allowing us to enter. For instance, the wonderful people who are new today are here because of Brad Clark, David Norris, John Bonner, Rita Lusk, Larry Thompson, John Galbraith, and Randall Miller. We welcome you as we remember them, especially Brad and Dave with their shortened lives.

Selecting new individuals to join our faculty has been a careful, deliberate, and prayerful process. For nearly fifteen years now, I have been directly involved in the hiring process. I learned early that in many ways it is easy to find a qualified individual to fill a position, but the great challenge is finding the rarer person who can carry on with the spirit and strength of the teacher who has just left. I believe that those teachers who exemplify the "Spirit of Ricks" do two things: first, they teach souls and not just students, and second, they also teach faith with knowledge. Let us look first at teaching souls.

At BYU-Idaho our mission is to teach souls. In Doctrine and Covenants 88, we are taught this eternal truth: "And the spirit and the body are the soul of man" (15). Yes, that means our souls are made up of our physical bodies and our divine spirits. In terms of teaching and learning, I believe that students' souls consist of their minds and their hearts, their intellects and their spirits. Because of this revealed understanding, we should not be like some teachers whose focus is on the mind of the student, on what the mind can gain in intelligence, knowledge, and wisdom—these teachers unintentionally teach only to the intellectual part of the student. Our job is harder here at BYU-Idaho; we should teach to the *whole* student, to the soul of the student. Yes, we should teach to the mind and the intellect of the student, but we also have a responsibility to teach to that same student's spirit. When we prepare our lessons, we should consider two questions: "What do I want my students' minds to learn today?" and "What do I want my students' spirits to learn today?" We want to teach to the *whole* student, to the *soul* of the student.

At times we may feel torn to do one or the other, to teach directly to the mind or to teach directly to the spirit. I contend that we can't balance, that we can't do one or the other; rather we must do both, be all, be whole teachers. In this light, Doctrine and Covenants 64:33-34 gives us a perspective of wholeness. This revelation was given in the fall of 1831 when the Brethren were busy making preparations to leave Ohio to go to Missouri. The Lord comforts and challenges them with this:

Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great. Behold the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days.

I know we're not beginning our journeys to Missouri, but we do have divine yet difficult work to do in our classrooms. We are also laying foundations for a great work, the results of which are difficult to envision because they lie in the distant future. Yet our Heavenly Father promises us that small things, the small things we do in our classrooms, can lead to that which is great. He promises us that He will lighten our load and that we will eat the good fruit of the land. For us to achieve this assistance and these blessings, what does the Lord require of us? He requires from each of us our heart (and I believe the heart is an individual's spirit) **and** a willing mind—both, not one or the other, but all—the soul. Therefore, as teachers we should also concentrate on both our students minds and their spirits—their souls.

Let me share examples of two past teachers who have taught to the whole student—to their souls.

Jon Perry first introduced me to Shakespeare when I was 18 years old sitting in the back of his class. I don't remember reading the plays, but I remember Jon sitting on the edge of the desk retelling Shakespeare stories written in the form of plays—Jon could tell stories. Although my memories of the plays are dim, I vividly remember Jon frequently asking us to check our ambitions to determine if we shared any strengths or flaws revealed by any of Shakespeare's characters. He would ask how we were like Iago, Macbeth, Falstaff, Lear, Cordelia, Henry V, Hamlet, Isabella, Portia, Shylock, Mercutio, Rosalind, Helena, or Orsino. At the end of nearly every class, Jon would ask what the play had to do with our individual lives. He wanted us to see characters as individuals, as real people manifested in our and others' everyday lives. Jon also held student conferences long before researchers advocated their efficacy. Jon always had students lined up at his office door which was always open. He would ask them about their classes, their roommates, their student wards, and their families at home. In fact when I finished teaching Jon's composition classes after his death, one student told me how much she missed talking with him about her papers—and undoubtedly talking about a lot more. Jon taught souls.

