

In preparation for Ward Conference on Sunday, January 17, the Stake Sunday School Presidency has asked us to review the following for the Gospel Doctrine Class:

Lesson 3: The Vision of the Tree of Life

Book of Mormon Class Member Study Guide, (1999), 3.

As you study the account of the vision of the tree of life, watch for the following symbols and their meanings:

- **Tree of life** (1 Nephi 8:10; 11:8–25)
- **Fruit of the tree of life** (1 Nephi 8:10–18, 30; 15:36; see also D&C 14:7)
- **Rod of iron** (1 Nephi 8:19–24, 30; 11:25; 15:23–24)
- **Mist of darkness** (1 Nephi 8:23–24; 12:17)
- **River of filthy water** (1 Nephi 8:13, 26, 32; 15:26–29)
- **Great and spacious building** (1 Nephi 8:26–28, 31, 33; 12:18)
- When Nephi was shown the tree of life, he asked to know its interpretation (1 Nephi 11:8–11).
 - What did he learn that the tree represents? (See 1 Nephi 11:21–25.)
 - What did Nephi see that helped him better understand God’s love? (See 1 Nephi 11:13–21, 24, 26–33; see also John 3:16.)
- How did Lehi and Nephi describe the tree of life and its fruit? (See 1 Nephi 8:10–12; 11:8–9, 23; 15:36.)
- In the vision, Lehi saw “numberless concourses of people” (1 Nephi 8:21). These people can be divided into four categories based on their attitudes toward the tree and the fruit. Read 1 Nephi 8:21–33, and look for these four categories. How are these categories manifest in the world today? In which category do you feel you are?

Suggestion for Family Discussion

Conduct the following activity to help family members better understand the vision of the tree of life:

- Blindfold a member of the family and spin him or her in circles. Explain that the blindfold represents the mist of darkness. Then place a picture of the Savior somewhere in the room. Challenge the blindfolded family member to walk to the picture without help from anyone. When it becomes apparent that he or she will not be able to walk directly to the picture, have one family member stand by the picture, holding one end of a piece of string (representing the iron rod). Have another family member hold the other end. Then have the blindfolded family member catch hold of the string and walk to the picture.

Sunday School General President: Looking Internally Can Help Deepen Gospel Study

By Brother Tad R. Callister Sunday School General President
For the Deseret News, Published: Wednesday, Nov. 25 2015

Summary: Alma put our role as learners in its proper perspective: “the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal” (Alma 1:26).

It was the Passover immediately preceding the crucifixion. The Savior “sat down with the twelve.” He then made the startling announcement that one of them would betray Him. Human nature might have caused them to point their finger at someone else, but instead the depth of their character was revealed as each inquired, “is it I?” (Matt 6:19-22). In other words, am I the one who is at fault?

Perhaps in that same spirit, before we come to the conclusion that a teacher is boring or uninformed or not up to our expectations, we as learners could adopt the “is it I?” principle. For example, we might ask of ourselves, “Did I read the lesson material in advance? Did I offer a silent prayer for the teacher? Did I contribute by participating in class? Did I seek divine impressions and record them? Did I share what I learned with others?” If we have somehow fallen short in these endeavors, then we might further ask: “Am I a partial cause for the class not being all I hoped it would be and, if so, how can I improve? How can I be a better learner and class member?”

What do I contribute to class?

Alma put our role as learners in its proper perspective: “the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was

the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal" (Alma 1:26). That is a remarkable insight — the learner has an equal responsibility to that of the teacher to contribute to the success of a class. The Savior taught this same principle in the Doctrine and Covenants. He first enjoined the teacher to “preach my gospel by the spirit.” He then enjoined the listener to receive the word by the “spirit of truth.” He then promised that if each would fulfill his role that “both would be edified and rejoice together” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:14, 19, 22).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1919-85) spoke of the consequences when learner and teacher are not equal: “Sometimes a speaker [teacher] brings a jug of ‘living water’ that has in it many gallons. And he pours it out on the congregation [or class]. And all that the members have brought was a single cup; and that’s all they took away. Or maybe, they had their hand over the cup and they didn’t get anything to speak of” (“The Seven Deadly Heresies,” BYU Fireside Address, June 1980). He then explained that the reverse happens when the teacher is less prepared than the learners.

Caring like blazes

The Lord spoke reprovingly of those learners who came with a small cup or perhaps no cup at all to receive His gospel message (Mark 8:17). Suffice it to say, He desires us to be active, alert, avid learners of His gospel.

J. B. Priestly, an English novelist, was once asked how he became such a famous writer since some of his equally gifted peers, as youth, had not so excelled. He responded: “The difference between us was not in ability, but in the fact that they merely toyed with the fascinating idea of writing. I cared like blazes! It is this caring like blazes that counts” (J.B. Priestly, *Rain*, p. 178). Somewhere, sometime we must care like blazes if we really want to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ. That must have been the condition of the Saints in Berea, for Paul said that they “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind” (Act 17:11).

How can we contribute as learners?

We can all contribute to the spirit of our Sunday classes by choosing to do some or all of the following:

- Coming a little better prepared to class
- Praying for the learners as well as the teacher to have the Spirit
- Stepping outside our comfort zone and participating in class discussions
- Recording spiritual impressions and sharing them with others

For the last few years I have tried to record doctrinal insights and spiritual impressions I receive at church. I can honestly say I have been richly rewarded. This approach has changed my perspective; it has accelerated my learning and increased my anticipation for church. When I started recording insights and impressions received at church, I was pleasantly surprised at how much better the speakers and teachers had become in such a short period of time.

The consequences of contributing

Elder Boyd K. Packer (1924-2015) spoke of the value of contributing by sharing an experience in the life of Belle Spafford. He said that shortly after Sister Spafford was called as the Relief Society general president, she met with President George Albert Smith. In the course of this meeting, she recommended the Church drop its membership in one national and one international women’s organization. The prophet inquired “Had they not held membership for well over a half century in these organizations?” Sister Spafford acknowledged that was true but then explained how costly it was to travel to these board meetings and that occasionally they even became the subject of humiliation. Then she added: “We don’t get a thing from these councils.” The wise prophet responded, “You want to withdraw because you don’t get anything out of it?” “That is our feeling,” she replied. He then responded: “Tell me, what is it that you are putting into it?” He then said with considerable firmness: “You continue your membership in these councils and make your influence felt.” Later she shared how she had become president of one of these organizations. (“The Relief Society,” *Ensign*, November 1978, p. 9).

The lesson taught was critical. If we do not put much into our church classes, we are unlikely to get much out of them. On the other hand, when we do contribute, our learning can become exponential. In fact, the Lord has promised: “And unto you that hear [and contribute] shall more be given” [Mark 4:24].