Norman Gage was my reason for being an English major. Norm was my writing and literature teacher before and after my mission. That man changed my life. In fact, I asked him to speak at my mission farewell. I clearly remember Norm standing at the

pulpit of my mission farewell focusing on Alma's counsel to his son Corianton, "That is no excuse for thee, my son" and the need to be responsible for one's life and actions. He was my first exposure to thematic teaching with his testimony-building and life-shaping literature text *The Way of the Soul*. He used literature to exemplify three phases of the repentance process: Phase I "The Natural Man is an Enemy to God," Phase II, "Man Aware of His Awful Condition," and Phase III "The New Man Alive in Christ." Norm knew how to teach souls. (He and Diane will be leaving in October for a 23-month mission to Honduras.) Especially today I miss Norm's arm that he always put around me.

In the past I have accepted the mistaken metaphor that those who carry torches before us drop out of existence after passing the torch along. That is not true. Jon, Norm, Dorla, Enid, Gertrude, Bill, Ralph, Brian, Moana, Phil, Glade, Karl, Larry, Albert, Mary, Garth and other individuals have not passed their torches along. Rather they have lit other's flames while still carrying their own torches high. These torch-carrying persons were teaching here before my arrival twenty-three years ago. They are teachers who have pioneered, tested, modeled, and shared their craft with me and others, and I'm very conscious that they have lighted my own torch of teaching, writing, and professionalism. What principles and activities professional journals tout as being current, innovative, scholarly, and professional are the same principles and activities these individuals from our midst have been doing for years. But above all else, these individuals were men and women of faith and knowledge; they could teach souls.

Central to teaching souls is teaching faith. As teachers we're very familiar with Doctrine and Covenants 88:118 where the Lord admonishes us to "teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith." Only recently have I realized that I have been reading that scripture out of context. Yes, I have known that the verse is in relation to both the School of the Prophets and to holy temples. I also know that the verse applies to our individual homes and even to BYU-Idaho as Elder Bednar has identified it as a Disciple Training Center. But what I have missed understanding about this scripture on teaching and learning is the *purpose* for this teaching and learning. Let's read that verse again, but this time from the beginning. This time, let's focus on the significant introductory clause: "*And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.*" The purpose of our teaching and learning is to develop our own faith and to help others develop their faith. Of course, we're in the academic profession where we teach disciplines, but does our own learning, does our teaching also lead to discipleship, to faith?

I'm beginning to understand the power of knowledge coupled with faith. Think of the boy Prophet Joseph Smith who lacked knowledge but who had faith—because of that faith he gained eternal knowledge and wisdom. With that in mind, let's now read James 1:5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Over the years I've stopped reading the scripture at this point, but I've missed the significant qualifier needed to gain that

wisdom. The clarification following the desire for wisdom immediately stipulates, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” Wisdom or knowledge comes after the exercise of faith.

The desire for knowledge is a powerful drive. Think about it—Satan uses Eve’s desire for knowledge to beguile her. In the book of Moses, Satan deceives Eve by saying she would not die if she partook of the forbidden fruit, but he tells her the truth that by partaking of the fruit “your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as the gods, knowing good and evil”—she will have knowledge. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it became pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make her wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and also gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened. . . .” (Moses 4:11-13). They gained knowledge. In fact, Heavenly Father states to His Son that because of the knowledge Adam and Eve have, they have “become as one of us to know good and evil” (Moses 4:27). This knowledge is not bad—it is good; it helps us become more like Father.

It is important that we recognize that Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden and out of Father’s presence because of their disobedience and not because of their newly-learned knowledge. Before they enter the world, Father promises them that if they use their knowledge to call upon God in faith and obey the commandments, He will provide a Savior whose sacrifice will make it possible for them to come back into His presence and eventually to know all that He and the Son know. Adam and Eve enter the world with that knowledge. Not until after they are obedient, not until after they make sacrifices, not until after they call upon the name of the Lord in faith, do they receive the promised further light and *knowledge*. Adam and Eve learn that faith is, in part, the ability to labor without knowing the end from the beginning, yet they continue to labor, to obey, to sacrifice, and to pray. They receive more knowledge from God because of their faith (*Lectures on Faith* 2: 18-25). It is Adam and Eve’s knowledge coupled with their faith that leads them to God and to more knowledge and faith.

The Prophet Joseph’s faith also led to immense knowledge in the bringing forth the Book of Abraham. While Joseph was laboring in Kirtland and journeying to and from Missouri, teaching his brethren and being taught of God, he was exercising faith because he didn’t always know why he did what he was asked to do, yet he continued to be steadfast. While he was exercising that faith, there were moving to him from one of the catacombs of Egypt the writings of Father Abraham and of Joseph who was governor in Egypt. On June 7, 1831, a French traveler and explorer penetrated the depths of a catacomb near the site of ancient Thebes. It had cost him time and treasure and influence to make the entrance. After months of excavation he was able at last to find several hundred mummies, but only eleven of them were in such a state that they could be removed. He carried them away, but died on his voyage to Paris. The mummies were bequeathed to Michael H. Chandler, his nephew, and after two years arrived to him in Philadelphia. Chandler opened the coffins hoping to find gold and jewels, but attached to two of the bodies were preserved rolls of linen, and within were rolls of papyrus bearing perfectly preserved records in carefully formed black and red characters.

Learned scholars flocked to see these records, and many of the wisest attempted to translate the characters, yet they only interpreted the meaning of a few signs. Mr. Chandler had heard that a Prophet lived in the West who could decipher strange languages and reveal things hidden, and after failing with all the learned, he finally reached Kirtland and presented himself with four mummies and the rolls of manuscript.

The Prophet, because of his faith and under the inspiration of the Almighty, interpreted some of the ancient writings to Mr. Chandler's satisfaction. So far as the learned men of Philadelphia had been able to translate, Joseph's work coincided with theirs, but he went much further. The learned men had knowledge, but Joseph had faith which led to his knowledge as a seer to translate the scrolls. Later some of the friends of the Prophet purchased the four mummies with these sacred writings. The result of Joseph's faith and knowledge was the translation of the Book of Abraham. Because of Joseph's faith and diligent study, he acquired more knowledge with the intent to enhance our faith and to increase our knowledge.

The Apostle George Q. Cannon refers to the translation of the Book of Abraham when describing Joseph's intelligence—notice the relationship between faith and knowledge, notice that the Prophet has both faith and knowledge:

At the time when Joseph, aided by the inspiration of the Almighty, was enabled to make these translations, he was studying ancient languages and the grandest sciences, while he was also imparting instruction in the school of the brethren in Kirtland, that others than himself might have their minds fitted to grasp the sublimities of truth in theology and history the laws governing the universe. Joseph was now in his thirtieth year and was no longer an unlearned farmer lad. He was the leader of a people by the command of heaven, and he was the leader of the people by his growing intellectual greatness. The Prophet had already become a scholar. He loved learning. He loved knowledge for its righteous power. Through the tribulations which had surrounded him from the day when first he made known to a skeptical world his communion with the heavens, he had been ever advancing in the acquisition of intelligence. The Lord had commanded him to study, and he was obeying. Such branches of learning as he knew not, teachers were employed to communicate. His mind, quickened by the Holy Spirit, grasped with readiness all true principles, and one by one he mastered these branches and became in them a teacher. (Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet*, Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1972, pp. 198-199.)

What does knowledge have to do with faith then? Joseph Smith teaches in the First Lecture on Faith that we are dependent on faith “for the acquisition of all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence” (*Lectures of Faith* 1:11). Let me state that again: we are dependent on faith “for the acquisition of all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence.” The amazing blessing and responsibility that we have as teachers at BYU-Idaho is to depend openly upon our faith to acquire and to share all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence

with each other and with our students. We have the charge to teach with faith and in faith—this should and must distinguish us from other universities.

Let me briefly share two suggestions on what we can do to model and encourage the teaching of both the students' minds and spirits, the teaching of knowledge and the teaching of faith—the teaching of souls. These suggestions are not earth-shattering or profound. Rather they are simply two things I am going to try to do as I prepare for my classes this semester. The first suggestion has to do with the mind, and the second has to do with the spirit.

The first suggestion is something I learned with my mind that resonates with my spirit. For the last few years I've been impressed with and have tried to integrate questioning circles into my teaching. The questioning circles developed by Leila Christenbury and Patricia Kelly is an approach to questioning that is not linear and hierarchal: one lower-level question progressing to a slightly more challenging question, and all moving toward the most sophisticated, penetrating question of all (think of Bloom's taxonomy). Christenbury and Kelly's alternative model for developing questions works at the intersection of three circles: the textual, personal, and external. On your program is a model of the three questioning circles, and you'll also see that I've added a fourth circle. Christenbury and Kelly define their three circles as follows.

Textual: The subject under discussion, the text

Personal: The individual reader's experience, knowledge, feelings, and values that are brought to the reading of the text

External: The "world" and other texts—the experience, history, and concepts of other peoples, cultures," disciplines.

Questions surrounding texts or subjects, for instance, can address each of the three separate circles as well as the intersections of two circles and the converging point of all three. Let me give you some examples of questions generated for each circle. I'll base the questions on Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Individual Circles

Textual: What does Huck say when he decides not to turn Jim in to the authorities?

Personal: When would you support a friend when everyone else thought he or she was wrong?

External: What was the responsibility of persons finding runaway slaves?

Two Circle Intersections

Textual/Personal: In what situations might someone be less than willing to take the consequences for his or her own actions?

Personal/External: Given the social and political circumstances, to what extent would you have done as Huck did?

Textual/External: What were the issues during that time which caused both Huck's and Jim's actions to be viewed as wrong?

Three Circle Converging Point

Textual/Personal/External: When is it right to go against the social and/or political structures of the time as Huck did when he refused to turn Jim in to the authorities?

Now, the fourth circle I've added is the larger circle of the spiritual. I believe that the spiritual is large enough to encompass the other three circles. This circle addresses how faith, religion, and spiritual matters connect with the textual, personal, or external. For instance, two questions generated from the spiritual questioning circle for *Huckleberry Finn* could be "How can Huck's personal conflicts in deciding to help Jim provide insights into Nephi's personal struggles when commanded to slay Laban?" Or another question could be "We witness Nephi's decision making process move from egocentric to ethnocentric, and finally to theocentric understanding as he struggles with the decision to slay Laban. How does Huck's decision in helping Jim escape slavery demonstrate a similar thought process to Nephi's decision?"

By adding the fourth circle of the spiritual, we are consciously addressing both the spirits and the minds of the students. That we try to address both the minds and spirits of our students is my first suggestion. My second suggestion is more abstract but also is something spiritual that becomes connected to learning. We know that our Heavenly Father and His Son do not distinguish between temporal and spiritual—that all things are spiritual to Them (D&C 29:34) and "that which is spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual" (D&C 77:2). I believe that the more we become like the Savior, we will teach more like the Savior teaches. The more we pattern our lives after His life, the less distinction we will make between the mind and the spirit. The more we assimilate Christ's attributes into our own lives, the more significantly we will teach to students' souls. As we address our students' faith, we need to address our own. One way in which to do this is to become more like the Master Teacher. Therefore, my second suggestion is for us to develop Christlike attributes as we strive to be His disciples. .

Perhaps a meaningful activity for each of us is the chapter "How Do I Develop Christlike Attributes?" from *Preach My Gospel*. At the end of the chapter is an attribute activity in which we can decide how we measure ourselves in acquiring Christlike qualities. The activity focuses on nine attributes (of course there are more): faith, hope, charity and love, virtue, knowledge, patience, humility, diligence, and obedience. I firmly believe that these Christlike attributes are the connection between the spirit and the mind, between scholarship and discipleship, between teaching students and teaching souls, and between teaching subjects and teaching faith.

Now, let me conclude by returning to those faculty members who have prepared the way for us to be here today. Those of us who knew them know with a certainty that they were men and women of God, that they were saints of faith and action, that they exemplified

Christlike attributes in their daily lives and in their classrooms, that they taught students' souls and not just their minds, and that they sought "learning, even by study and also by faith."

I believe each of us can echo Brad Clark when he said "I prayed myself to Ricks College" because we each prayed that we would be a part of this faculty and a part of this university. Also know that many of us have prayed for you to be here. We are here because of divine guidance. We have a divine mission, and a central part of that mission is to teach faith. As we seek Father's help to become more like His Son, we will teach faith; we will be teachers of souls. We know that by faith, our souls are enlarged, our understanding is enlightened, and our minds are expanded (Alma 32:28, 34). As we teach diligently and as we teach faith, His grace will attend us (D&C 88:78). May our students say of us: "Thou art a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). Bless each of us this coming year, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.